An urgent necessity

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Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Rev W.R.Mackay

[0:00] The Gospel according to John, chapter 9, and at verse 4. We might read again from the beginning of the chapter.

And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man who was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin?
This man or his parents that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.
I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day. The night cometh when no man can work.
And the words around which our thoughts will gather are these words in verse 4. I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day.
[1:12] There are six miracles recorded in the Gospels in which people have their sight restored.

But this is the only one in which it is stated that the person concerned was born blind.
And this situation gave rise to what appears to be a very curious and unusual question on the part of the disciples.
Master, they said, who did sin? This man or his parents? That he was born blind. Now I say we would regard this question as being unusual.
It's not the type of question that we would be inclined to ask if we met a handicapped person or if we saw a handicapped person. But you see, in the mind of the Jew, suffering was always associated with sin.
[2:21] More than that, suffering was looked upon as the punishment of sin. The greater the suffering, the greater the sin.

But here was a situation which perplexed the disciples. The man concerned could not be very well blamed for the sin, seen he was born blind.
On the other hand, where were they to apportion blame? Was it fair? Was it right? Was it reasonable? That his parents should be concerned in this?
Was it their fault that their son was born blind? And in their perplexity, they come to Jesus. And Jesus lifts their minds and their thoughts onto a higher plane.
He says, neither this man nor his parents are responsible. There was a purpose. There is a purpose behind this.
[3:30] It is an act of God. God has brought about this situation in order that he might be glorified.
And he added, I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day.

The night cometh when no man can work. And so this reply on the part of our Lord brings us face to face this morning with a urgent necessity.
There is work to be done. I must work, he says, the works of him that sent me.
It was as if our Lord in his human nature felt a compulsion laid upon him to work. And it was not the compulsion of necessity.
It was the compulsion of love. On a previous occasion when he healed the lame man at the pool of Bethesda, he had said, My father worketh hitherto, and I work.
[4:45] Now the father's work was the work of creation. He had worked before in the work of creation. But the son's work was the work of redemption.

The father brought the world into being. Man was placed in the world. Man fell from that estate in which he was created. And the son's work was the work of redemption.
To seek and to save that which was lost. And because our Lord loved men, he would not leave any to perish.
I have finished, he said to his disciples shortly before he left this world. I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And on the cross he uttered those memorable words.

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It is finished. And when he spoke these words he meant that redemption had been accomplished in him. That the power of sin and Satan had been broken.
[5:52] And that the gateway to glory had been opened. For Adam's fallen race. And Jesus had completed the work which the father had given him to do.

But we must remember. That while there was work for the son of God to do. There is also work for his followers.
Have you ever thought what a wonderful privilege it is. And yet at the same time what a tremendous responsibility. To be invited.
To be fellow labourers with God. Why God should have ordained that it should be so. Man can never tell.
Here he has committed to sinful men and women. A task which the angels in glory might well covet. The task of leading men and women to himself.
[7:03] And yet the way in which he has ordained it is this. That sinful men and women. Should be instruments in his hand. Working for the salvation of men.

With the promise. That the work is not theirs. But the work is God's. And that he is there. Working through the gracious operation of his own spirit.
So that men may be brought back to himself. Yes. Redemption is God's work. God so loved the world. That he gave his only begotten son.
That whosoever believeth in him should not perish. But have everlasting life. And we are called upon. To be fellow labourers with him.
In bringing men. Back to God. And as we look out in the world around. How many tasks there are to accomplish.
[8:11] And a task which faces us. Would seem to be well nigh impossible. In fact it is a task which humanly speaking. Would be impossible. But you see the difference just lies here.

That with God. Nothing is impossible. He knows the end from the beginning. And it is. To this great work.
Of being fellow labourers with God. That you and I are called this morning. Let us see to it. That we are willing.
That this burden should fall. Upon our shoulders. That we are willing. That we are willing. That we are willing to do. That we are willing to do. That we are willing to engage in this task. Where are we to begin?
What are we to do? How is the work to be accomplished? These are some of the questions. Which naturally come to our mind. Well to begin with.
[9:11] Let us remind ourselves of this. That God has given different gifts to men. That is made abundantly plain. In the New Testament.

There are some who are called upon to proclaim the gospel. And there are precious promises. Concerning the faithful proclamation of the gospel. Oh yes.
The preaching of the cross. May be to them that perish foolishness. It may be foolishness to the Greek. It may be a stumbling block to the Jew. But the fact remains.
That it is the power of God unto salvation. And God has placed that power in the hands of men. So that through the faithful proclamation of the word.
Sinners may be converted. And turned unto him. But you see we are visualizing a situation.
[10:09] If we confine it to this one channel. We are visualizing a situation. Where all men are going to come under the sound of the gospel. And as we look out in the world around us today.

A very different situation exists. Men are turning their back upon the gospel. They are turning their back upon God. It would be all very well if you could get them coming in their thousands.
In order to hear the word proclaimed. And God blessing his word. But when we find empty churches. When we find people openly antagonistic to anything that savors of Christ and Christianity.
Then a different situation exists. And you see it is here. It is here that the different gifts which God gives to men.
Comes into being. Some as I said are called upon to proclaim the word. There are others who are given the gift of teaching.
[11:09] And what a wonderful opportunity there is. For Christian teachers. For those who know and believe.

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And who have been established in the faith. To bring both through the medium of the Sabbath school. And in the day school. As the opportunity presents itself. To bring to those young ones entrusted to their care.
The good news of the gospel. And I believe that that can be done. And I believe that it has been done. In certain quarters.
And God honors it. He always will honor. A faithful teaching. And there is a wonderful responsibility. Another avenue of service. And then.
There are those who are engaged in the healing of the sick. And surely that is something which was closely associated with the work of the Lord himself. You remember the original commission which he gave to his disciples.
[12:14] He sent them forth to preach the kingdom of God. And to heal the sick. And where was a greater healer to be found. Than in the person of Jesus Christ.

He went about healing the sick. That was the major part of his ministry. And you see he healed not only their bodies.
But he healed their souls. And so even as Christian teachers have their part to play. The same thing holds true of Christian doctors.
Who in a quiet way. Without seeking to impose their views upon others. Can draw the wonderful combination.
That exists between the body and the soul. And as they seek to heal their bodies with the skills which God has given them. So they can speak a word. Which may be for the healing of their souls.
[13:15] I remember in my first congregation in Duffel. I was privileged for some years while I was there. To have a Christian doctor who was operating in the parish.

And he often used to look in to see me. When he was passing. He would come in for a cup of coffee and a chat. And we had some good times together. And I remember vividly one day he came in.
And he said to me. He said Mr. Mackay you know Mrs. A. Who lives in such a place. You've probably heard that she's very ill. Well I've just been seeing her just now.
And her condition is very very grave. And she said to me. She said. Doctor. She said. Is there nothing you can do for me? And he said.
Well Mrs. A. I must be perfectly frank with you. Humanly speaking. There's nothing more that I can do for you. But if you would like. There is one thing I can do.
[14:18] I can pray. And she said. Yes doctor. I would like you to do that. And he kneeled down beside that bed. And he prayed fervently.

That if it was the will of God. Who is the good physician. That that lady might be raised to health and strength. That he would be pleased to grant that it might be so.
The days passed. The next time he visited me he said. You've probably heard the good news about Mrs. A. I don't know how it came about he said.
I never expected that it could happen. But a miracle has taken place. She's very much better than it would appear as if she is going to recover. And to make a long story short.
That lady lived for 10 or 12 years. After that. Now I believe. I believe that that was a present day miracle.
[15:18] I believe that there is still power. Behind fervent prayer. And you see this is the task to which we are all called. Whether we are ministers.

Or whether we are teachers. Or whether we are doctors. Or whatever we may be. We can pray. In the good hope. That God will hear. And that God will answer prayer.
But then not only are there. Those who proclaim the word. And teach the word. And use their ministry of healing. To extend the word. There are also those who are found in other walks of life.
In local governments for example. What an influence they can play. The policemen as they go about their beats. We thank God for Christian policemen.
And for what they can accomplish. And the list is so large. That we cannot repeat it just now. But no matter how humble your occupation may be.
[16:20] Wherever you may be found. Wonder of wonders. You can be a fellow laborer with God. And you must be prepared to accept your responsibility.

And to say. I must work the works of him that sent me. While it is day. For the night cometh. When no man can work.

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But let us remind ourselves of this. That all men cannot do God's work. You see we cannot serve two masters.
No man can serve two masters. We must make up our minds who is to be our master. We have to surrender our hearts. In faith and love to Christ.
If we would be fellow laborers with him. His works are spiritual. And they can only be performed by spiritual men. And so the call to repent.
[17:21] Comes before the call to work. What a pathetic picture that is. Which is given to us by our Lord in Matthew's gospel.

You remember how there were those who came. And who said. Lord have we not prophesied in thy name. And in thy name done this, that and the other thing.
He said I never knew you. You weren't working alongside me. You were working at variance. To my will. And so I say the first thing is this.
To see that we repent. That we come to Christ in penitence and faith. Casting our burden upon him. Seeking his pardon and his forgiveness. And then we shall be able to take up our yoke. And follow in his footsteps. There is work to be done.
[18:24] And we have said something of the nature of the work to be done. And how it is to be accomplished. But now notice the urgency of the work.

I must work the works of him that sent me. While it is day. The night cometh when no man can work. We are reminded in a word.
That the day is short. And how short. Is even the longest life. It's fit only to be compared.
To those things which are fleeting and transitory. To the mist which you see on the mountain tops in the morning. And when the sun comes out in all its brightness.
It vanishes away. To the steam or the vapour which comes out from the kettle when it is boiling. And in a moment. It is gone.
[19:29] To the grass which groweth up in the morning. And in the evening is cut down and withereth away. It is surely a humbling thought.

That very often. The very trees which men plant. Live longer. Than they themselves do. When we look out on a normal day.
The normal routine is that there should be the dawn. That there should be the morning. That there should be noonday. Followed by the afternoon. And the evening twilight. And then the day ends.
But life doesn't always work out like that. There is a dawning for us all. There is a birth. But very often there are those who are cut off.
Early in life. In the mid time of life. And only a comparatively few. Have a long even time.
[20:34] Towards the end of life. And yet the injunction is given. The command is given. I must work the works of him that sent me.

While it is day. And we must never forget. That though for the young person. Life may appear to be long. At best.
It is but a few short years. Our life is long. Not so wise angels say. Who watch us wasted. Trembling while they weigh against eternity. One squandered day. Our life is long. Christ's word sounds different. Night cometh.
No more work when day is spent. Repent. And work today. Work. And repent.
[21:30] How necessary then that we should repent. And how necessary too. That we should work. Because the day is uncertain.

Not a moment of our future. Can we call our own. We are liable to be cut off. As so many are.
In a moment. And so there is need for diligence. If we miss an opportunity. That opportunity may never return. And so let us utilize every moment.
There was a godly man. In a previous generation. Who had engraved across the dial of his watch. For the night cometh.
Every time that he looked at his watch. Those words faced him. And they served to remind him. That he must grasp every opportunity. The night cometh.
[22:29] John G. Payton. That great missionary. To the South Sea Islands. Was one day. Asked why he. Labored so hard.

Why he didn't take a rest. And he said. I will never. Be a loafer. I would that I might be able. To accomplish three times. As much as I am able to do now.

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In one single day. As somebody has said. Let me not pass to leave. Till that day's fight is best. Done. What soldier cares to leave the field.
Until it's won. And I have loved my work. And fame would be deemed worthy. Of the ranks again. The night cometh.
When no man can work. And so there is a challenge. Extended to all of us here. Who profess to know and to love. The Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
[23:26] Sometimes we are inclined to leave. The responsibility to others. Sometimes we say. I have so few gifts. So few talents. There's so little that I can do. And yet all the time.

The challenge is there. You know how in a great piece of machinery. If one little screw comes loose. Perhaps that great machine. May be brought to a halt.
And sometimes it may be so. In the work of extending God's kingdom. Because someone who has just some little insignificant part to play.
Is not playing that part. Things seem to come to a standstill. Someone who's forgotten to pray. Somebody who's forgotten to speak that word.
And so things are hindered. And things are hampered. Yes. I repeat. There is a challenge. To all. The people of God.
[24:25] But what of those. What of those. Who know not Christ. As Lord and Saviour. How can they rest. If the situation is so urgent.

How can they remain as they are. Remember this. If you do not make your acquaintance. With Jesus Christ. As your Saviour in time.
You'll never make your acquaintance. With him as Saviour. In eternity. Then. It will be too late. And so the challenge comes to you.
This morning too. Now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation. Oh how I wish. How I wish I could impress upon you.
The urgency of the situation. How I wish I could remind you. And it's not easy to remind youth of this. Of the brevity of life.
[25:24] Of the uncertainty of life. Here but for a moment and then. The place which now knows us. Shall know us. No more forever.

I must work. I must work. The works of him. That sent me. While it is day. The night cometh. When no man can work. Go forth. By his grace. And be labourers in his vigour.
God grant that at the end of the day. When our labour is finished. When our travelling days are done. We may be welcomed into his presence of the world.
Well done. Good and faithful servant. Enter thou. Into the joy. Of my Lord.
[26:21] Let us pray. O Lord our God. We can never understand.

Why thou shouldst. Give us work to do. Connected with the extension of thy kingdom. And yet thou hast ordained. That it has been so.
From the beginning. And we believe it will be so. Until the end. Lord. We have so often been unprofitable servants. We have not done what we should have done.
And we have left. Undone so many tasks. Which ought to have been accomplished. Lord forgive us. For our misspent time.
For our wasted energy. For our misdirected zeal. And help us by thy grace. To repent. To come to thee.
[27:19] In penitence and faith. And give us grace. O Lord. To lay ourselves. Upon the altar of thy service. So that we may go forth. To serve thee.

Remembering. That we serve the Lord Christ. Abide with us. Throughout the remainder. Of this thine own day. Come out with us again. At eventide. And grant thy presence.
And thy blessing. And go with us. Into the days. Which lie ahead. Making provision. For our every need. And pardoning our every sin. We ask it.
For Jesus.

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