

ATHE POINT OF NO RETURN@

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Lk. 13:34-35; 19:42, 44

AOh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but ye would not. Behold, your house is forsaken! Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace? But now they are hidden from your eyes, because you did not heed the hour of your salvation.@

It must have been the reading of this tragic text that caused the poet to pin these solemn lines:

AThere is a time, I know not when,
A place, I know not where,
Which marks the destiny of men
To heaven or despair.

There is a line by us unseen,
Which crosses every path;
The hidden boundary between
God's patience and his wrath.@

During the awful Holocaust of the last World War, I had many friends and buddies who served as pilots in the United States Air force. I remember clearly, when talking with one of my flyer friends -- a Captain with a whole chest full of medals and ribbons won for his heroic service B he told me of the thrilling experiences he had while flying long missions over the blue waters of the Pacific. During one of our conversations, he mentioned something which left its indelible mark upon my memory.

AThere are no landing fields on the ocean,@he said, Aand there comes a time in every flight over the ocean, when we reach the point of no return.= It's when a pilot must decide whether he has

sufficient fuel to reach his final destination. If not, he must turn back. To go on is certain death. Once he is past the point of no return, he will not have enough fuel to make it back to his home base. Nor will he have enough fuel to reach his goal!@

As I listened to this most interesting fact, I realized he had shared a present-day parable with unparalleled application to human life: AThe Point of No Return.@ For just as surely as every pilot flying over the ocean comes to a spot in his flight when he is forced to make a decision relating to the safety of his ship and all aboard, so, too, there comes a point of no return in the experience of each of us as we pilot the ship of our soul over the sea of life, when we must make the destiny determining decision about whether we will turn back to the safety of God's abiding love in Jesus Christ, or go on in our rebellion against God's love to certain doom.

It's our Apoint of no return.@ The time in our life when, as in the case of the Jerusalem of old, if our answer is A~~no~~,@the grace of God for us will be gone forever. It is possible to go on and on in resistance to the love of God revealed in Christ that the convicting power of the Holy Spirit simply stops and you feel no conviction at all. That is the peril about which I preach tonight. It is the peril of perils. For there is no peril like the peril of a soul, who knowing his or her sin and need of a Savior says, A~~Not~~ tonight! I ought to take Christ, but not tonight.@

History

The danger of that peril is seen in history. We need only to read our text for the truth of that. Here we see Jesus, the blessed Savior and promised hope of Israel, looking out over Jerusalem and sobbing in concern for the Capitol city of that nation which God had called "my people." The city in which Jesus had taught and preached. The city above all other cities into which the light of God's love had been shown! And yet, despite it all, a city which had gone on in its rejection of the Messiah until it was in danger of crossing its point of no return.

This is the city over which Jesus stands looking and, as he sees the resistance and neglect of his people, his heart goes out to them and through tears of sorrow for their lost condition he cries,

Oh Jerusalem. Jerusalem. How oft I would -- but ye would not! History tells the tragic tale of the bitter consequences of Israel's rejection.

Psychology

For further proof of the peril of delay, look at the testimony of science. The science of psychology tells us that each time we face an option and say No, it becomes easier to say No the next time we face that option. Psychologists say our first reaction to a particular decision is registered on the plastic cells of our brain. When we face that same decision again, our immediate reaction is the same as before. Each time we react the same way that reaction is deepened in our brain cells until it becomes almost second nature to react a certain way in a given situation.

Do you get the point? The first time you said No to God, it became easier to say No again. So you said it again. And again and again. Perhaps you said it a hundred times last year. And a hundred times the year before that. And the year before that. Ad infinitum. You've said it so often, and repetition has stamped that No so deep in you nature, that tonight -- as I extend the gentle invitation of Jesus to come -- every decision you made unites with every other until your whole being -- body, soul and spirit -- hurls back at God the NO! which has become part of your very being. This is a psychological explanation for why so many decisions for Christ are made in the prime of youth. It happens because young hearts are not yet hardened and it is still possible to say Yes to God.

Mathematics

Turn to the science of mathematics for some staggering figures which further substantiate the peril of delay. The Statistician, a research magazine reports that -- Nine-tenths of all of the decisions for Christ are made before the age of twenty-one. This same source goes on to state -- Only one in 5,000 makes a decision after the age of twenty-five. After the age of thirty-five, one in 80,000. After the age of fifty, only one in 150,000 people makes a decision for Christ.

Think of it! If you are twenty-five years of age and still unsaved, you have one chance in 5,000. If you are thirty-five and still not converted, your chances dropped to one in 25,000. If you are fifty-years of age and still outside of Christ the odds against you are stacked 150,000 to one against you. Oh, how it behooves you to think and act before it's too late, before your opportunity is gone and you are past Athe point of no return.@"

The Bible

Holy scripture makes it clear that God is not willing that any should perish. God, the loving Father, is never at fault if a sinner is lost. He loves with an everlasting love. Listen to his solemn cry, AAs I live@-- and notice the Lord swears by himself for he can swear by none higher -- AAs I live, sayeth the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but, that the wicked would turn from his evil ways and live.@" Then, God himself exhorts, ATurn ye! Turn ye! Why will you die?@"

If a person makes his bed in hell, it will be by reason of his own neglect. He will never be able to successfully argue that God did not love him. God's love is infinite. It cannot increase. It cannot decrease. And, it will never die. God's love is like a ring. It is without a beginning or end. And the great source of eternal sorrow for the doomed shall be that they could have been saved, but would not! As the poet says so powerfully --

AFrom heaven above God's eye is bent
Still ranging to and fro,
Where e'er in this wide world
There roams a child of woe.

And when that rebel chooses hell,
God wails his hopeless lot,
Deep breathings from his heart of love,
X I would, but ye would not.=-@"

Bishop McDowell, a mighty man of God now gone to his reward, tells of an incident out of his vast experience. It seems electricity had only recently been discovered and for the first time in many cities, the electric light was replacing the kerosene lamp. One evening while in New York City, some friends invited him to see a spectacular electrical display. He recounts in vivid language the tremendous impression this spectacle made upon him. How, as he watched the dazzling array of lights he said, almost in a whisper AIsn't it wonderful?@

His friend who was standing at his side, replied softly, AYes. It reminds me of the patience of God.@ AWhy?@asked the Bishop. AWhat is there about this glorious display, even in its magnificence, that reminds you of the patience of God?@ The man answered, AFor centuries men have groped around in darkness with their lamps and bits of tallow, when all the time God in his heaven has patiently flashed his lightening across the skies, and cried out to men, XLook here! See what I have for you if you will only take it. Come out of your darkness and take my light!= Then, one day someone reached up into the heavens and pulled it down, harnessing the power of God, and today our cities and homes are flooded with light@

Beloved, as Bishop McDowell points out, For the last two-thousand years people have been groping about in the darkness of their sin, vainly searching amid the tallow and wicks of the world for some faint light to guide their souls. And all the time, God in his tender patience has been flashing the eternal light of his love as it radiates from the cross of Christ crying, ALook here! See what I have for you if you will only take it! Come out of your darkness and take my light!@

Beloved, to me it is the wonderment of the ages, that every rational, responsible human being does not drop to his or her knees in gracious gratitude to God, for His love gift of Jesus. Have you thanked him? You=ve cursed him! Yes you have! You=ve taken his name in vain and rejected him. You=ve spurned him. Have you ever thanked him for what he did for you on the cross? Why not do it tonight? God is waiting for you to be reconciled to him. Christ has prepared the way. All heaven is waiting for your decision. The time to say Ayes= is now, before you cross your point of no return.

Hyman Appleman, the great Jewish evangelist, put it so eloquently when he wrote, APut your watch to your ear. Every ticking second says, now. Put your finger to your pulse. Every beat of it says, now. Put your hand to your heart. Every pulsating throb of it says, now. Come with me to the silent confines of the cemetery. Every heaped-up grave, every tombstone, every cross, every blade of grass, every wilting flower and every sorrowing memory says, now. Stand with me on the brink of hell. Look down into that pit of torment. See the writhing anguish of those who are eternally lost. Hear their fearful cries. Were they able to speak to you tonight, with all of the anguish of their souls they would cry out, now? Get right, now! Accept Christ, now!

ALook up into the marvelous magnificence of heaven. Hear that singing, shouting, saintly band! Hear them, as with outstretched hands and pleading voices, they gently urge you, now. Oh, friend of mine, if you would escape the torments of hell, if you would hope for the bliss of heaven, if you would rejoice in the presence of God, if you would look forward to that land without sorrow, without sickness, without death, then I plead with you, prepare now to meet your God!@

Tomorrow, he promised his conscience,
Tomorrow, I mean to believe.
Tomorrow I'll think as I ought to,
Tomorrow my Savior receive.

Tomorrow I'll conquer the habit that
Holds me from heaven away.
But ever his conscience repeated
One word, and one only, today!

Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow,
Thus day after day it went on.
Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow,
Till youth like a vision was gone.

Till age and his passions had written
The message of fate on his brow;
And forth from the shadows came Death
With the pitiful syllable -- now!

What will you do with Jesus?
The call comes loud and clear.
The solemn words are sounding
Now! In your listening ear.

Eternal life is in question,
And joy through eternity.
Then what will you do with Jesus?
Oh, what will your answer be? (Anon.)

One day Napoleon was sitting in his camp, sad and dejected. Half of his army had been annihilated and he wasn't sure how the fortunes of that day would turn. Suddenly, an orderly came running into his camp crying A**Cheer up sir. You've gained the victory.**@ A**Yes,**@said the great general, A**I have gained the victory. But one more such victory will cost me my kingdom.**@

Beloved, you've gained the victory, haven't you? You've gained the victory over your mother's prayers. You've gained the victory over the tears and pleadings of your loved ones. You've gained the victory over the urging of your preacher. You've gained the victory over the tender, patient Spirit of God. But what I greatly fear for you, is that if you should gain one more such victory tonight, it will cost you your eternal soul. Ponder these solemn lines again B

A**There is a time, I know not when,**
A place, I know not where,

Which marks the destiny of men
To heaven or despair.

There is a line by us not seen
Which crosses every path.
The hidden boundary between
God's patience and his wrath.

To cross that limit is to die,
To die, as if by stealth.
It may not pale the beaming eye,
Nor quench the glowing health.

The conscience may be still at ease,
The spirit, light and gay.
That which is pleasing, still may please,
And care be thrust away.

But on that forehead God hath set
Indelibly a mark,
By men unseen, for man as yet
Is blind and in the dark.

And still the doomed man's path below,
May bloom like Eden bloomed.
He did not, does not, will not know
Nor feel that he is doomed.

He feels, he sees, that all is well,

His every fear is calmed.
He lives, he dies, he wakes in hell,
Not only doomed, but damned.

Oh, where is that mysterious bourn,
By which each path is crossed,
Beyond which God himself hath sworn
That he who goes is lost?

How long will men go on in sin?
How long will God forbear?
Where does hope end and where begin
The confines of despair?

One answer from the skies is sent,
>Ye who from God depart,
While it is yet today, repent,
And harden not your heart.=@

A young man was walking along a road in ancient Greece when he came upon a statue. It was a strange statue. It had wings on its feet, a lock of hair on its forehead and the back of its head was shaved bare. The young man studied the statue for a long time and then said, AStatue, what is your name and why are you made in such a funny fashion? Why do you have wings on your feet, a lock of hair on your forehead and why is the back of your head shaved bare?@

According to the myth, the statue stared at the young man for a moment and then spoke, AMy name is opportunity. I have wings on my feet for I am always ready to take flight. I have a lock of hair on my forehead so people can reach out and grasp me and cleave me unto themselves. The back of my head is shaved bare because once I am gone, its not possible to call me back

again!@

With all of the tenderness, love and earnestness in me, I gently plead with you. If there is the slightest interest, if there is the faintest awakening, if there is the smallest concern, if there is any longing -- however feeble it may be -- if there be the faintest desire within your heart to make your peace with God and have your sins forgiven, I urge you to do it tonight. For once you have passed your day of grace and crossed your point of no return, the battle for your soul will be over, and you will be lost -- for all eternity.

Will you come tonight? Will you say, **I** am wrong with God and I know it. With all my heart I want to be right with God before it is too late. I want to make my peace with him. I want my sins forgiven. I want Jesus to be my personal Savior -- tonight -- before my opportunity has passed and I have crossed my point of no return.@ If that is your desire, come, and from this moment forward you will be secured in Jesus!