

THE DANGER OF BEING TOO LATE

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Today If ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts
(Heb. 3:7-8).

My spirit shall not always strive with man (Gen. 6:3).

Some years ago in one of the rescue missions in the state of New York, a prominent attorney told how he had become a Christian. He described how, at the age of twenty-four, he married a very talented and beautiful young woman, but unfortunately at that time, he had been almost an atheist and persisted in trying to destroy his wife's faith. After a few years a baby arrived, and the adoring mother took her daughter to the church services. The years passed, and the girl became a charming young lady who leaned increasingly toward her father's way of life. She ceased attending church, and he arranged special outings to provide excuses for his daughter's actions.

When she was twenty, she was engaged to be married and later went with friends on a boating vacation in Pennsylvania. One foolish young man began rocking the boat, and it eventually capsized, throwing its occupants into the icy water. They were all excellent swimmers, but unwisely, instead of drying their clothing, they drove home in wet garments. The girl contracted pneumonia and became gravely ill. When she realized death was approaching, she sobbed and said, "Daddy, I don't want to die." The attorney paused, for it was difficult to control his emotion. The girl's voice was getting weaker when she said, "Daddy, you have been saying all along there was no need to worry about religion, if I did what was right, heaven would take care of itself. Mother disagreed, telling me that I needed Christ as my Savior. Daddy, now that I am dying, will you please tell me which way I should go Mother's way or yours?" The father leaned forward and, grasping his daughter, nearly lifted her from the bed. Molding her tightly to his chest, he whispered, "Darling, if you have a moment to spare, for Christ's sake, for your own sake, for your mother's sake, and for your

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hard-hearted daddy's sake, take Mother's way." That sorrowful parent explained that by the time he had lowered the frail body into the bed, she was gone. Then he stepped into the aisle and, pulling desperately at his gray hair, said, "Brothers and sisters, only God knows whether my darling had enough time to take her mother's way."

This disturbing story illustrates the three facts found in the introductory verse. (1) "TODAY" - A Priceless Opportunity. Yesterday has gone forever. Tomorrow may never arrive. Today is a part of time which is fleeting. If something needs to be done urgently, wisdom whispers, "DO IT." (2) IF YE HEAR HIS VOICE" - A Personal Obedience. When any person is able to hear the voice of God, it is the guarantee the Lord continues to speak. Wisdom suggests, "LISTEN." (3) "HARDEN NOT YOUR HEART" - A Possible Obstinacy. When the Savior seeks admission to the human heart, only two responses are possible. Do nothing and let Him remain outside, or open the door to make His entrance possible. Wisdom urges, "ACT."

History teaches that occasionally opportunity comes only once. What is done then may decide destiny. A lost chance may never return. God, through Isaiah, said: "Come NOW,

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and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). God says, "COME NOW." People who say "We will come someday" may arrive too late!

The Procrastination of a Multitude

They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all (Luke 17:27).

And [God] spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5).

The apostle, Peter described Noah as "A preacher of righteousness. The statement is intriguing. At that time there was no Gospel to be preached, and the Almighty was regarded

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as the austere, but omnipotent, Ruler of the Universe. He could, and would, punish people who displeased Him. The Ten Commandments had not been given, and therefore Noah was limited in his knowledge. He denounced the conduct of his neighbors, but the situation described by Peter is thought-provoking. "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them unto chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment" (2 Peter 2:4). The events that happened during Noah's lifetime were abominable and disgusting. He denounced what he saw and probably became an object of scorn. It was only when the rising waters of the flood shattered the self-confidence of the population, that unbelievers began to realize their danger.

The door of the ark had been closed. Rain was falling from the sky, and the scoffers who had ignored the warning of Noah could not believe what was happening. Water had already covered the ground, and the waves were washing against the strange vessel on which Noah had labored so long. The sky was filled with ominous clouds, and people were becoming alarmed. For many years they had laughed at the strange preacher and considered him to be a foolish old fellow who had stayed in the sunshine too long! The idea of water coming from the sky was ludicrous, for until that time the earth had been watered by dew.

The arrival of many animals only aroused curiosity. When the door of the ark was closed, and another seven uneventful days passed, possibly the observers began speculating how long it would be before Noah, in search of fresh air, opened the door.

And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth . . . all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights (Gen. 7:10-12).

Frightened people began climbing to higher ground, and others tried to cling to the ship, which was already riding

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gracefully upon the rising water. Unfortunately, they had

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waited too long to respond to the invitation of Jehovah. It is thought-provoking that Jesus said, "But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matt. 24:3, 7).

The Procrastination of a Mob

During my stay in Australia I was entertained in the home of Mr. Walter Beasley, a prosperous business executive in the city of Melbourne. He was a very keen Christian who helped to finance several archaeological expeditions in the Middle East. He supplied the following details.

When he spoke of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, he explained that certain discoveries had enabled the scientists, in thought at least, to reconstruct the ancient tragedy. (1) They discovered beneath the ancient site evidence of a burnt-out oil field. (2) On either side of the district was a vertical fault in the strata of the earth. (3) Deep in the ground were immense deposits of rock salt, but in the immediate area of Sodom the salt was on the surface. Evidently it was carried out of its original habitat by up-rushing oil which was flung into the air to drop as a gigantic snow storm. Apparently a tremendous earthquake shook the area; the earth slipped between the faults, and the pressure on the oil field forced enormous quantities of oil to the surface. When this became ignited, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by falling masses of flame. Lot's wife was instructed to flee for her life, but she disobeyed. When the woman turned to gaze at her former home, the earth split around her and she was trapped. She was quickly covered by the salt and died of suffocation.

Against that background it is possible to understand the ancient story. Sodom was inhabited by homosexuals who refused to abandon their evil practices. Their doom became inevitable. Paul described a similar situation when he wrote to the Christians in Rome.

Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies

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between themselves . . . For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another, men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient (Rom. 1:24-28).

Vast numbers of people are dying of a loathsome disease which apparently is incurable. It has spread through a situation such as existed in the two ancient cities, but is to be regretted that innocent people suffer because of the sins of others. It is evident that when God gives up on any man, that soul is beyond redemption. This is accentuated by the text quoted at the beginning of this study: "Today, if ye hear his voice, harden not your heart."

The Procrastination of a Monarch

But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and harkened not unto them; as the LORD had said (Exod.

8:15).

Pharaoh was thought by his people to be a god; but perhaps in his own estimation, he was even greater. It is always dangerous when a self-made deity worships at his own shrine. The arrogant ruler detested Moses and Aaron who had become a daily annoyance. Nevertheless, he was disturbed, for the Hebrew leaders possessed strange powers. They demanded the liberation of the slaves and warned Pharaoh of retribution. God had informed His servants that the ruler of Egypt would not respond favorably, but it is doubtful whether they believed what they were told. No man could resist Jehovah; Pharaoh would be compelled to yield. Sometimes God's servants may be carried away with their own enthusiasm. The king hardened his heart as the Lord predicted. Terrible plagues

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devastated the country, but after promising to cooperate, the ruler changed his mind.

It is possible to become so set in one's ways that change becomes impossible. A man may be dead before he dies! Everything might have been different had the king obeyed the voice of God. One fact is easy to understand. Had the ruler been wise, he would have lived longer. When the water of the Red Sea overwhelmed the Egyptian army and Pharaoh died with his men, it was too late to repent. When God says "Come now," only foolish people reply, "I will do it tomorrow." The final act of rebellion led to a premature death, but it is difficult to avoid the conclusion the king deserved his fate. God would inevitably fulfill His plans, but the Egyptians needed to be taught a lesson. Pharaoh did not recognize-as Daniel later said to king Belshazzar "the God in whose hand thy breath is" (see Dan. 5:2-3).

The Procrastination of a Man

Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself (Matt. 27:3-5).

The pathetic statement: 'Judas repented himself' has been used to distort the truth. Cinematography depicts Judas going to Calvary to seek forgiveness from the Savior. Authors in search of happy endings for their stories describe how, in the darkest hour of the betrayer's life, the love of Christ reached out to reclaim the degraded sinner. These people ignore the fact that when the Lord prayed for His disciples He said, "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me, I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled" (John 17:12). Judas was a lost soul whom even Christ could not save. He repented, but unfortunately his day

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of grace had terminated. When immediate action is necessary, delay is dangerous. The Scriptures say: "Behold, NOW is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor.

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6:2).

While the voice of Jesus calls you
Be in time.
If in sin you longer wait,
You may find no open gate;
And your cry be just too late,
Be in time.
William I. Kirkpatrick

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