

“THE DEADLINE”

Along the river leading up to Niagara Falls, I'm told there is a sign that says, “YOU'RE PASSING THE POINT OF NO RETURN!” The current becomes so strong and the water so raging, that past that point, there is no turning around. Spiritually, is there ‘a point of no return?’ You may have heard it said that as long as there's breath, there's hope, but is that true? The answer may surprise you.

Can a man so arrogantly and stubbornly reject Jesus Christ and the word of God to the point where there is no more hope for him? Now, I'm not talking about when a man dies—I'm talking about while he yet lives. Can he pass a point of no return? You may say, “Well, God is a God of love and grace and patience and goodness!” Yes, God is all of those things. You can't make a truer statement! BUT, God is also a God of judgment and holiness and a God capable of great wrath.

Romans 11:22 “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.”

Yes, God IS a God of love, but make no mistake: God is also a God who has promised to judge sin. Well, does that judgment even come in our lifetime? That is, can a man pass a point of no return? I believe that the Bible teaches that there IS a deadline.

Proverbs 29:1 “He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”

Solomon is teaching us that there is a deadline. What is that deadline? When do I cross that deadline, and what does it mean if I do? It's a very sad and difficult thing to accept, that a human being can yet be alive, and have no hope. Hopelessness is one of the saddest words in all of human language. But the Bible does teach that there is a spiritual point of no return. There is a deadline. The Bible exemplifies it time and again. For example, in the prophecy of Amos in the Old Testament. God, through the prophet Amos, told the people that He had given them ample opportunity to come back to Him in contrition and repentance. He sent famine, drought, pestilence and all of these troubles and woes upon the land, but in every case, they did not return to Him. Therefore, this pronouncement was made upon them:

Amos 4:12 “Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.”

Amos 8: 11-12 “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.”

What this tells us is that there comes a time when God's patience runs out, when we've exhausted the precious and priceless opportunities that God's grace and mercy have afforded us. Solomon vividly describes this process to us in our text passage:

Proverbs 29:1 “He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”

This is a powerful passage of scripture, because it essentially tells us where we will spend eternity. The question for you today is: Where are YOU on God's clock? We're going to look at this verse in four points to help you determine the answer to that question.

1) REPROOF

There is not a single sinner on the face of the earth who is not reprov'd of God. You may be thinking that there are a lot of people who live in remote parts of the earth who've never heard a gospel sermon. Maybe they've never heard of Jesus Christ, never picked up a Bible, know nothing about Christianity. So, how could they be reprov'd of God? Well, Paul answers that for us.

Romans 1:20 “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:”

Paul is telling us that even nature preaches a gospel sermon! The invisible things of God are clearly seen from the things that are made, from His creation. If you never pick up and read a Bible, it should be obvious when you look at the universe and the world around us that there must be some intelligent power behind that! I mean, the very idea that man and life, with all of its complex forms, and this universe that operates in such majesty and precision, that somehow that is random chance. That somehow, just the right things came together at the right time, in the right way, and, in some great explosion produced a universe that runs in such harmony as our universe does! That operates according to such fixed and set laws. The idea that life somehow spontaneously emerged as some simple non-sex cell in a pool of primordial slime, and that cell finally grew legs and a tail and climbed out onto the land and climbed a tree and started eating bananas while swinging by its tail, and that's your great-great-grandfather...You know, that's preposterous! People, in the name of higher learning and intelligence and sophistication, tell us that ALL of this came from nothing but chance, but it is the height of folly!

Psalms 14:1 “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God...”

To every person who sees a sunrise, or when he beholds the immutable laws of nature, or when he sees the wonder and complexity of life-human and otherwise—a sermon is preached to him! There is evidence in all of that that there is a God.

Psalms 19:1-2 “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.”

Now, I may not know the WILL of God by beholding nature. I can't look up into the starry sky and know what I must do to be saved. But I can look up and see that some great designer and architect of the ages must have created that. Then, when I have placed within my consciousness the fact that there is a God, that there is one greater than me, then that creates a desire in my heart to KNOW Him and SEEK Him. I

believe that the Bible teaches that when one desires to know and seek God, that God, through His providence, gives him opportunity to hear, believe and obey the gospel. So Paul could say that we are “*without excuse.*” Those Gentiles of old didn’t want to retain God in their knowledge. They weren’t thankful for the things that God had provided for them. They didn’t glorify God, but instead turned to foolish and vain philosophies and ideas, moving entirely away from God. They are “*without excuse.*” God reproves us by the very blessings which fill our lives. God causes it to rain upon the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45), and all of us have been the beneficiaries of God’s great blessings in our lives, whether we’ve come to Him in obedient faith or not. And those blessings ought to humble us and make us reflect upon the goodness and grace of God! We are reproved by the problems and trials of life too. The things that disturb us, or cause us pain, grief and woe, at the very least ought to make us stop and think about sin and its existence in the world and all of the problems that sin has created. And, if we are wise, it will cause us to turn to God for the answers. Ultimately, the sinner is reproved by gospel preaching and by the influence of the gospel in the world. It is the preacher’s job, much to the consternation of those who wish to remain in their sins, to convict and reprove you in your sins. That’s one of the purposes of God’s word and the preaching of God’s word.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

The word of God is given to us in order to reprove us in our sins and to point us Calvary. It is to correct us and set us in the right way. In all of these ways, and others, God providentially reproves us in our sins. What that means is that there is not a single sinner who is eternally lost who was unloved or unwanted by God, because God in His mercy affords opportunity after opportunity after opportunity, for the sinner to seek Him. It would have been wonderful, marvelous grace if God had just warned us ONE TIME. God had every right, in His holiness and justness, to simply cast the human race away at the very first occurrence of sin. Back in the Garden of Eden, He could’ve said, “That’s it! I gave you one law and you couldn’t keep that one law?!” He could’ve turned His back and completely walked away. But He didn’t do that. God had a plan that He unfolded throughout the ages to bring man to repentance and salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ. If God had just given us ONE chance and ONE opportunity individually to hear the gospel and seek Him, it would’ve been grace beyond our comprehension, because He had every right and reason to condemn every one of us eternally. But God didn’t give us just one chance. God reproves us over and over and over again. That’s what Solomon is saying in the text.

Proverbs 29:1 “He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”

2) REBELLION

So often, the reproof of God is met with rebellion. That’s what Solomon means when he says that the sinner “*hardens his neck.*” He stiffens his neck and refuses to submit to the truth. How does a sinner rebel against God and harden his neck? It doesn’t necessarily mean that he says, “All right, if that’s what God says, I want no part of it. I’m not going to believe that. That’s just foolishness and I’m not going to

accept it.” Rebellion doesn’t necessarily take that form. The sinner hardening his neck can occur in different ways. In fact, Solomon gives us a clue two chapters earlier:

Proverbs 27:1 “Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”

One of the ways that so many sinners harden their necks and rebel against God is merely by procrastination. It isn’t that they just outright reject what the word of God says, but they procrastinate and put it off. They deem it as not being that urgent or that much of a priority in their lives. They say, “Well, I’ll get to that later in my life. One day...”

There’s an interesting story of Moses back when he was leading the children of Israel up out of Egypt. You remember that Egypt had a king, Pharaoh, and he was a vile and wicked and arrogant man who refused to submit to God and let God’s people go. So, Moses went to him to plead with him to set God’s people free. You remember that God sent ten plagues upon the land of Egypt, directed at Pharaoh and the Egyptians in order to convince him to let His people go. One of those plagues was the plague of frogs. Now, we’re not just talking about a few frogs—a frog here, a frog there, just a small nuisance. No, I’m talking about an absolute *invasion* of these slimy creatures coming up out of the Nile River, and they covered everything in the land! Can you imagine how horrible and terrifying that would’ve been? You have that deafening noise of the croaking, you have the stench of the dead frogs, no matter where you step, you step on a frog...They were EVERYWHERE. It was an awful, awful plague. I remember years ago, I was traveling through the state of Texas and I came to a shopping center where I stopped for a few minutes to get out and rest. As I walked across the parking lot, I noticed a very strange sight. The entire façade of that building was covered with crickets! I looked down and the parking lot was covered with crickets! I had never seen anything quite like it. I asked somebody from the area about it and I was told that every so often, they just get this sudden invasion of crickets for a few days, and then they’re gone. That’s what was taking place in Egypt with frogs. They were everywhere, and finally Pharaoh had had enough. Look what he tells Moses:

Exodus 8:8 “...Intreat the Lord, that he may take away the frogs from me, and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may do sacrifice unto the Lord.”

Well, an interesting conversation takes place, as Moses tells Pharaoh that, indeed, he *can* talk to God and ask Him to remove the frogs from the land and he asks Pharaoh, “*When shall I intreat for thee, and for thy servants, and for thy people, to destroy the frogs from thee and thy houses, that they may remain in the river only?*” (Exodus 8:9)

Isn’t that a strange question? When would you like for me to remove the frogs? You’d think that Pharaoh would say, “RIGHT NOW! These frogs are driving me crazy! Get rid of them!” But that’s not what he said.

Exodus 8:10 “And he said, Tomorrow...”

Remove the frogs tomorrow?! Just give me one more night with the frogs. That doesn’t make any sense, but sometimes, that’s the way we are with our sins, with regard to our salvation. “Oh, one of these days,

I'll have faith in Christ. One of these days, I'll obey the gospel. I'll be saved one of these days. Tomorrow. Just let me remain in my sins a little bit longer." You see, when we do that, it begins a very dangerous spiritual process. That is, the hardening of our hearts. The Bible never tells anybody to do anything pertaining to their salvation *tomorrow*, because the Bible never gives the promise of tomorrow. Remember what we read in Proverbs:

Proverbs 27:1 "Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."

James 4:14 "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

So, it's dangerous to procrastinate because we're not guaranteed another hour or minute, much less another day, upon this earth. But beyond that, every time we procrastinate doing what we know is the truth, what we know we should do, believing in Jesus, obeying Him, being saved, we make it even *more difficult* to obey the gospel the next time. We make it easier to let the gospel roll off of us, like water off of a duck's back. We see people like that. The gospel doesn't move them. They are beyond the point of feeling, spiritually speaking. The gospel doesn't touch or affect them. Why is that? It's because they have had opportunities to repent, yet in simple procrastination, they said, "Another time. Oh, I'll obey the gospel one of these days." And though they may live for a long time, opportunity has passed them by, because their heart has become too hard to allow the seed of the kingdom to penetrate it.

Many people are hardened by pride. The gospel appeals to you, but then Satan whispers, "You'll be made a fool of. People are going to make fun of you...Look at what you're going to have to give up... You're going to be different from your friends... What is your family going to say? You're going to be in the minority..." We allow that sinful pride to harden our hearts to the truth of the gospel.

Sometimes, we're hardened by sin's pleasures:

Hebrews 3:13 "But exhort one another daily, while it is called today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

It may be a vile sin. It may be a sin of immorality that gets its tentacles into us, and that sin puts us into bondage and we can't get loose and we remain in that sin until we literally become a slave to it. But it may not be a vile sin at all. It may just be a worldly lifestyle, things of this world that are contrary to the things of God. We might be so caught up in money and achievement and the pursuit of fame and riches, or worldly possessions, that there is no room in our hearts for the truth or for the gospel. That's what Solomon is talking about in the text.

Proverbs 29:1 "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

3) SUDDEN DESTRUCTION

What does Solomon mean? He's not necessarily talking about the physical cessation of life. It is very true that life is fragile, and not one of us has the guarantee of another day on this earth. But that's not the only way that sudden destruction can come. A person can be very much alive physically, but have been destroyed spiritually. How can that be? It's what the Bible calls 'the sending of a strong delusion.' This is where the mind is destroyed through the process of delusion. That means that God will allow sin to take away your ability to *spiritually* think right. Listen to Paul:

2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

On the surface, that may sound like God has done something very unfair and cruel. You may, if you don't look carefully, think that Paul is saying that God circumvents the free will, free moral agency of man, and the He arbitrarily causes man to believe something that's wrong, and be lost. But that is NOT what Paul is saying. He is not talking about some random person to whom God arbitrarily chooses to send a strong delusion; he's talking about people who "*received not the love of the truth.*" The phrase "*strong delusion*" means *a working of error*. God will allow sin and error to have its way in their hearts and lives that they will be so deluded that they would never find their way out of that error. How did they get there? "*Because they received not the love of the truth.*" A similar statement is made in the book of Isaiah:

Isaiah 66:3-5 "...Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not. Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word..."

Think about what Isaiah is telling us here. He says that they *chose* sin. They *delighted* in error. They had the opportunity to do right, but they chose to do the wrong thing. God says since they chose their errors, He's going to choose their delusions, and make their fears come to pass. That's what happens spiritually in the heart of a sinner who consciously chooses wrong over right; who refuses to heed the call of the gospel, the voice of God. A strong delusion comes. How does that happen in practical terms? Well, you have somebody, for example, who goes to church one Sunday and hears a faithful gospel preacher proclaim the gospel. That preacher reproves that man of his sins and tries to convict him of his sins and point him to Jesus to be saved, but that man doesn't like that. That man says, "You know, I didn't come to church to be preached at. I didn't come to church to be made to feel like a sinner, or be made to feel bad." (--Even though one of the very points of gospel preaching is to reprove the sinner and point him to Jesus. And you won't get a person to see his need for Jesus until he sees that he is a sinner and he is lost.) But this man hears that very type of gospel exhortation and he doesn't like it. He leaves that service disgusted and turned off and he wants no part of that. Well, you know, he's ripe for the picking for someone else who comes to his door that next week and tells him he come in and explain to him why there is no Hell. He's ripe for the picking for one of these churches that you don't read about in the Bible,

who tells him they're not about condemning sin or judging his lifestyle or behaviors. They say they're tolerant of everybody, so there won't be any negative preaching at their church service. That sounds good to him, and he's swept up into whatever type of religion or doctrine sounds good. Why? He's already made his mind up that he doesn't want the truth. That's where a strong delusion comes in. I've met some people who are so wrapped up and entrenched in error, that I don't see how they could ever get loose from it. When that's the case, you can look back at their life and you will find that at some point, that person hardened their neck and would not yield to what the Bible says. When that happens, the Bible warns us that a strong delusion comes.

But there's not only the destruction of the mind, but a destruction of the heart. That is, I can reach a point where the gospel no longer touches me or appeals to me.

Hebrews 3:15 "While it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts..."

Every time you hear the voice of the Lord in the form of gospel preaching, and you don't obey the Lord in gospel obedience, the heart becomes a little bit harder. I preach to people on a regular basis, and I don't know how else to explain what has happened to them. I preach to people and I don't know how to more vividly portray to them the awfulness of Calvary, the seriousness of their sin, the certainty of eternity and judgment, and it doesn't phase them. It doesn't bother them. I might as well have been talking about politics—in fact, they would get more excited if I WAS talking about politics than the gospel. They're simply not interested in the gospel, and no matter what kind of sermon would be placed before them, it's not going to touch them because they've hardened their heart, through procrastination, rebellion or disobedience, to the point where it cannot be touched. Much like burning your skin on an iron: you can burn that skin so many times that it becomes insensitive to pain. Those nerves lose the ability to feel pain in that spot. You can work with your hands, and injure them to the point where they become rough and calloused, and not much will hurt them. That's what happens to the human heart that hears the gospel and rejects it. There comes sudden destruction.

There can also be sudden destruction of the body. I remind you again of Solomon's warning:

Proverbs 27:1 "Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."

James 4:14 "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

We are all living by a thread. For all of us, the sands of time are quickly sinking through the hourglass of life. You may be young today and think that you're strong, healthy and have many years to live. Pick up a newspaper and look at the obituaries. You'll see many that were older, some that have been ill for some time. But you'll also see those who were young, who got up one morning this past week and got ready for work or school, and they expected to come home that night to their families, and get up the next day and do it all again. But they didn't come home that night. They tied their shoes that morning, but the

undertaker untied them that night. None of us knows what a day will bring forth. I'll tell you, friend, when you reach the point of physical destruction that is the deadline.

Proverbs 29:1 "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

4) DESTINY

In other words, we've been destroyed—our heart, our mind, our spirit, our body. We rejected the truth, and therefore we died spiritually or we died physically in our sins, and the result is that our destiny is sealed. There is no changing it. There's no going back and undoing the damage that has been done. The idea of there being a 'purgatory' is not taught in the Bible. That is a scheme that was concocted way back in the dark ages to dupe money out of people who were illiterate and didn't understand the will of God. Remember what the Bible says in Luke 16? There was a rich man who wasted his life, living it without thought about spiritual things. And the Bible says that when he died, he lifted up his eyes in Hell. That's settled destiny: the deadline.

Proverbs 29:1 "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

Now, you may say, "Have I crossed the deadline?" Here's the good news: if you want to be saved, then no, you haven't passed the point of no return! The person who has crossed the deadline has no desire to be saved and never will, because they have seared their conscience and hardened their heart. If you desire a new life in Jesus Christ today, regardless of what you have done in the past, it can be yours if you will come to Christ in contrition and obedience. I hope today that you won't cross that deadline. That you'll obey the Lord while he yet may be found.

Isaiah 55:6 "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."

