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#65 - 13

### DON'T GAMBLE YOUR SOUL AWAY!

My subject today is entitled: Don't Gamble Your Soul Away! It surely is not an extravagant title for Jesus said, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" The scripture which shall form the basis for our study is found in Jeremiah 8:7,20 RSV.

"Even the stork in the heavens knows her times;  
And the turtledove, swallow and crane  
Keep the time of their coming;  
But My people know not the judgment of the Lord.  
The harvest is past, the summer is ended,  
And we are not saved."

With every returning robin we are reminded of the tragedy of man. The robin goes and comes at the beck and call of her creator. There is no stubborn resistance to God's call that seeks to save the life of that creature. They know their appointed times. They observe those times and wing their flight to their winter home and then return again as life begins anew for another season.

But not so with man. He resists. He has an inborn sense of rebellion. God pictures man with his hostility toward counsel: "Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein." Jeremiah 6:16. "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. Ye are all children of the light, . . ." 1 Thessalonians 5:1,5. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." 2 Corinthians 6:2; "Jesus saith unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: . . ." John 12:35. ". . . knowing the time, . . . it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." Romans 13:11-14. Because man is a reasoning creature God extends this invitation: "Come now, and let us reason together, . . ." Isaiah 1:18. See also Matthew 11:28; Hebrews 3:7,8; Isaiah 55:6.

You see, the time will come when summer--the day of salvation, that is,--will be ended. Strange isn't it that man continues his daily round with little thought that the eventual grip of a spiritual winter will maim the wings of his soul and make flight impossible. And too late his last anguished lament--the saddest words ever spoken: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." Jeremiah 8:20. Don't let it happen to you! Whoever you are, wherever you are--stop, look up and listen for the still small voice. Don't go on gambling your soul away.

Early in my experience in this faith I shared something that made a profound impact on my life. Pastor Clarence Smith invited me to join him in a special anointing service for a man who was dying. Just the two of us talked with this man. As we sat by the bed and listened to him unfold his story of unfaithfulness, it stirred us deeply. He felt that he had failed--miserably failed after having known the way. How much he wanted to redeem the time. We visited with him at length and

then we called in the family. Following the counsel of James 5 we prepared to anoint him and pray for his healing. One of the last things he said before the service was that if God would heal him, that he would spend the rest of his days traveling up and down the highways surrounding his farm telling people about the gospel and truth of God. We assured him of salvation and prayed according to God's will. James 5 declares that the prayer of faith shall "save the sick." Salvation is more important than physical healing. God didn't heal the man but he died with a hope.

What a gamble to wait until life is almost gone and then call upon the Lord. In too many cases there is no heart to call on God when a man waits til his strength is spent. Now is the time! What would hinder you from giving your life to Christ this very hour? Some say, "Oh, I plan to do it." I always say, when? Anything this important surely you have set a definite time. Some still insist after I say this. I then say, "If you are sincere, then you must have it marked on your calendar. Tell me the date!" "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Galatians 6:7.

History is filled with shocking evidence of the truth of this scripture. Some-time ago a Los Angeles court found Samuel Whitaker guilty of murdering his wife. When the judge pronounced a life sentence, Whitaker jumped dramatically to his feet, and cried, "If I'm guilty of this horrible crime, may God strike me down before I get to my cell!" Walking down the corridor toward death row at San Quentin, Samuel Whitaker suffered a heart attack and fell over dead. There is, however, more than one way of challenging God in this life. He appeals, "Turn you at my reproof, and I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you." Proverbs 1:23. He goes on in the next verse and says, "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at naught all my counsel, . . . I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;" Proverbs 1:24-26. Some of you are gambling with God's grace. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Proverbs 14:12. "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, . . ." Ezekial 33:11. Life is a journey and every man is a traveler. There are two roads; the broad way and the narrow way. Eternity beckons. We are free moral beings. Choose ye this day whom ye shall follow. God does not force the choice nor does He impose the decision. The way of least resistance is the way of the crowd. But just remember this! The crowd doesn't think, cannot think. Individuals think! History is the sad account of the crowd . . . everlastingly traveling in the wrong direction. It was a crowd that clamored for the crucifixion of our Lord--the most tragic of all human blunders. A dead fish can go along down stream with the rest of the fish. It takes a live one to go against the stream. Instead of stopping to think, most folk have stopped thinking. They have their thinking mechanism in neutral and just go along with the crowd. I would say to all who come under the influence of this sermon: THINK!! "So then everyone of us shall give an account of himself to God." Romans 14:12. Youth are told by the wise man (Ecc1. 11:9) that they may follow the inclinations of the heart, but in the final judgment they will face it all. So the wise man under inspiration concludes: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, . . . Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." Ecclesiastes 12:1, 13.

We may be thinking now that we aren't so bad. Surely we would never stand up and with clenched fists utter a volley of oaths at God as did a Casco Bay, Maine, fisherman, whose day of fishing was being ruined because of a thunderstorm, and who was struck by lightning simultaneously and died moments later. We would never be guilty of anything so wicked. We may be church members in good standing, may be officers of

the church, or even stand in the sacred desk, but if we are putting off our personal salvation, playing at church, toying with truth, it will be just as fatal; and we are greater gamblers than the man who has cast the highest stakes at Monte Carlo.

That the God of heaven, the Creator of the universe should focus the revelation of His will upon our life and then nothing come from it--incredible! But as our Lord said, ". . . unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required:" Luke 12:48. The work of the Holy Spirit is to "glorify Me" declared Christ. John 16:14. Now to be shown the "Way" or the "Life" or the "Truth" and to reject it is the same as rejecting Him. For He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. John 14:6. And that's why the Bible teaches: "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." James 4:17, See Romans 6:23.

God is not willing that any should perish, but He desires that all come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved. See 2 Peter 3:9 and 1 Timothy 2:3,4. For the day is coming when judgment will begin at the house of God and Peter says: ". . . If it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" 1 Peter 4:17. The Lord is in great earnestness about sinners breaking with sin so that sin will not break them. See Daniel 4:27 and Ezekial 18:30-32.

A number of years ago we were holding a Crusade for Christ in a midwestern city. A dear elderly man attended the meetings for weeks. His heart reveled in the truth as we presented it night after night. He was ready to become a member of the faith. Then something happened. He had four daughters living in other cities. When they learned of Dad's plans they all came to see him. The four daughters reminded him of a pledge he and they had made by the bedside of his wife and their mother just before she died. The pledge was to stay by the church. We visited him a day or so later and he related the story to us. Now he said, "You tell me what I should do." I simply opened the Bible to Hebrews 10:26-29 and read the Word of God to him. "For if we sin willfully after we have received a knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." In the remaining portion of this context we find that rejecting truth crucifies the Son of God afresh and grieves the Spirit of grace. After reading these verses I looked into his godly face wondering just how he would receive this truth. He said, "You know, that frightens me." It was his way of saying "to obey is better than sacrifice." 1 Samuel 15:22. The pledge he made to his wife should have been to be faithful to Christ.

Resisting truth hardens the arteries of the spirit. It dims the ability to discern spiritual things. At the end of this process, said Jesus, is the unpardonable sin. Don't gamble your soul away when the "truth shall make you free." John 8:32,36; 14:6. You see, to reject truth is to reject Christ. "The Lord knoweth them that are His . . ." 2 Timothy 2:19. Our Lord and Master gives the formula for discipleship in the sermon on the mount: "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock." That Rock is Christ. 1 Corinthians 10:4; Deuteronomy 32:4. Christ is the Word! John 1:1-3,14. He is the living Word. John 6:51, 53, 63. That's why the writer of the book of Hebrews declares, "The Word of God is quick and powerful." Hebrews 4:12. God says, "Now is the accepted time." 2 Corinthians 6:2. There are no provisions made for tomorrow. It's always, "Now" and "Today" Hebrews 3:7, 8. We shall not pass again this way. Yesterday is gone and tomorrow is not ours, but today, this hour, this moment is mine. And God has equipped me with the capacity to decide for good or evil.

"Once to every man and nation  
Comes the moment to decide  
In the strife of truth with falsehood  
For the good or evil side."

Even now the judgment is going on. Daniel 7:9, 10; Revelation 14:7. How shall we stand? God draws aside the veil and gives us a view of a man before the judgment bar. The account is in Daniel 5. The man is a king, Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. The place is Babylon. A great feast has been prepared for a thousand of the king's lords and his wives and his girl friends. It is a scene of revelry and debauchery. The king is the center of attention--kings usually are, must be-- especially this playboy king. When the festivities were at their height, the king called for the sacred vessels that his grandfather had brought from Jerusalem following the captivity. These vessels had been used in the sacred service of the God of heaven. The king put intoxicating liquor in them and then proposed a toast to the gods of Babylon. Even while the cup was put to their lips, something happened. All eyes were on the king, including the eyes of the Almighty. The fingers of a man's hand appeared and began writing on the plastered wall. The king pales, his heart skips a beat, and his knees knock together. He calls for the wise men, the astrologers, the fortunetellers of that day. But they cannot read the writing. Finally, Daniel is called. He knows His Father's handwriting. Only the spiritually-discerned can read and understand spiritual things. Daniel fearlessly reminds the king that he knew better than to do what he had done. He knew how great things God had done for his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar and yet after knowing he, with reckless abandon, went right on flaunting himself in the face of God. "God is not mocked: whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap." Belshazzar was weighed in the balances of God and was found wanting. That very night he was slain, and Darius, the Median took the kingdom. Daniel 5:31.

Perhaps you are saying, I don't want to be judged. "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ . . . " 2 Corinthians 5:10.

How will we stand? God's Word states that we can have "boldness" in the day of judgment. 1 John 4:17. What we need to do is follow God's counsel and invitation now and come "boldly" before His throne of grace to be strengthened and prepared for that great day. God says, "Give Me thy heart." Will you do it? Now? Don't Gamble Your Soul Away!

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