The Ultimate Decision

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My grandmother was a beautiful and intelligent woman. She was a petite school teacher married to an oil field supervisor in Montana, where they lived for many years. They didn’t have much during the Great Depression, but they saved carefully and dreamed of their retirement. My mother tells me she often heard my grandmother and her husband sit in their little rented house and talk about their retirement and where they would live. They scrimped and finally bought the land they wanted in the Ozark mountains in the north of Arkansas. It was beautiful, with a creek running through a valley. They owned the entire little valley and decided to build their house right beside a spring on the side of the hill. First they built a little cabin to live in while they built their house. Finally it was done, and they moved out of the cabin and into the house. It was beautiful, with a stone front and completely modern. They dug up a lot of rocks from the stony ground and we grandkids helped haul them away so they could plant a garden. They found good friends and went berry picking with them and us, and she made jelly from the berries and gave it away. They bought a few cattle and fenced off the pasture land. Just about the time when everything was finished and they were thoroughly satisfied with their setup, she started to get sick. She was a smoker, and had stomach cancer. She was 64. She was dying and they couldn’t help her. She didn’t go to church and I never heard her talk about God. But a few days before she died she asked the local preacher to come by and see her in the hospital, where she lay, skin and bones. Then she died. My step grandfather married another woman, who inherited the house and the spring and the cattle and the farm.

Friend, this story is not about my grandmother. It is about you.

She was just like you. She planned her life and saved her money and sacrificed to make that dream come true. She trusted in herself and her hard work to make it come to pass. But in her planning she left out God, until she realized she was dying. And I hope and I pray that she sincerely repented and that someday I will see her in heaven. There, if she is there, she would tell you right now, if you could hear her speak from heaven, to get ready, to prepare, not for a beautiful retirement, but to meet God.
My wife and I saw an old tombstone in the Smoky mountains one day. This is what it said:

Remember friend, as you pass by,
As you are now, so once was I.
And as I am, so you shall be,
So prepare now, to follow me.

I believe that is what my grandmother would tell you now if she could.

She had everything planned out, but she never got to really enjoy it. The Bible says, “No man knows when his hour will come. As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them.” (Eccl. 9:12)

It also says there is a time for everything, a time to be born, and a time to die (Eccl. 3:1).

There is also a time to repent.

You may not get another time. You may not have the luxury of having a preacher come by your hospital bed when you are dying. If you harden your heart now, it may be too hard to repent later.

Hebrews 3:15 says, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

Did you know that the desire to repent comes from God, and it is something that He can take away? 2 Tim. 2:25 says, “that God will grant them repentance, leading them to a knowledge of the truth.” So the desire and the opportunity to repent comes from God. What you do with it is up to you.

There is a time when you should repent, and then there will be a time when it is too late to do so. The desire will go away and your heart will become hard. So when you feel the desire to repent, my friend, use it. It may never come again.

What is repentance? The word for it in the Bible is METANOIA, and it means a change of mind. It means you are really sorry for your sins, and you make a decision to turn from those sins and turn toward God and trust Him to save you from yourself and your sins, and to forgive you for them.

The Bible says, “Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the dark days come. Remember him, before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” (Eccl. 12:1, 6, 7)
Friend there will be no second chances beyond the grave. The rich man in hell (Luke 16) got no second chance. Your second chance is right now. Will you take it?

Here are some verses on repentance from the Bible:

“Rid yourselves of all of the offenses that you have committed, and get a new heart and a spirit. Why will you die?” (Eze. 18:31)
“Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to him, “Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously...” (Hos. 14:2)
“Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” (Joel 2:12)
“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” (Matt. 3:2)
“Unless you repent, you too will all perish.” (Luke 13:3)
“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” (Acts. 2:38)