

EVERYDAY IS FOR THE SINNER BUT ONE DAY IS FOR GOD!

Today's Text: Ecclesiastes Chaps 8-9

Extracts:

- 1. Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. *Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him, but it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God [Eccl. 8: 11-13]***
- 2. *For man also does not know his time; like fish taken in a cruel net, like birds caught in a snare, so the sons of men are snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them [Eccl. 9: 12]***

The Seme border is the busiest entry point into or out of Nigeria from its West African neighbouring countries like Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal. It is situated less than a hundred kilometers from Lagos, the business capital of Nigeria. Therefore, the volume of traffic can be overwhelming for both immigration and customs officials. Recently, two young Ghanaian "pastors", both 20 years old, were crossing the Seme border. They were dressed as priests in white cassock, and one of them clutched a copy of the Holy Bible. They both sat at the back of a Mazda 323 saloon car with a local Nigerian number. Ordinarily, people like that are hardly searched in Nigeria because they are presumed to be holy men of God. On that day, however, the customs officials stopped them and searched them. They found on them over one thousand rounds of short gun live cartridges neatly sewn into their inner garments. They were promptly arrested. Commenting on the arrest, the head of the customs border post said, "As for these men of evil and their ilk, Nemesis will always catch up with them."¹

These young criminals might have been engaged in this kind of business for sometime and got away with it. However, that day was their day of reckoning. It was God's day! So it is with all of us. No matter what we have got away with all this while, God's day is finally here. That is the subject of today's lesson.

¹ Yemi Akinsuyi, 'Fake Pastors Arrested with 1094 Live Cartridges,' www.thisdayonline.com of 05.21.2005

1. Why everyday has so far been for you!

Whether you are watching television or reading newspapers, the news of growing wickedness in the world is alarming. Some times, true believers wonder and wonder. Like believers of old, such as Jeremiah [**Jer. 12: 1-4**] and the psalmist [**Ps. 73: 1-15**], they wonder why the evil people seem to prosper at the expense of the God-fearing. Some people's faith has been shaken to the extent of flirting with the evil principle of "if you can't beat them, join them!"

Of course, we should not lose heart. The word of God is clear that "the Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and *will not at all acquit the wicked*" [**Nahum 1: 3**]. The sentence against an evil person may not be "executed speedily ... but it will not be well with the wicked" [**Eccl. 8: 11, 13**]. So, why does God give the wicked, that is, the unrepentant sinner, such a long leeway? Here are some of the reasons:

a) *Time means nothing to God*

Human beings measure time in days and years but God measures time in *eternity*! To Him, a day and a thousand years are one and the same [**Ps. 90: 4; 2 Pet. 3: 8**]. The oldest person in history, Methuselah, lived for 969 years [**Gen 5: 27**], that is, less than a day in God's reckoning! So, what is 120 years (which we can hardly clock these days) in eternity? Yet, in our impatience, we feel let down when God does not immediately punish sinners. Their time will come!

b) *He gives us time to grow up!*

Children have a maturation process and period when their parents tolerate unacceptable conduct from them. They could destroy valuable property in the home or hurt their siblings with the parents' carelessly stored handgun. Our excuse for not treating them harshly is that they have not reached the age of reason, that they do not know what they are doing. However, after teaching them to know evil from good, and they mature, it is a different ball game. They could go to jail and bear full responsibility for their actions.

In like manner, God is "longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" [**2 Pet. 3: 15**]. He would first require that the knowledge of His word be written on our hearts. God told Moses, "Read this law before all Israel to their hearing. Gather the people together, men and women and *little ones* and the stranger..., *that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the Lord...* and that their *children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God*" [**Deut. 31: 11, 12, 13**].

During the learning process, God tolerates some of our weaknesses. For example, the Holy Spirit did not leave Samson right from his first affair with a prostitute [**Judg. 16: 1-5**]. He was a learner then. Over time, when he *continued* in sin as a man who should know the difference between good and evil, the power of God left him and the enemy got him quite cheaply [**vv. 15-22**].

c) *God does not force us to worship Him*

We are free agents when it comes to worshipping God. When He made us, He gave us the choice to eat either from “the tree of life” or “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” [**Gen. 2: 9**]. The first choice would have made us “mere robots,” not knowing any suffering or death. However, God also laid out the consequences of the second choice: spiritual and physical death [**vv. 16-17**]. In spite of that, we chose the second where we can exercise free will, and God has honoured our choice since the days of Adam and Eve.

So, when sinners refuse to repent and continue to multiply their error, they should know that they are living on borrowed time. In God’s time and according to His purpose, He will certainly visit their iniquities with the punishment that they deserve. As the Preacher put it, “it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God” [**Eccl. 8: 13**].

2. But today is for God!

Sooner than later, the day of reckoning comes upon sinners “like a fish taken in a cruel net” or “like birds caught in a snare,” and “it falls suddenly upon them” [**Eccl. 9: 12**]. So, why does a patient and kind God suddenly become a “consuming fire” and demonstrate His great power? Here are some reasons:

a) *To stop innocent people from being punished by their association with you!*

There is hardly a sinner who acts alone. A boss who is stealing money from his or her organization is conniving or using subordinates to do it, some times against their will. The prodigal child who has squandered his or her parents’ money and good will is keeping such innocent people in anguish. Imagine the sleepless nights in worry, and vigil and prayers to get the “super brat” back in line with God. A man who is into adultery is hurting his innocent wife and children, not to talk of the family of his accomplice. For how much longer do you think that God will allow such innocent people to suffer on account of your waywardness?

See what happened when Jonah tried to run away from God's call. He bought a one-way ticket of disobedience to Joppa instead of Nineveh. The innocent ship owners who collected his fare did not know the invisible heavy baggage that this passenger was carrying. On account of Jonah, God sent a storm that threatened that ship's safety. They threw their valuable cargo over board and yet the storm could not be appeased. Where was Jonah all that while? He was fast asleep in the lower deck of the ship! After casting lots, they discovered that Jonah was their problem. At his request, they threw him over board and the storm disappeared [**Jon. 1: 1-15**]. If God had not intervened to stop Jonah's continuing disobedience, more innocent people would have suffered on his account. Jonah's time was up. That day was for God!

b) *To stop the gullible from admiring your life style!*

When something that is unacceptable is not checked promptly, many young and gullible people may begin to accept it as normal behaviour and admire its proponents. That is why, for example, evangelicals in America are moving quickly to influence a change in their country's constitution to prevent court- mandated same-sex marriages. In like manner, God will step in to arrest a sinner whose conduct could be admired and imitated by gullible people.

A good example is the case of Herod who persecuted the early church. He killed James the apostle and "because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also" [**Acts 12: 1-3**]. Now, see the danger that this man was posing to the work of God. He was going to kill the head of the apostles just because the gullible people admired his murder of James. After God had miraculously set Peter free, Herod went ahead to kill all the prison guards [**v. 19**]. He became so proud and arrogant that the people were anxious to appease his anger. On a set day, he arrayed himself in royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered an oration "and the people kept shouting, 'the voice of a god and not of a man!'" God would not allow such a vile person to get away with that blasphemy. Immediately, an angel of the Lord "struck him.. and he was eaten by worms and died" [**vv. 20-23**]. Herod's time was up!

c) *To prevent you from blaspheming God*

God has placed some of us in leadership positions. There are people (aides, colleagues, advisers, family, etc.) who have the privilege to watch us at close range, and we can motivate or discourage them by what they see us do. Where God's integrity is at stake, He will not allow us to blaspheme Him for too long without stopping us. He will have His day with us sooner than we think.

A good example is David's adultery with Bathsheba, followed by the murder of her husband, Uriah. [2 Sam. 11-13]. His personal staff in the palace and top government and temple officials knew what was happening and many of them might have been scandalized. Each day they listened to the king sing the psalms and worship with passion. They might have wondered why God had not reacted. So, you can imagine their relief when God finally sent the prophet Nathan to set the king in order. Even after David had repented and God had forgiven him, God still said, "However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die" [2 Sam. 12: 13-14]. Everyday was for David but that day was for God!

d) *So that you do not give other sinners false hope*

Human beings like to live in denial. Apart from pretending that all is well, they look around for "best practices" to defend their ugly lives. For example, they see people who became rich through fraudulent means. However, since the police or tax authorities have not caught them, others like to copy their tactics. A common expression that you hear in corrupt societies when the police make a big catch is "What a fool! He could not cover his tracks!" Some of us try to do the same thing with God but He cannot be bribed! He will stop wickedness before it attracts followers for "the wicked prowl on every side when vileness is exalted among the sons of men" [Ps. 12: 8].

Look at the case of Sodom and Gomorrah where Abraham's nephew, Lot, and his family lived. The place was vile and not an ideal place to raise a family. When two angels (in the form of men) came into Lot's house, "the men of Sodom, *both old and young*, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot and said to him, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us *that we may know them carnally*'" [Gen. 19: 1-5]. Even when Lot pleaded with them to desist from their wicked act of homosexuality and offered the men his daughters in lieu of his male visitors, they refused, saying, "This one came in to stay here, and *he keeps acting as a judge*; now we will deal worse with you than with them" [vv. 6-9]. That suggests that Lot had been preaching against their sins. Did you expect God to fold His arms and let the evil people have their way? No! The angels struck the attackers blind and the twin cities were burnt to ashes. Only Lot and his family were saved [vv. 10- 13, 15-26]. That day belonged to God!

3. Conclusion: Your time is up!

When Paul preached among the people of Athens, he concluded in these words: "These times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands *all men everywhere* to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the

world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained.” What was their reaction? Some of his listeners mocked him; some procrastinated their decision and only a few believed [**Acts 17: 30-31**]. Are you one of the few who have believed and have given their lives to Christ? Congratulations!

Are you postponing your decision or mocking the message under the guise that you are still young and that time is on your side? Don't count on luck! How many of us will have Hezekiah's luck, that God would send a prophet Isaiah to tell them that death was near and that they should put their house in order [**Is. 38: 1-5**]? May be you are counting on the experience of the good thief that received Jesus at the point of death [**Lk 23: 39-43**]. Do you know the odds?

You may have got away with so much for too long. God's patience with you has finally run out. The gadgets that you have relied on for too long (age, ignorance, parents, pastors, friends, spouse, servants or maids, etc.) are no longer accessible or sufficient. You are now the one to pay your bills of responsibility and accountability to God for “the soul who sins shall die” [**Ezek. 18: 4**].

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