

Time to Turn

- ‡ Attending to God's Word (vv.7-9)
- ‡ Anticipating peace and joy (vv.10,11)

In the name of Jesus the Captain of our souls, dearly redeemed:

O Captain! My Captain! our fearful trip is done;
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won;
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:
But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

Old movies aside, this poem by Walt Whitman records the tragic loss of our sixteenth President Abraham Lincoln only days after the end of the Civil War. The war that ended slavery in America cost many lives. Yet in triumph the Union grieved. It's a sad lesson God was teaching His people exiled with Ezekiel and now in these tumultuous days before an election. Nations and earthly leaders rise and fall. ***"All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever."*** (1 Peter 1:24f NIV84) Today it's **Time to Turn**.

‡ Attending to God's Word (vv.7-9)

So let's say you're standing next to a rushing river. A rubber raft is floating toward rapids around the bend. Do you just stand and watch, or start yelling for them to get out? In the raft you don't like them yelling at you, but then you realize they're shouting, "Get out! Rapids!" You try to shoot the rapids anyway, but get hung up on a tree across the stream. You step out, and the current flips the raft upside down, spilling all your gear, and pulling the huge raft underwater. Aren't you glad people warned you?

This must be very important for our faith because it's the second time in forty-eight chapters of Ezekiel the LORD says, ***"I have appointed you, son of man, to be a watchman for the house of Israel."*** In the previous verses the LORD explains how a ***watchman*** standing high on the city wall sees the enemy coming and sounds the alarm. Everyone who hears the warning must do what the ***watchman*** says. Anyone who rolls over and goes back to sleep is responsible for his own death. But if the ***watchman*** fails to blow the ram's horn, he is responsible for any deaths resulting from his silence.

See how this applies to our everyday life? Years ago a highly successful, wealthy surgeon ranted about a pastor daring to tell him he was sinning. Mind you, this surgeon made his living cutting people, yet had no concept of spiritual surgery. Just as we need skillful surgeons attending to their practice and staying sharp, we need spiritual surgeons **Attending to God's Word** to tell us it's **Time to Turn**.

"I have appointed you, son of man, to be a watchman for the house of Israel. So whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you are to warn them from me. When I say to a wicked man, 'Wicked man, you shall surely die,' if you do not speak to warn the wicked man against his way, that wicked man will die because of his guilt, but I will also hold you responsible for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he will die because of his guilt, but you will have saved your life." (EHV¹) It's a life and death responsibility for the ***watchman***.

¹ Scripture quotations marked EHV: *Evangelical Heritage Version*® © 2019 Wartburg Project, Inc.

Before COVID hit, some wondered how long the Lord could let wickedness go on. If Americans worship their money or sports or beautiful mountains and forests, what else can the LORD God do but take them away for a time in economic crash, cancelled seasons or wild fires? Anything coming between the soul and God is an idol that separates that soul from eternal life. Unrepentant idolatry earns the eternal wages where Jesus says there will **“weeping and gnashing of teeth.”** Jesus volunteered His life on the cross for all to make sure that no one would have to go there. The key? **Attending to God’s Word.**

Is it any surprise that 86% of Americans feel everyone else’s sources are false? “Fake news” began with the enemy serpent tempting Eve and Adam in the garden: **“Did God really say...?”** Does all this turmoil make you want to clam up in silence? Listen, the Holy Spirit warns the *watchman* in each of us: **“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”** (Proverbs 31:8f NIV84) God wants His people engaged in prayer, blessing your community so God’s Word can spread. It’s **Time to Turn...**

✠ Anticipating peace and joy (vv.10,11)

Do you believe this? **“Son of man, say the following to the house of Israel. This is what you people are saying: ‘Certainly our rebellion and our sins weigh us down, and because of them we are rotting away. How then can we live?’ Say to them, ‘As I live, declares the LORD God, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from their way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why should you die, O house of Israel?’”**

It’s **Time to Turn**, but our old sinful nature will never be converted. Ever in rebellion against God, our Old Adam wants to do whatever he wants, refusing to trust God’s Word. Only bad fruit can come from bad trees. The Lord asks, **“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”** (1 Corinthians 6:9–11 NIV84) God turned you around, **Anticipating peace and joy** in Jesus.

God wants to bless us more than we can ask or imagine. Do you believe that? Listening to sermons is a good start. The LORD streams great blessings to His family of believers through Word and sacrament. But have you turned to God beyond your head and heart? What are those dark feelings when a neighbor needs help? Or a church budget report says we’re falling behind funding our Gospel ministry? Or you haven’t given anything to God in months, which God’s Word calls **“robbing God”**? (Malachi 3:8-10) We tell our guests to leave their wallet at home because this is not about budgets. It’s all about our relationship with God. Still true: “Man is converted first in his head, then in his heart, then in his wallet.”

Let’s be honest. If we think it’s **Time to Turn** for everyone else but us, we’re flaming Pharisees. **“Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”** (James 1:22 ESV) **Time to Turn** back to more eagerly **Attending to God’s Word** so day-by-day the Holy Spirit can warn us of the danger of sin and open God’s river of blessing through repentance. Then **peace and joy** flow in from Jesus.

Personal test: *Firstfruits*. The LORD commanded His people to bring the first sheaf of grain or cluster of grapes or jar of olive oil as a *first fruits* offering. This bold, beautiful statement: “My God, everything good comes from you. It all belongs to you. I thank you for what you have given and I trust you to bless me with far more.” **“Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.”** (Psalm 37:4 NIV94) If someone invited you to a banquet, then served leftovers, would you like it? **“Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed are they who take refuge in him.”** Awesome promise: **“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse....Test me in this,”** says the **LORD Almighty**, **“See if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.”** (Malachi 3:10 NIV84) **Time to Turn** to **peace and joy** in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.