

## OF SPIRITUAL DISASTER

CBC-Exeter, 23 Oct 2011

Katowice (kā-tò- 'vèt-se) Trade Hall, Poland. 56<sup>th</sup> National Exhibition of Carrier Pigeons, 120 European exhibitors, 700 people inside. 28 Jan 2006, Saturday, very cold winter, heavy snow. 3 knew of unsafe building, did not remove ice and snow, left former roof damage unrepaired, did not report to building inspector. Suddenly, 5:15 p.m., roof collapsed: 65 died, 170 injured. Warning signs ignored, no going back, triggered national days of mourning.

Who knew that would be their last day to get right with God? Any Christians went straight to heaven. Others, some who had resisted a thousand reproofs, suddenly found themselves in eternal hell.

Prov 29.1 is a fearful warning before it is too late for us. Its 16 words tell a short story of spiritual disaster (8 tell the beginning; 8 more, the end).

*He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck,  
shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*

### THE BEGINNING

Your Life Is a Story. Generic “he,” pronoun of one person. Judgment Day is a judgment of individuals, not groups. Of Rom 14.12 (see AV), “So then each of us will give an account of himself to God” (ESV):

“Every word in this sentence is emphatic” (so Cranfield). *So then* introduces the logical conclusion [of the preceding text]. *Each* makes the judgment universal: each one of us is caught up in it and there is no escaping it. *Of us* makes it personal: we cannot see this as applying to our neighbor but not ourselves. And we should notice that Paul is including himself with his readers. *Give an account* is an expression often used for the keeping of financial records (L. Morris).

And many of us will end with a “life collapse.” Even (esp.!) many hearers (and preachers!) of sermons who have become sermon-proof. You rob yourself of a sermon’s benefit if you apply it mainly to others. Take this one to heart! Even if you are a Christian, remember that old spiritual, “It’s me it’s me oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer // Not my mother /father//my brother/sister//my elder/leader//the preacher/sinner, but ME!”

You Are Very Sinful. “Reproof” presupposes sin; everyone needs it. You are sinful and commit sins (Jas 3.2; 1 John 1.8). You were *born a sinner* with a sinful nature from sinful parents. You *began sinning* from the start of your moral consciousness; only little Jesus did not need “the rod.” Except for grace, you are *constantly sinning still*. Moralists never rise above “splendid sins.” And the biggest sinners are *hypocrites*, not prostitutes or drunkards.

You have very little sense of your vast natural guilt and foul moral corruption. “Sin is the dare of God’s justice, the rape of his mercy, the jeer of his patience, the slight of his power, and the contempt of his love” (J. Bunyan). See Job 15.14-16. J. Edwards said to sinners that God

holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours (“Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”).

O miserable man, what a deformed monster has sin made you! God made you “little lower than the angels”; sin has made you little better than the devils (J. Alleine).

If unconverted, you are a spiritual corpse; resurrection is your only hope.

Reproofs Are the Way of Life. Original for “reproof” means “rebuke, correction, i.e., speak words which show strong disapproval, with possible actions of punishment to follow” (DBL #9350); “reprimand, protest, objection” (CHALOT). “To charge with a fault to the face,” censure, cast blame (1828 Webster’s). The moral law directs and then testifies against violators. Faithful preachers reprove sinners. Reproof has the nature of correction (Psa 39.11); it may succeed in turning one from sin/ruin and to righteousness/salvation; it will succeed when God gives converting grace (Prov 1.23). Reproof is love’s response to sin (same word in Lev 19.17-18; also in Prov 3.11-12). Hence “reproofs of instruction are the way of life” (Prov 6.23; cf. 29.15).

Being unpleasant, reproof tempts to resentment and hardening one’s heart (Prov 15.10). Resisting rebuke makes one more resistant. Youth (Prov 19.18) and humility make one more likely to be helped by reproof.

Some Will Not Change. Heb. idiom, “a man of reproofs.” Both his sin and God’s mercy are persistent, so reproofs attend him. The Lord has a controversy with him and lets him know it. This is a mercy because in settled anger, the Lord stops speaking altogether. No reproofs in hell.

Jesus rebuked a storm and there was a great calm; he rebukes these and they keep raging. Only extreme wickedness continues impenitent despite frequent strong rebukes. Heb. idiom, “hardeneth his neck” (“stiffens his neck,” ESV), “is a metaphor derived from obstinate draft animals who will not submit to the yoke” (Pulpit Commentary) and means “to be stubborn” (cf. Jer 7.26; 17.23) → unteachable, incorrigible, “bad beyond correction.” The yoke is God’s revealed will; these will not bend down and accept its restraint.

For Them, God’s Longsuffering Mercy Has an End. The Lord’s “mercy endureth forever” (26x in Psa 136); his “steadfast love” toward his chosen. The impenitent risk the end of his mercy. Of Noah’s generation the Lord said, “My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years” (Gen 6.3; cf. 1 Pet 3.20). Ninevites received a 40-day warning (Jonah 3.4), but usually God does not reveal the time limit. His judgment jars like an alarm the morning sleeper. All of a sudden, and too late, stubborn sinners realize: “time’s up!” Then there is no time to escape the collapsing roof of God’s wrath.

## THE END

The **story begins** with a sinful person (“he”) who has the mercy of frequent reproofs, but he is stubborn and steadfastly continues as he is and does.

**His end** is dreadful beyond what we can adequately express or conceive. Among the saddest words in all Scripture: he *“shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy,”* *“will suddenly be broken beyond healing”* (ESV), *“will be shattered instantly—beyond recovery”* (HCSB), *“one day you will be crushed and never recover”* (GNB), *“will suddenly be broken and never have another chance”* (LB), *“when [a stiff-necked man] is suddenly set on fire there shall be no remedy”* (LXX).

All the Finally Impenitent Will Be Finally Ruined. When you spurn God’s overtures of love and mercy again and again and the Lord in his sovereignty and just wrath withholds the grace of salvation that would effect a change, one of two things absolutely must happen. Either God must be eternally dishonored or his avowed enemy must be eternally humiliated and ruined, and the former is impossible. Your probation is temporary. God’s amazing patience has an end. “We must either bend or break” (M. Henry). Bending glorifies God’s mercy and grace; breaking glorifies his terrible justice.

It is a tribute to God’s longsuffering nature, and his amazing kindness, that he does not instantly destroy rebels. He is our Maker and we will not acknowledge him. He is our Sustainer and we will not give him thanks. He is our King and we will not swear fealty, or we do and commit treason. He is altogether glorious and we will not praise him. He is the only true and living God and we worship creatures instead. He is the Truth and we love and practice falsehood. He is the Life and we continue in a pact with death. He is perfect Love and we prefer the oppression of Satan our adversary. He is Judge and we dare continue in crimes right in front of his omniscient eyes. He is all-powerful and we challenge him. He is everywhere-present and we try to hide. He is pure and holy but we gladly wallow in filth.

Friends, such a state of things cannot continue forever. God’s love is on display in the interim, but his wisdom would be impugned if he maintained this forever as the status quo. Can you defy him with impunity and get away with it? Do you think God will let you keep spitting in his face forever? NO!

For the Incurable, the End Comes Suddenly. The genre is a proverb or axiom, *generally true*, though there are exceptions. Some sink quietly, gradually in the quicksand of God’s wrath, but for many, it is a bolt of lightning from heaven.

It is no security to wicked men for one moment, that there are no visible means of death at hand. It is no security to a natural man, that he is now in health, and that he does not see which way he should now immediately go out of the world by any accident, and that there is no visible danger in any respect in his circumstances. The manifold and continual experience of the world in all ages, shows this is no evidence, that a man is not on the very brink of eternity,

and that the next step will not be into another world. The unseen, unthought-of ways and means of persons going suddenly out of the world are innumerable and inconceivable. Unconverted men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering, and there are innumerable places in this covering so weak that they will not bear their weight, and these places are not seen. The arrows of death fly unseen at noon-day; the sharpest sight cannot discern them. God has so many different unsearchable ways of taking wicked men out of the world and sending them to hell, that there is nothing to make it appear, that God had need to be at the expense of a miracle, or go out of the ordinary course of his providence, to destroy any wicked man, at any moment (Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands,” etc.).

Scripture has many examples of sinners cut down suddenly: Lot’s wife, Pharaoh, Korah & Dathan & Abiram, Achan, Hophni & Phinehas, King Saul, Ahab and Jezebel, Judas Iscariot, Ananias & Saphira, King Herod.

These illustrate Prov 1.24-33; 6.15 (almost the same words as 29.1); Psa 73.18-20. When Christ returns, all the lost will suffer this sudden catastrophe (1 Thess 5.2-3).

Their Catastrophe Is Irrevocable. “And that without remedy.” In this life you may be spared by grace but not in the next. “If the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be” (Eccl 11.3). “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still” (Rev 22.11). One thing Dante got right about hell: “abandon all hope, all ye who enter here.” If you should die and discover you are in a pitch black furnace screaming from intense pain, know now that you will be tormented forever! It will only get worse.

This May Be Your Last Opportunity. Friends, for all I know this may be the last sermon you will ever hear. One Saturday evening, 8 Oct 1871, D. L. Moody was finishing his sermon and decided to press for decisions next week, when the courthouse bell sounded an alarm. No one thought much about it at first, but when they went outside, they saw the glare of the flames, and this was the start of the Great Chicago Fire in which 300 people died. He never postponed again! May God be merciful and grant us more opportunities to repent of our sins, but he may not!

Allegedly true, the story is told of a young woman, who had been brought up in a Christian home and knew she should come to Christ chose but instead took the way of the world. Much against the wishes of her godly mother, she kept company with ungodly people. Again and again she persistently refused to listen to gospel urgings. Finally, she contracted a terminal illness. Her case was hopeless and death was staring her in the face. Still she was hard and stubborn when urged to turn to God in repentance and to believe in Christ. One night she awoke suddenly out of a sound sleep, a frightened look in her eyes, and asked excitedly, “Mother, what is Ezekiel 7.8-

9?" Her mother said, "What do you mean, my dear?" She said she had a most vivid dream with "a Presence" in the room who very solemnly said to her, "read Ezekiel 7.8-9." The mother reached for a Bible and her heart sank as she saw the words, but she read them aloud to the dying girl: "Now will I shortly pour out my fury upon thee, and accomplish mine anger upon thee: and I will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense thee for all thine abominations. And mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: I will recompense thee according to thy ways and thine abominations that are in the midst of thee; and ye shall know that I am the Lord that smiteth." The poor sufferer, with a look of horror on her face, sank back on the pillow, utterly exhausted, and in a few moments she was in eternity. Grace rejected brings judgment at last!

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov 28.13). The door of salvation is still open, and his name is Jesus Christ. He says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt 11.28-30). Bend your neck and receive his yoke. Yield to him and become his disciple while you have this fleeting opportunity. Amen.