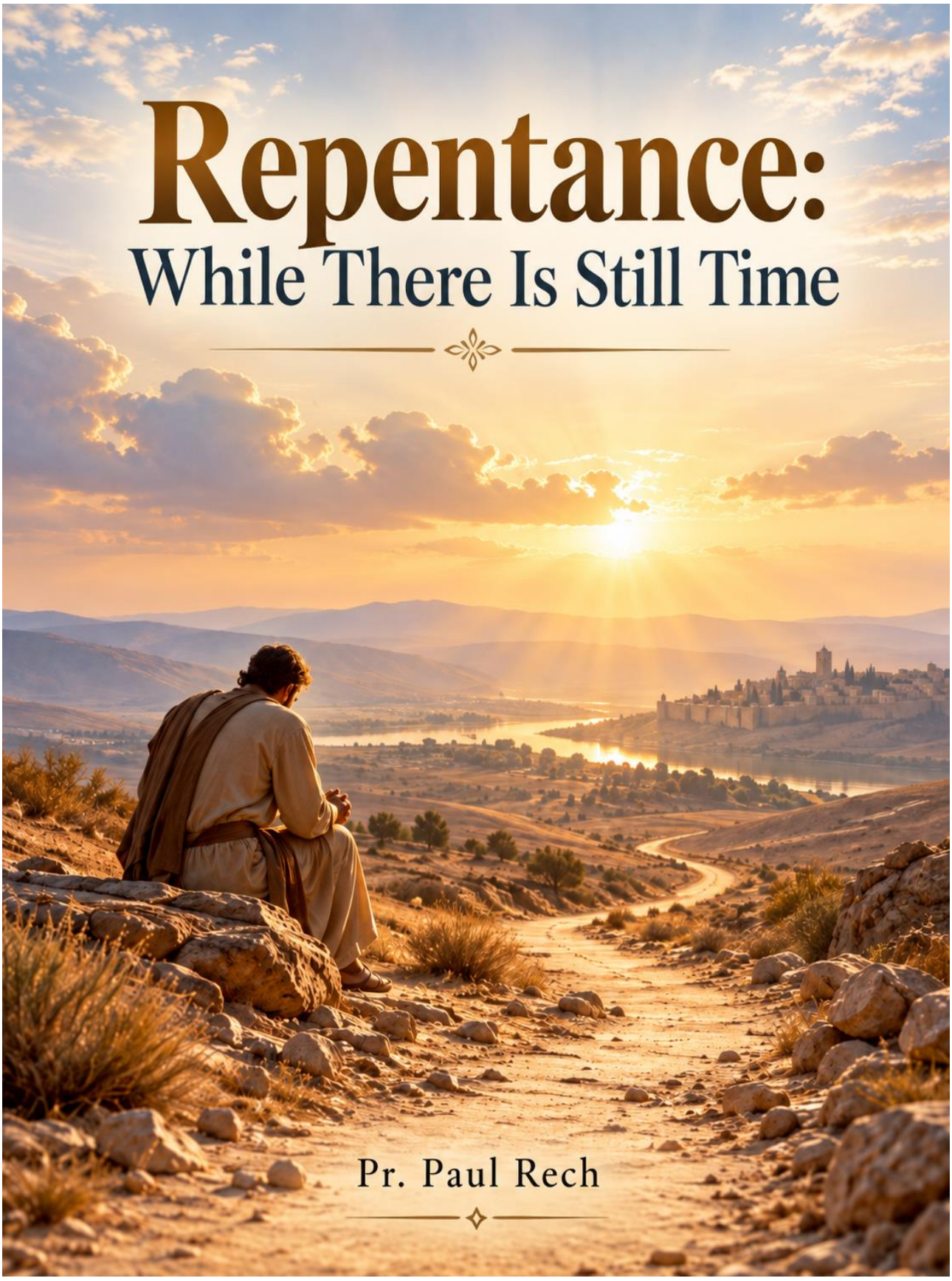

Repentance:
While There Is Still Time
Pr. Paul Rech

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There are words in the Bible that carry eternal weight. Words that were given not merely to inform, but to awaken. They are not intended merely to increase our knowledge, but to confront our conscience. Among these words is one of the most important in the entire biblical message: **repentance**.

When John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, his message did not begin with promises of prosperity, comfort, or ease. He did not seek to please his listeners or adapt his preaching to popular taste. His message was direct: "***Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.***" **Matthew 3:2**

John was preparing the way for the coming of Jesus Christ. And preparation to meet the Messiah began with repentance.

Centuries later, we still hear the same message echoing throughout Scripture. A person may ignore it, reject it, postpone it, or even ridicule it, but cannot eliminate it. God continues to call men and women to abandon their sins, turn to Him, and receive by faith the salvation offered in Christ.

The problem is that there is something dangerous in the human heart: the tendency to postpone until tomorrow what God is asking us to do today.

It is possible to recognize the truth too late.

It is possible to understand the seriousness of sin too late.

It is possible to desire change when there is no longer an opportunity to change.

Jesus presented one of the most striking illustrations of this reality when He told the story of the rich man and Lazarus, recorded in Luke 16:19–31.

The rich man finally understood some very important things.

But he understood them too late.

His experience stands in profound contrast to the message of John the Baptist: **John preached repentance while there was still time; the rich man desired change when his time had already ended.**

1. The message that prepared the way for Christ

John the Baptist appeared during a spiritually significant period. For centuries, Israel had not heard the voice of a prophet speaking with such authority.

Then John appeared in the wilderness saying: "***Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.***" **Matthew 3:3**

His task was to prepare the people to receive Jesus.

But it is significant to observe how John understood this preparation.

He did not simply say: "**The Messiah is coming.**"

He said: "**Repent.**"

This shows us a fundamental truth: **there is no genuine encounter with Christ without a change of attitude toward sin.**

Biblical repentance is not simply emotion.

It is not merely feeling guilty.

It is not merely feeling sorrow because of the consequences of a wrong decision.

In the New Testament, the Greek word frequently used for repentance is *metanoia*, which conveys the idea of a change of mind, direction, understanding, and attitude.

True repentance takes place when a person recognizes that he or she has been living far from the will of God and decides to abandon the old way in order to turn back to the Lord.

This inward change produces outward consequences.

That is why John the Baptist said: "***Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance.***" **Matthew 3:8**

In other words, John was saying: "**Do not merely say that you have repented. Show it through the way you live.**"

True repentance produces fruit. There may be tears without repentance.

There may be emotion without transformation. There may be remorse without change.

But when genuine repentance exists, everything begins to change.

2. When the people asked, "What shall we do?"

John's preaching was so powerful that the crowds began asking a very important question: "***What shall we do then?***" **Luke 3:10**

This question reveals that the message had reached not only their ears, but also their conscience. True repentance always asks:

"What needs to change in my life?"

John answered in practical ways.

To the crowd, he said: "***He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.***" **Luke 3:11**

To the tax collectors, men frequently associated with financial exploitation, he said:

"***Collect no more than what is appointed for you.***" **Luke 3:13**

To the soldiers, he said: "***Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely and be content with your wages.***" **Luke 3:14**

Notice that John did not treat repentance as an abstract idea.

He said that repentance needed to reach:

money, relationships, the use of authority, generosity, honesty,

and the way we treat other people. True repentance brings real change.

When God transforms the heart, that transformation begins to appear in our attitudes.

3. Repentance is not simply remorse

The Bible presents several examples of people who became deeply troubled after they sinned.

But that disturbance did not always mean genuine repentance.

Judas Iscariot is a dramatic example. After betraying Jesus, he realized the seriousness of what he had done.

Matthew records: "***Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders.***" **Matthew 27:3**

Judas experienced deep remorse.

But remorse did not lead him to the feet of Christ.

Peter also failed deeply.

On the night Jesus was arrested, Peter denied three times that he knew the Lord.

When he realized what he had done: "***He went out and wept bitterly.***" **Luke 22:62**

But Peter returned to Christ.

That is an important difference.

Judas looked at his sin and found despair.

Peter looked at his sin and then turned back to the Savior.

True repentance does not end in guilt. It leads us to God.

Paul explains: "***For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.***" **2 Corinthians 7:10**

Remorse is a sorrow that merely destroys.

Repentance is a sorrow that awakens, corrects, and leads us to God.

4. The story of the rich man and Lazarus

In Luke 16, Jesus presents a profoundly serious story.

There was a rich man who: "***was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day.***" **Luke 16:19**

At his gate was a man named Lazarus.

He was poor, sick, and dependent upon the mercy of others.

Jesus says: "***But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate.***" **Luke 16:20**

The contrast was enormous. One lived surrounded by abundance. The other survived in deep need. Eventually, both men died.

Jesus then reveals something the world normally avoids considering: death is not the end of existence.

Lazarus was carried by the angels to Abraham. The rich man also died.

And Jesus declares: "***And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes.***"
Luke 16:23

Here a striking reversal occurs. During his lifetime, the rich man seemed to possess everything. After death, he discovered that what he possessed could not help him.

His money could not redeem him. His social position could not save him.

His fine clothing no longer mattered. His properties were left behind. Now he stood before eternal reality.

5. When reality finally became clear

Something changed in that man's thinking.

He began to realize things that apparently he had never taken seriously enough during his lifetime. First, he recognized his condition.

Then he pleaded: "***Father Abraham, have mercy on me.***" **Luke 16:24**

It is striking. Now he wanted mercy.

Perhaps he had had countless opportunities to show mercy while Lazarus was at his gate. But now he was the one crying out for mercy.

Abraham replied: "***Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things.***"
Luke 16:25

There is a deeply significant word in that response: **"Remember."**

His memory was still functioning. His conscience was still functioning.

The rich man could remember his life. He could remember his opportunities.

He could remember his decisions. He could remember what he had ignored.

This makes the story even more solemn.

6. A repentance that came too late

The rich man then began to show concern for his family.

He said: "***I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.***" **Luke 16:27–28**

Now that man became concerned about evangelism.

Now he wanted his family to be warned.

Now he recognized that there was a place that needed to be avoided.

Now he understood that his brothers needed to change their lives.

But his understanding came too late for him.

There is something profoundly sad about this scene.

He knew exactly where his brothers stood spiritually.

They were probably living as he had lived. Perhaps they shared his values. Perhaps they believed that wealth, comfort, and success were enough.

Now he desperately wanted them to be warned.

Abraham replied: "***They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.***" **Luke 16:29**

The rich man insisted: "***No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.***" **Luke 16:30**

Notice the word: **"*repent.*"**

At last, the rich man understood the necessity of repentance.

He realized that his brothers needed to repent.

He probably also realized that he himself should have repented while he was alive.

But for him, the opportunity had ended.

7. The great gulf

Abraham explained: "***Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.***" **Luke 16:26**

During our lifetime, there are decisions that can still be changed.

We can reconsider. We can ask forgiveness. We can confess. We can abandon wrong paths. We can return to God.

Jesus presents here an extremely serious reality: **there comes a moment when the eternal condition is determined.**

That is why the Bible places such emphasis on spiritual urgency.

Paul writes: "***Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.***" **2 Corinthians 6:2**

Hebrews declares: "***Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.***" **Hebrews 3:15**

There is one word repeated in these passages: **today.** God calls today.

The Holy Spirit convicts today. The Word confronts today.

The opportunity exists today.

8. The danger of postponing repentance

Few people consciously say: "**I will never repent.**"

The more common strategy of the human heart is different: "**Someday I will do it.**"

Someday I will seek God more seriously. Someday I will abandon this sin.

Someday I will put my life in order. Someday I will ask for forgiveness.

Someday I will reconcile. Someday I will take my faith seriously.

But there is great danger in the expression: **"someday."**

Proverbs warns: "***Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.***" **Proverbs 27:1**

James also reminds us: "***You do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.***"
James 4:14

Human life is precious. But it is brief. And we have no guarantee of tomorrow.

That is why the message of the Gospel always carries an element of urgency.

It is not panic. It is reality.

9. Jesus also preached repentance

Sometimes someone may imagine that the message of repentance belonged only to John the Baptist. But Jesus began His ministry proclaiming practically the same message.

Mark records: "***The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.***" **Mark 1:15**

Notice two inseparable elements: **repentance and faith.**

To repent means to abandon rebellion against God. To believe means to trust in Christ.

The Gospel is not merely about abandoning something. It is also about receiving Christ.

We are not saved because we manage to improve our own lives. We are saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul declared: "***Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.***" **Acts 16:31**

That genuine faith produces a new direction.

10. Peter repeated the same message

On the Day of Pentecost, after Peter proclaimed the death and resurrection of Christ, his listeners were deeply moved.

They asked: "***Men and brethren, what shall we do?***" **Acts 2:37**

Peter answered: "***Repent.***" **Acts 2:38**

Later he said again: "***Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.***" **Acts 3:19**

Thus, we see an impressive continuity.

John preached repentance.

Jesus preached repentance.

Peter preached repentance.

Paul preached repentance.

In Athens, Paul declared: "***Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.***"
Acts 17:30

The message is the same and remains valid.

11. God does not call us to repentance because He desires to condemn

Some people interpret the message of repentance as something negative.

But biblically, the opposite is true.

The call to repentance is a manifestation of God's mercy.

Peter writes: "***The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.***" **2 Peter 3:9**

God calls because He loves. God warns because He desires to save. God confronts because He desires to restore.

A warning is a form of mercy.

Imagine someone walking toward a cliff on a dark night.

The person who shouts, "**Stop!**" is not demonstrating hatred.

That person is demonstrating love.

The same is true when God confronts sin.

Divine warning is an invitation to turn back before it is too late.

12. The goodness of God also leads us to repentance

Paul writes an extraordinary truth: "***The goodness of God leads you to repentance.***" **Romans 2:4**

Some people come to repentance when they recognize the consequences of sin.

Others come when they understand the depth of God's goodness.

Think about everything God offers. Forgiveness. Reconciliation. A new life.

A new identity. Hope. Peace with God. Eternal life.

All of this was made possible because Jesus took upon Himself the penalty for our sins.

Isaiah prophesied: "***But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities.***" **Isaiah 53:5**

At the cross, Jesus did not merely teach about love. He demonstrated love.

13. True repentance produces change

Zacchaeus is an excellent example. When he encountered Jesus, his life changed.

He declared: "***Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.***"
Luke 19:8

Jesus answered: "***Today salvation has come to this house.***" **Luke 19:9**

Zacchaeus did not purchase his salvation by giving away money.

But his change demonstrated that something had happened in his heart.

This is the fruit of repentance about which John the Baptist spoke.

True repentance changes priorities. It changes attitudes. It changes relationships. It changes values. It changes directions.

It does not mean instant perfection. But it does mean a new direction.

14. The greatest danger may be thinking that we still have plenty of time

The rich man in Luke 16 probably never imagined that his story would end the way it did. Perhaps he had many plans. Perhaps he believed he would live for many more years. Perhaps he was thinking about new investments, new properties, and new banquets.

Jesus told another similar parable in Luke 12.

A rich man had a great harvest and decided to build larger barns.

He said to himself: "***Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.***" **Luke 12:19**

But God said to him: "***Fool! This night your soul will be required of you.***" **Luke 12:20**

The problem was not that he possessed material goods.

The problem was that he had built a life without God.

An entire life may be carefully planned for earth and completely unprepared for eternity.

15. If the rich man could return

The story in Luke 16 invites us to imagine a question.

If that rich man had the opportunity to return to his former home for just one day, how would he live?

Probably many things would lose their importance.

Perhaps he would immediately walk through his gate to look for Lazarus.

Perhaps he would ask forgiveness. Perhaps he would share his wealth. Perhaps he would gather his five brothers. Perhaps he would say:

"We need to seek God."

"We need to listen to the Word."

"We need to change while there is still time."

Perhaps he would spend that one day trying to correct what he had ignored for years.

But Jesus shows that this opportunity was no longer available.

We, however, still have something of immeasurable value.

We have today.

16. Repentance begins with sincerity before God

David left us one of the greatest examples of repentance in Scripture.

After his sin, he prayed: "***Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness.***" **Psalm 51:1**

He also acknowledged: "***Against You, You only, have I sinned.***" **Psalm 51:4**

And he pleaded: "***Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.***" **Psalm 51:10**

This is the heart of true repentance. It is not justifying sin.

It is not blaming other people. It is not looking for excuses.

It is coming before God and saying: "**Lord, I have sinned.**"

And then adding: "**Transform my heart.**"

17. There is still grace

Perhaps someone will read these words and think: "I have gone too far."

"I have made too many mistakes." "I have wasted too many opportunities."

"God could never receive me."

But that is not the message of the Gospel.

Jesus declared: "***The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.***" **John 6:37**

Isaiah wrote: "***Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.***" **Isaiah 55:7**

As long as there is life, there is an opportunity to return to God.

The thief crucified beside Jesus discovered this during the final moments of his life.

He turned to Christ and said: "***Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.***" **Luke 23:42**

Jesus answered: "***Today you will be with Me in Paradise.***" **Luke 23:43**

This demonstrates the greatness of grace.

But we must not interpret this story as an encouragement to postpone our decision. On the contrary.

It shows that God can save even at the final moment, but none of us knows when our final moment will come.

18. The question that remains

When John the Baptist preached in the wilderness, the crowds asked:

"What shall we do?"

When Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, his listeners asked:

"What shall we do?"

Perhaps this is also the question that needs to arise in our hearts today.

What do I need to do?

Is there some sin I have been tolerating?

Is there some area of my life that I have never truly surrendered to God?

Is there someone I need to forgive?

Is there some injustice I need to correct?

Is there a decision I have been postponing?

Do I have merely a religious faith, but without inward transformation?

The biblical answer remains:

Repent and believe in the Gospel.

While There Is Still Time

There is something deeply solemn in the story of the rich man in Luke 16.

He believed in repentance.

But he came to believe when it was already too late for him.

John the Baptist, on the other hand, raised his voice to a people who could still make a decision.

His message continues to echo through the centuries:

"**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**"

Perhaps the greatest spiritual tragedy is not never hearing the call of God.

Perhaps it is hearing it many times and always responding: **"Later."**

Later I will change. Later I will seek God. Later I will forgive. Later I will abandon this sin. Later I will surrender my life to Christ. But the Bible never says:

"**Later is the day of salvation.**"

It says: "***Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.***"
Hebrews 3:15

An Invitation to True Repentance

If God is speaking to your heart, do not turn this moment into merely another passing emotion. Do not seek merely to feel better.

Seek to be reconciled with God. Acknowledge your sin.

Confess it before the Lord. Abandon what you know is contrary to the will of God. Place your faith in Jesus Christ.

Believe that He died for your sins and rose again. Surrender your life to Him.

The Bible promises: "***If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***" **1 John 1:9**

And also: "***Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.***"
Romans 10:13

Perhaps you can pray a simple and sincere prayer right now:

"*Lord God, I recognize that I have sinned against You. I do not want to continue living apart from Your will. Forgive my sins. I believe in Jesus Christ, in His death and resurrection. I surrender my life to You. Change my heart, transform my ways, and help me to produce the fruit of true repentance. I want to live for You while I still have time. In Jesus' name. Amen.*"

The message of John the Baptist still stands before us.

The testimony of the rich man in Luke 16 does as well.

One calls us to repentance **before** it is too late.

The other demonstrates the tragedy of understanding the truth **after** the opportunity no longer exists.

The choice is before each one of us. And the Word of God continues to say:

Today is the day!

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