Crossing the Rubicon

Joshua 24:15

Governors of Roman provinces were appointed pro-magistrates with ***imperium*** (roughly, "**right to command**") in their province(s). The governor would then serve as the general of the Roman army within the territory of his province(s). Roman law specified that only the elected magistrates (consuls and praetors) could hold *imperium* within Italy. Any pro-magistrate who entered Italy at the head of his troops forfeited his *imperium* and was therefore no longer legally allowed to command troops.

Exercising *imperium* when forbidden by the law was a capital offence, punishable by death. Furthermore, obeying the commands of a general who did not legally possess *imperium* was also a capital offence. If a general entered Italy whilst exercising command of an army, both the general and his soldiers became outlaws and were automatically condemned to death. Generals were thus obliged to disband their armies before entering Italy.

The idiom "Crossing the Rubicon" means to pass a point of no return, and refers to Julius Caesar's army's crossing of the river in 49 BC. Do you know the story?

Julius Caesar was one of the most brilliant military strategists of the ancient world. This, in concert with his political ambitions, made him one of history's most colorful characters. About 60 years before the birth of Jesus, he was appointed governor of Gaul (north of Italy). His military skills thrust him into considerable prominence, so much so that he became a threat to Rome. Eventually he was declared to be an "enemy of the state," and ordered to disband his army. The Roman general, Pompey, was appointed to enforce the charge. This set the stage for a mighty confrontation.

In 49 B.C. Caesar was confronted with a major decision. Should he surrender, or should he march southward and engage Pompey? A crucial geographical point figured in his decision. A stream marked the boundary between Gaul and Italy, the Rubicon. To cross it with an army was a breach of Roman law—an act of open rebellion. Once he crossed, there would be no turning back. It became an irrevocable decision. Suetonius, a Roman historian, records that he approached the stream; after some hesitation, he issued the command, "**Advance**!" When on the southern side, he shouted, "**The die is now cast**." Those words have echoed across more than twenty centuries, becoming proverbial for decisions, once made, that cannot be reversed without dire consequences; in some case, not at all.

There are a number of decisions, crucial decisions in life, which entail a "point of no return." Sadly, many do not "think ahead" about consequences, and so plunge recklessly into situations that affect them dramatically—sometimes even eternally!

Joshua 24:15 - "And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Joshua crossed the Rubicon . . . will you not cross it as well and obey the gospel commands of Christ?