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Today if You Hear His Voice - Do Not Harden Your Heart – A Look at true Repentance

September 3, 2017

Sermon Text: Hebrews (Selected)

Scripture Reading: 1 Samuel 15

King Saul mouthed the words of repentance, but they were just words.

1 Samuel 15:24-25 Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. (25) Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may bow before the LORD."

1 Samuel 15:30 Then he said, "I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may bow

before the LORD your God."

1 Samuel 15:35 And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.

It is quite interesting to compare Saul's "repentance" with that of King David's, which was genuine:

2 Samuel 12:13 David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die."

Very similar and some would say identical words. Yet Saul was not repentant and David was. Saul was utterly rejected. David was forgiven. You do see some hints of falsehood in Saul's "confession" –

- Excuse: because I feared the people and obeyed their voice

- Honor me before the elders of my people

Repentance. Last week we considered the sobering warning of Scripture about the reprobate. This is the person who hears the Lord’s voice and hardens his or her heart against it, the very sin Hebrews warns us about. In the end, after a time known only to the Lord, we saw the divine gavel falls and the Lord makes the pronouncement, “he shall not enter my rest.”

For such a person, repentance becomes impossible. And that is exactly what happened to Saul. He was done. Weep and wail all he would, the Lord rejected him utterly. Saul was reprobate. Herein is a serious warning for each one of us.

As a corollary to this matter of the reprobate, I want us to consider this morning this subject of *repentance*. When we hear the Lord’s voice, when by His Spirit the Scripture comes alive to us and warns us, or commands us, or convicts us, or instructs us, *a response is necessary*. We must *hear* and we must *obey*. To do otherwise is to harden one’s heart against the Lord.

You have it in the London Confession:

...this faith...also acts differently upon that which each particular passage

thereof contains; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come; but the principal acts of saving faith have immediate relation to Christ, accepting, receiving, and resting upon him alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.

To fail to respond, to fail to obey or to fear is to harden the heart. This is the path the reprobate followed and it is why he is forever and unchangeably lost.

John Bunyan saw this. He correctly depicts the reprobate man in the iron cage (a part of Pilgrim’s Progress by the way that many professing Christians chaff against) –

Now,” said Christian, “let me go on my way.”

“No, stay,” said the Interpreter, “till I have showed you a little more, and after that you shall go on your way.”

So he took him by the hand again, and led him into a very dark room, where there sat a man in an Iron Cage.

Now the Man, to look at, seemed very sad. He sat with his eyes looking down to the ground, his hands folded together; and he sighed as if he would break his heart.

Then said Christian, "What does this mean?"

At this the Interpreter bid him talk with the man.

Then said Christian to the Man, "What are you?"

The Man answered, "I am not what I once was."

"What were you once?" asked Christian.

The Man in the iron cage said, "Once I had a fair and flourishing Profession of faith, both in my own eyes, and also in the eyes of others. I once was, or so I thought, ready for the Celestial City, and had then even joy when I thought that I should get there."

"Well," said Christian, "but what are you now?"

"I am now a man of Despair, and am shut up in it, as in this Iron

Cage. I cannot get out; O now I cannot."

"But how did you come into this condition?" asked Christian.

"I left off watching and being sober;" said the Man. "I laid the reins on the neck of my lusts; I sinned against the light of the Word and the goodness of God; I have grieved the Spirit, and he is gone. I tempted the Devil, and he has come to me; I have provoked God to anger, and he has left me; I have so hardened my heart, that I cannot repent."

Then said Christian to the Interpreter, "But are there no hopes for such a man as this?"

"Ask him," said the Interpreter.

Then said the Christian, "Is there no hope, but you must be kept in the Iron Cage of Despair?"

"No, none at all," said the Man.

"Why?" said Christian, "the Son of the Blessed is very pitiful."

"I have crucified him to myself afresh," said the Man. "I have despised his Person, I have

despised his Righteousness, I have counted his Blood an unholy thing; I have reviled the Spirit of Grace. Therefore I have shut myself out of all the Promises, and there now remains to me nothing but threatenings, dreadful threatenings, fearful threatenings of certain Judgment and fiery Indignation, which shall devour me as an Adversary.”

“For what did you bring yourself into this condition?” asked Christian.

“For the Lusts, Pleasures, and Profits of this World;” said the Man, “I persuaded myself I would enjoy them and they would bring me delight, but now every one of those things bite me, and gnaw me like a burning worm.”

“But can’t you now repent and turn?”

“God has denied me repentance:” said the Man. His Word gives me no encouragement to believe; yes, he himself has shut me up in this Iron Cage; nor can all the men in the world let me out. O Eternity! Eternity! how shall I grapple with the misery that I must meet with in Eternity!”

Then said the Interpreter to Christian, “Let this man's misery be remembered by you, and be an everlasting caution to you.”

You see, most professing Christians really think that *repentance* is something that a person works up in themselves and that they can do so at any time they choose. But the doctrine of the reprobate clearly shows us that repentance is a gift from God just like faith, and therefore it is a presumptuous sin for a person to harden their heart against God’s Word, insisting that at some future time they can repent.

2 Timothy 2:24-26 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, (25) correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, (26) and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

God must grant repentance. Yes, WE must repent, just like WE must believe. Nevertheless repentance and faith are gifts from God, gifts that are no longer possible for the reprobate.

I want to read at length to you now from the Epistle to the Hebrews. Listen carefully as the Apostle emphasizes this very theme, at the same time warning believers not to be careless but to *look to Christ in faith and not grow weary*. Yes, we are Calvinists. We correctly understand that a genuine Christian can never be lost and will persevere in faith and repentance right to the end. But God's Word also gives Christ's people these warnings, just as we have heard Peter tell us to be diligent to make our calling and election sure.

Alright then, here we go:

Hebrews 2:1-4 Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, **lest we drift away from it**. (2) For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, (3) **how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?** It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, (4) while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Hebrews 3:7-19 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, (8) **do not harden your**

hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, (9) where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. (10) Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.' (11) As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'" (12) **Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God**. (13) But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

(14) For we have come to share in Christ, **if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end**. (15) As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." (16) For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? (17) And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? (18) And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? (19) So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

Hebrews 4:1-13 Therefore, while the

promise of entering his rest still stands, **let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.** (2) For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. (3) For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest," although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. (4) For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." (5) And again in this passage he said, "They shall not enter my rest."

(6) Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, (7) again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, **"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."**

(8) For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. (9) So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, (10) for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. (11) **Let us therefore strive to enter that rest,**

so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. (12) For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (13) And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Hebrews 5:11-14 About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, **since you have become dull of hearing.** (12) For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, (13) for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. (14) But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

[NOTE: There are MANY professing Christians today who have grown "dull of hearing" and to whom it is very hard if not impossible to explain Christ's truths to them. Hebrews is telling such people that THEY need to fear!!]

Hebrews 6:1-12 **Therefore let us**

leave the elementary doctrine of **Christ** and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, (2) and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. (3) And this we will do if God permits.

(4) **For it is impossible**, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, (5) and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, (6) **and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance**, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

(7) For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. (8) But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

[NOTE: As you sit here in this church, hearing God's Word year after year, the rain has often fallen upon you. *Be sure it produces a useful crop in you!*

(9) Though we speak in this way, yet

in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. (10) For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. (11) And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, (12) **so that you may not be sluggish**, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Spiritual sluggards are on their way to being reprobate, hearing God's gavel fall – *you shall not enter my rest!*

Hebrews 10:19-31 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, (20) by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, (21) and since we have a great priest over the house of God, (22) **let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith**, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (23) **Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering**, for he who promised is faithful. (24) **And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works**, (25) **not neglecting to meet together, as is the**

habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

(26) **For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, (27) but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.**

(28) Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. (29) **How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God**, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? (30) For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." (31) It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Hebrews 10:32-39 But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, (33) sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. (34) For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted

the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

(35) **Therefore do not throw away your confidence**, which has a great reward. (36) **For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.** (37) For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; (38) but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." (39) But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

Hebrews 12:1-17 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, **let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us**, (2) looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. (4) In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. (5) And have you forgotten the

exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. (6) For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." (7) It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? (8) If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. (9) Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? (10) For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. (11) For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

(12) Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, (13) and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. (14) Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

(15) See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; (16) that no one is sexually immoral or unholy **like Esau**, who sold his birthright for a single meal. (17) For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, **for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.**

There then is the repeated warning to us all. Don't be a spiritual sluggard. Don't be satisfied with spiritual baby food. Don't be overconfident and presume on God's grace by concluding that it doesn't matter how you live or what you do since you are "saved."

May no one here ever end up being that man in Bunyan's iron cage.

Then said the Interpreter to Christian, "Let this man's misery be remembered by you, and be an everlasting caution to you."