

Title: God is Serious about His Mercy
Text: Hebrews 10.26-31
Theme: Warning about turning back
Series: Hebrews #29
Prop Stmt: If you reject Christ as lamb, you will face Christ as Lion.
Aim: I aim to warn my people of the dangers of “coasting”.

The winds of revival were sweeping through New England. 37-year old Jonathan Edwards was at the center of it. On Sunday, July 8, 1741 in Enfield, Connecticut, Jonathan Edwards ascended to the pulpit of the Congregational Church and preached what has become his most famous or infamous sermon entitled: Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. This sermon, still read by many in a Literature class during their Junior year of high school, is assumed by some to have been delivered by an angry, pulpit-pounding, fire-breathing, head-steaming, brimstone-spitting preacher. That is simply not the case. Jonathan Edwards was anything but. He was actually a very warm-hearted tender man. When he was 20 years old he met Sarah Pierrepont. On the front page of his Greek grammar he described her as one whom:

“...is of wonderful sweetness, calmness and universal benevolence of mind, especially after this great God has manifested himself to her. She will sometimes go about from place to place, singing sweetly, and seems to be always full of joy and pleasure; and no one knows for what. She loves to be alone walking in the fields and groves, and seems to have someone invisible always conversing with her.”

You don't write like that unless you are a bit of a romantic and John was clearly that. He and Sarah were married about four years later. His sensitivities toward his wife and children were very evident. One day his path crossed with that of a young missionary who had given his life to bring the gospel to the Indians. When this young man, David Brainerd came down with tuberculosis a year later, the Edwards family took him in to care for him in his final weeks of life. Jonathan's seventeen year-old daughter, Jerusha served as a nurse to him with such devotion that she likely contracted his disease. After Brainerd's death, Jerusha died five months later. Her father's grief was deep. When you read Edwards, he writes as a man intoxicated with God's glory. He is often overwhelmed at God's enjoyment of his own being. Glory, joy, pleasure, greatness and grace are topics that he writes about with passion. Edwards perhaps better than any pastor/theologian since Calvin, understood the incredible joy and delight that God enjoys as God. This joy and delight, and God's desire to share that with us, is what drives the gospel. But, there is another aspect to it. You see, to spurn the gospel and to reject God's grace is to bring the severest of condemnation upon one's soul. That is what Edwards was warning about in this sermon that he delivered as a guest preacher that morning in Connecticut.

How can you reconcile his great tenderness, romantic sensitivities, profound joy, poetic and lyrical descriptions of nature and some of his sermons in which he is unrelenting in his warnings of the judgments of God upon the unrepentant? Edwards saw that the glory of God was the center of all things. This God who is indescribable in beauty is also absolutely perfect in holiness. For Edwards, there was no tension between the two. The

beauty of the grace of God is seen in the sinless, sacrificial death of Christ for our sin. The terrifying wrath of God is seen being poured out on Christ who, on the cross, was treated as if he had committed all of our sin. The gospel of this God for his true believers goes to unfathomable heights and the judgments of this God for those who reject him, goes to unspeakable depths. Edwards sought to capture both.

I tell you that, not simply because my daughter is about to study that sermon in an English class at her high school, but, more importantly because that glory and warning is all over the book of Hebrews that we are studying. In fact, the sermon, Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God, was based on a text from Deut. 32 that the Author of Hebrews quotes here in Heb. 10.30. This text sounds a lot like that famous sermon. But just as that sermon did not reflect Jonathan Edwards's entire emphasis and preaching ministry neither does this text capture the entire message of the book of Hebrews. This text is a warning. The warning is real, strong and needed. But, the warning comes at the beginning of a major emphasis in this book on perseverance and faith. In other words, God is serious about your perseverance. God is serious about your faith. This is no game. The stakes are very high. This book was written to some believers who were Jewish and living in Rome. They were seen as traitors by the rest of the Jews because they professed faith in Christ. They were enduring some serious persecution at the hands of the Romans, and were rather discouraged. In this letter, the Author of Hebrews shows them over and over the multi-layered excellencies of Christ. So, in view of what Christ has done, in view of what you have in Christ, in view of your identity and inheritance, press on and don't turn back! The encouragement is clear; Press on Pilgrim. Christ is worth it. But, there is another side. There is the warning side. Yes, Christ is worth it, but if you reject Christ, you have just rejected the very Son of God. You have just rejected the one and only Savior. You have just rejected the One that God has installed as King! If you are going to spit in someone's eye, it is advisable not to do that to God. And this God, who is glorious in his grace, is also terrifying in his wrath. You see, if we spurn his mercy, we will receive his righteous wrath. God is serious about his mercy. He does not play games with his grace. Now

If you reject the gospel:

1. **There is no solution for your sin.** (26)

The "if we" in verse 26 is connected to the "let us" in verse 24. The writer is admonishing himself even as he writes to everyone else. And this admonishment reveals just how serious this command in verses 24 and 25 really is. If we neglect gathering together for worship, instruction and fellowship, then we are simply revealing that there are other priorities that own us. There are other things that we consider to be more precious and more important than God's Word and God's people. The person who diminishes the true value of the gospel, who discounts its calling upon our lives, is heading toward disaster because he has heard the gospel, understands the claims of the gospel, understands the implications of the gospel, and yet has chosen not to surrender to the gospel.

“If we go on sinning deliberately” refers to those who willfully, intentionally, and with planning, chose to reject the gospel. “After receiving the knowledge of the truth” means that this deliberate rejection of God’s authority in their life comes after they have understood and professed to be followers of Christ.

Now, this is not real complicated. A person who claims to be a follower of Christ demonstrates the validity of that claim by doing what? The answer is: following Christ! So, when a person who has professed to be a follower of Christ turns his back on Christ, the Author of Hebrews is simply pointing out the obvious. You cannot have Christ’s salvation, when you reject Christ. And Christ is King! His Word is the law.

Let’s say that a guy (professes to be a believer) comes up to you and says, “I’m divorcing my wife.” And you are a taken back a bit and say, “Why?” And he says because he just isn’t happy and she is driving him crazy and he has come to realize that they should not have ever gotten married in the first place. And you say, well, what does God’s Word say about that? To which he replies that he has come to conclusion that since God loves him, God wants him to be happy and being married to this woman has made him very unhappy, so it must be alright with God for him to get a divorce. See, it’s right there in the 11th commandment, “Above all things, Thou Shalt be Happy – no matter what!” Of course that is not what the Bible teaches. And I have seen this way too many times. You show the person from the Scripture that what they are proposing to do is in direct disobedience to God and after you cut through all of the maze and confusion of their excuses and convoluted reasoning, it comes down to this: are you going to obey God or not? Sometimes, I have had people say to me, “Well, I’ll take my chances.” That response reveals that this person is not in that decision following Christ, which may indicate that this person is not a follower of Christ, never has been, and this situation is just revealing it. Of course, down the road, this person may repent of this which would indicate that they were a follower of Christ, who strayed but whom God never let go of and brought back to himself. At this point, we don’t know what is going to happen. At this point we can only respond to what we see and what we see would indicate that this person is not following Christ. Therefore, if we really love that person, we are going to warn that person about the consequences of that sinful decision. This decision may be an indicator that they have never truly trusted in Christ as their Savior/King. If they reject Christ as Savior/King, there is no other hope of redemption. There is no salvation apart from Christ. There is no hope outside of him.

Now, we need to be careful. Some people do really stupid (sinfully stupid) things. It may be out of weakness, or ignorance, or struggle, or discouragement and we need to encourage, admonish and not give up on them. There are times of leanness that come upon people. Spiritual growth comes in fits and starts. However, that is not what this text has in view. Here are those who know the truth, and who walk away from the truth and will not live under the implications of the truth, as evidenced by no desire for the things of God, the people of God and a refusal to submit to the counsel of God. If you reject the Savior, there is no salvation but what is left is terrifying. And that is the part of the story that is often left out.

2. There is a greater expectation of judgment. (27-29)

Everyone deals with God, no matter what. He is Creator. He is Sovereign. He Rules – forever and will not and cannot be dethroned. You will either deal with Him as Savior or as Judge. His salvation is phenomenal and like anything that is precious, he treasures and values and esteems the salvation that he offers through Christ. God loves his Son, Christ. God loves the salvation that Christ purchased for us by his death and resurrection. God revels in this salvation plan because he is serious about his mercy and intentional in his plan to redeem and reclaim ruined sinners. Christ came to this earth looking like an exact replica of his Father. So, when people who know what Christ has done, know what Christ has claimed, know his promises and in his face say, “I’ll take my chances. After all, I just don’t do real well with authority figures anyway.” Look at the warning of these three verses. Not only is there no longer a sacrifice for sins. (that is there is no other means of dealing with your sins), but a fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.” (27)

The word “fearful” is more than a feeling. It is a word that has the idea of pointing to something specifically that is the cause of terror. The word “expectation” speaks of the certainty and the inevitability of this terror. The reality of the terror is reflected in the last phrase of v.27 that speaks of God’s fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. This is probably an allusion to the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Numbers 16.35) which illustrates for us the severity of God’s judgment.

In verses 28-29, the Author of Hebrews uses an *a fortiori* argument (that is, a “how much greater” comparison device). Look at the law of Moses (1st Covenant). If a person rebelled against the 1st Covenant, and were found to be guilty, they received a death sentence. If that is how serious God was with the 1st Covenant, how much more serious do you think He is with the 2nd Covenant? In the 1st Covenant, people rejected the words of God that all pointed to Christ. People who reject the 2nd Covenant, are rejecting Christ himself, that is they have “spurned the Son of God” they have “profaned the blood of the covenant” and they have “outraged the Spirit of grace.”

The language is severe because the judgment is severe. But why is the judgment of God so severe about this? Isn’t God a loving God? The language is severe because the stakes are so high.

I was talking with a guy this week who had an acquaintance in the Naval Academy in Annapolis. After your second year, you are given a chance to get out without penalty. But if you chose to stay, then there is a code of conduct that you must follow and of course, the Navy owns you for a number of years following graduation. If you break that code of conduct, you are not only dismissed from the Academy, but now you are billed for the cost of your education, which is staggering. The guy, he knew, smoked a joint, once. No one told on him, but his conscience plagued him. He had violated the code. So, he confessed and true to their word, the Academy dismissed him and hit him with a bill for over \$100,000. The consequences are severe because the stakes are so high. The Naval Academy is training officers whose character must be impeccable because we are trusting

the defense of our country and the lives of our sailors into their hands. Bribery, cheating, stealing, lying, will destroy any unit. The stakes are too high.

It sounds severe, not because it is severe, but because we have tried to create a world where God is soft and there are no consequences for our actions. And when God draws a line and says don't step over that line and we step over the line, we think, "he certainly can't be serious after all, my parents only yelled and never enforced the rules, and my church never took any command seriously because they were too afraid of offending someone or making people uncomfortable.

These three phases speak with heightening gravity of the consequences of rejecting the gospel. One who hears and understands the gospel and knowingly rejects it and its implications is an apostate. That is, he has deliberately turned away from believing in Christ and his gospel. This one is described as one who has "spurned the Son of God."

Think of the implications of that. This is one who treats Christ with utter contempt by refusing to treasure what Christ has done. Look at Christ in the garden as he faces the cup of God's just wrath for our sins. Watch him as he prays with trembling in anticipating of being credited with all of our sin and bearing all of our guilt upon himself. Hear him as he cries out to His Father, about being forsaken because he was in that very hour receiving the wrath of God upon himself so that we would never have to face the just judgment for our sins. Look at how he was despised and rejected, cursed and condemned, beaten and mocked and died alone for you. Now, to walk away from that, and to treat that as insignificant is the ultimate definition of a fool. You don't hurt God when you walk out on him, as if he needs you to complete himself. Oh no! You are the one who needs God. And here is the amazing part of it, he sent Christ to pay for your sins, so that you would not have to face his wrath, so that you could be forgiven and declared righteous and be at home with him forever and ever. Don't walk away from that. One who knows that and considers it too much to follow Christ is an apostate who profanes the blood of the covenant, by which he was sanctified.

This phrase obviously refers to the death of Christ that established the New Covenant. Just as the Old Covenant (Testament) or Law is what sanctified (or set apart) the nation of Israel as God's people, the New Covenant is what sets apart God's people now. What is profanity? Profanity is the use of words that refer to something sacred or special or serious and using them in a degraded way. To profane something is to take that which is holy and treating it as if it is common. To profane the New Covenant means to treat the gospel with disdain or irrelevance.

This is personal to God. This outrages the Spirit of grace. Doesn't grace mean that I can do whatever I want and God really won't care? Obviously not! God is serious about his mercy. And the apostate has offended and insulted the gracious Spirit of God. When you take these phrases together it is very clear that the Author of Hebrews is saying that those who reject Christ can expect something more severe than capital punishment. What could be worse than that? Hell.

3. **There is no doubt about God's judgment.** (30-31)

Toward the end of his life, Moses wrote a song for the children of Israel. People have not changed much have they? We remember songs much better than we do sermons. The song was for the 2nd generation, that is, it was for those who were going into the promised land, in contrast to the ones who had seen God's demonstration of power at Mt. Sinai, who had heard his law and yet consistently rejected him. With that generation, God finally said, "enough is enough." You will die in the wilderness. You will not enter my rest. You will not enter the land. God is serious about his mercy. Moses tells that story in a song that is recorded in Deut. 32. The song is full of warnings. One of which Jonathan Edwards preached on. Two of which are repeated here in v.30. This would have particular meaning to the Hebrews who received this letter, don't you think?

Vengeance is mine; I will repay. Do you know what that means? There are no exceptions. God is serious about his mercy. The Lord will judge his people. There are those who have claimed to be believers, whose lives are a mockery to the gospel and it is very discouraging to those who are still pulling the ropes. But, God will judge those, and in that day, he will vindicate the faithful. In that day, we will have nothing but pity for those whose unfaithfulness has been the occasion of so much hurt. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. This is not the main emphasis of Hebrews, but it is certainly part of it. God's joy is seen in your discovery of his mercy and in your faithful perseverance as a result.

Beloved, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, is a good lion, but he is not a tame one.

Now, you can understand why the command to stir up one another to love and good works is so urgent.