

Hebrews 6:7-12 "Christ's Flock Will Persevere To The End In His Strength"

Last week we dealt with a very hard passage as we looked into what the writer of Hebrews was trying to teach us as we considered HEB 6:4-6 "It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, ⁶ if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace."

It would seem that our writer has opened the door for the doctrine which states that born-again Christians can lose their salvation. But in our study we discovered that this is not what he was teaching. Rather, what was brought out was the hardness of the natural man's heart into deceiving himself into thinking that an association with the things of God is the same as a relationship with God by faith in Christ.

In our text this morning we see that our writer uses a metaphor to further explain his point. And this metaphor is a familiar one which we've seen on different occasions in both the O.T. and the N.T.

It involves an explanation of truth using terms many people in bible times would have fully understood. Our writer explains it in agricultural terms using words like "the land", "rain", "vegetation", "tilling", and so on.

He is painting a picture and making a comparison between the heart of man and the ground which produces either a good crop or weeds destined to be burned. So, let's jump in.

Hebrews 6:7-8 ⁷ For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; ⁸ but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

One of the things that our writer is doing is putting into perspective the difference between the Old covenant with its rules and regulations and the New Covenant in Christ. And by way of reminder he is encouraging these primarily Hebrew Christians that

to turn back to the old ways is not only unproductive, but fatal from a spiritual stand-point.

He also uses imagery which would drive this point home to a Jew who was versed in Judaism. And so when we come to verses 7 & 8 we need to get a feel for what these Jews would have understood our writer to be talking about. He begins with the ground. There are two applications here, and yet they speak of the same problem.

The first application has to do with how God has viewed the nation of Israel. In the O.T. Israel is viewed as God's vineyard.

ISA 5:7 "The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress."

JER 2:21 "I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?"

And so when our writer speaks of the land drinking the rain he intimates that the vine in that ground is being watered by God Himself. This is what our Lord did for Israel all throughout its time as a nation. But the rain which fell upon Israel is meant to describe another spiritual aspect of God's love and care.

The rain describes the word of God being given to Israel for its growth. We read in DEU 32:1-2 "Listen, O heavens, and I will speak; hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. 2 Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew, like showers on new grass, like abundant rain on tender plants."

ISA 55:10-11 "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, 11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

In His great care for Israel our heavenly Father tended to His garden where a choice vine was planted. He watered it with His word and tenderly pruned the vine. And as the vine received the nourishment it grew and became healthy and produced fruit. This is what our writer is showing us in verse 7. And as the vine grows it is blessed by God.

But if the field where the rains come and the sun shines does not produce a crop that is useful then there's quite possibly something wrong with the soil. This was Israel's problem. The soil of their hearts had become rocky and what at first appeared to be fertile was shown to be hard.

You see a Jew knew his own history and how God had brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey and how God cared for them as He brought forth the rains for their physical needs.

DEU 11:11-17 "But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. 12 It is a land the LORD your God cares for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end. 13 So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today - to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul - 14 then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil. 15 I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied. 16 Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. 17 Then the LORD'S anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you."

God gives the blessing. He brings the rains. This he did for Israel, not just in the physical realm, but most importantly in the spiritual realm. Like the rain His word came to encourage and direct His people on the path of life. But when God sent the prophets to water with the word Israel killed them and drove them away.

The ground was not willing to drink in the rain. This is where the second application comes in when our writer uses this metaphor of the land and the rain and the crops. And this is where this portion is not limited to Israel though the readers of this letter certainly understood the application for the Jew.

But the application wasn't limited to them. And though God's word has gone out into the world and watered the world with the living waters, the world has not drunk from the well. And the reason is because the soil, like Israel as a nation, was hard and rocky and gave no place for the seed to take root. The soil of course speaks of all men's hearts.

This is what Jesus meant when giving the parable of the soil.

MAT 13:3-9, 18-23 "Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop - a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. 9 He who has ears, let him hear." 18 "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 19 When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. 20 The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21 But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. 22 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. 23 But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

Jesus was speaking of the heart of man. As we saw last week man knows that he has a creator. God placed that understanding in him. And the natural man may even understand that he is accountable to God because his conscience bears witness to this. And so the natural man may seek God for help and may even associate himself with the things of God. But the natural man can only seek and grasp God on his own terms unless the Holy Spirit opens the eyes and gives life.

And so the natural man will ultimately not grow up to maturity because the soil of his heart will not allow the seed of God's word to take root. This is what our writer has been talking about when he says that those who taste the good word of God and partake of the Holy Spirit and His ministry and then reject those things will not be renewed because they've concluded that God is not the answer. They've closed the door.

But, as we also saw last week, where it may be impossible for man to renew himself, with God all things are possible. The field of the

natural man's heart will yield thorn's and thistles and it will ultimately be burned up if it continues to grow such a crop.

By the way, thorns and thistles in a spiritual sense are not necessarily indicating sin and wickedness, but a product of the curse, as our text implies, that only leads to death. This was the message God gave to Adam after his rebellion.

Genesis 3:17-19 ¹⁷ Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life. ¹⁸ "Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return."

Thorns and thistles are the best fruit the natural man can conjure. And so the best of man's efforts will be burned. They cannot save. True, they may have a form of godliness, but as they deny the true God who gives true godliness it is worthless and in vain.

These thorns and thistles, in many cases, look very similar to the wheat which is the good crop. And so even in the church there will be both growing side by side and it may be difficult for you and I to tell the difference. But God knows. He simply tells us to water and to care for the field and He will prove the true fruit of the heart.

MAT 13:24-30 "Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. ²⁷ "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' ²⁸ "'An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' ²⁹ "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'" ²⁹ "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the

harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."

You and I can't make wheat from weeds, but God can. If you don't believe that look at your life prior to coming to Christ. The message that our writer wants us to take home is that this is a warning to the church not to think that we can act like weeds and produce a good thing for God. But it does not mean that wheat will be transformed back into weeds.

And our writer is not intimating that his readers are weeds either. He just wants them to consider what kind of fruit weeds produce and what kind of fruit God's field produces. And with that understanding we will desire to distance ourselves from the fruit of this world and produce His fruit in His power that we can take with us in the next world with Christ.

And we see this in HEB 6:9-12 "Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case -things that accompany salvation. 10 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. 11 We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. 12 We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised."

Verses 4-8 were probably very hard to digest for the readers of this letter. And our writer understood this and knew many of them might become discouraged because their fruit may not be where it should be. But, he wants them to understand that there's a difference between a fruit tree which is bearing little fruit and a thorn bush which can produce no fruit.

And so he encourages them in a way which says, 'I'm not accusing you of being unbelievers.' I'm just putting your life in Christ into perspective. You've got ears to hear, so listen.'

Notice what he calls them in verse 9. He calls them "Dear friends" in the NIV. But in the Greek text the word for dear is *agapetos* and it means "loved of God". They are beloved of the Lord. What an encouragement to know that God Himself loves them and only has their best interest at heart.

Our writer says, beloved we are convinced of better things concerning you. Here he is referencing what he has just said in verses 4-8. And so he's saying that we know what the natural man may do with the things of God and how they will perish if they reject God, but we know that this is not your condition. You have been truly born from above.

We know this because of the things that accompany your salvation. What sorts of things accompany our salvation? A.W. Pink puts it this way. "The word accompany signifies conjoined with, or inseparable from that which has a sure connection with salvation. The principal things that accompany salvation are sorrow for and hatred of sin, humility, the peace of God comforting the conscience, godly fear or the principle of obedience, a diligent perseverance in using the appointed means of grace and pressing forward in the race set before us

..... the spirit of prayer, and a joyous expectation of being conformed to the image of Christ and spending eternity with Him. True Gospel faith and sincere obedience (in Christ) are far better things than the most dazzling gifts ever bestowed on unregenerate professors".

I know, sometimes we get weary and don't feel we're producing any fruit in our lives. But we should always realize that true fruit of the Spirit isn't derived from us, it comes from God. But it manifests itself as we seek Him and follow Him.

God knows where we are. But He never forgets what it is that brought us into a relationship with Himself. And that's what the writer of Hebrews brings out when he says in HEB 6:10 "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them."

He's not going to forget your work. And the principle work being referred to here is the work of faith which embraced Jesus Christ for salvation. When faith is engaged other works come into play because they are works done for God, not the least of which is helping His people.

What I like about this verse is it shows that when we do the least of His we do it unto Him. That's what is meant here in our text when it says, "the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them."

When our love is God motivated by faith, it not only pleases the Lord, it accomplishes His will to His glory. But what we find in the Body of Christ is that when some people understand this truth of faith and put it into action, others will be encouraged to follow the same example of love as they seek the Lord and His grace and strength.

And as our writer continues he brings this out.

HEB 6:11 "We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure."

Diligence is one of those areas we all have trouble in. We move forward sometimes with great strides, but it seems that when the road becomes hard our diligence dwindles.

The excitement seems to drain and the reality sets in that this walk with Christ was never meant to be based on how excited we can get about serving as much as it is an understanding that we are to persevere to the end no matter what the road may bring us, because that is what pleases Jesus. And that should get us excited.

Christ's redemptive work for us was accomplished despite the fact that man's sin did not lend itself to Jesus becoming excited. He grieved over Israel and its lost condition. In fact it was in the severest trial that Jesus did His greatest work for us. His joy was not in the cross itself but in what it would accomplish for us to the Father's glory. We were the joy set before Him and He loved us by enduring the cross and our penalty for sin.

He persevered to the end because it pleased His Father. We can persevere to the end because it pleases the Father to enable us to persevere for Him. But it takes diligence. A diligence which the Spirit of God enables us to pursue. It takes looking beyond ourselves to the prize set before us. It takes an understanding that God is at the finish line welcoming us home.

But it's in the diligence and the perseverance we gain our strength. This too our writer brings out in this verse. The NAS reads "show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end...."

It's in the persevering that we understand that it's God who is at work in us to will and to act according to His good pleasure. (PHI 2:13) And when we see Him working and we acknowledge His love and grace and power is in us, we know that only God could do these things as we submit to Him. This should give us great

assurance that He is in fact our Father who is conforming us into His Son's image.

Our full assurance of hope rests in Him and His work in us. This is the purpose our writer wants to accomplish. To encourage us to walk after Christ, knowing that the road lies ahead and though it may seem long at times it's a road we don't travel alone. God has promised that He will always be with us and He really means it. He will be faithful to His promises.

This is what we read in HEB 10:22-23 "let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful."

It's during those times, in which we don't feel like going on, that God wants us to draw near to Him in full assurance of faith. Faith in Him. And as we do He will make sure we will persevere to the end.

2TH 3:3-5 "But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. 4 We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. 5 May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance."

Christ is persevering for you. He is persevering in your life and in mine to make sure we make it to the very end. He tell us that He knows His sheep and He will lose none that the Father has given Him.

Again Paul says in 2TI 1:11-12 "And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. 12 That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day."

We may say, 'Oh, God, I don't know if I can persevere to the end.' God knows we can't persevere to the end on our own, He doesn't expect us to. That's why He gave us His Spirit.

But we don't want to use the excuse that since life is too hard that we should give up. We read in HEB 6:12 "We do not want you to become lazy (NAS sluggish), but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised."

It's very easy to think that since we don't seem to be going anywhere that we can just get off the road and spend the rest of this life under a tree waiting for the bus to come to pick us up.

No, we don't want to fall into that trap. We must be diligent, which is nothing more complicated than seeking God and not giving up. We may be down, but we know we must get up and that we will by God's grace and strength.

"We are to be imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." There's no way around it. If we are to persevere we must understand that faith and patience must be an integral part of our understanding of how God is working in our lives.

You and I have inherited the promise of eternal life which is no small thing. And what our writer wants us to understand is that if this life is important to you then your desire will be to please your Father as you persevere, knowing that Christ is persevering for you and enabling you to follow Him.

COL 2:6-7,9-10 "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. 9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority."

The Lord knows our weaknesses, but He wants us to gain His strength so that we can effectively be His witnesses in this world to the very end.

HEB 12:1-2 "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Fix your eyes on Christ and you'll never lose sight of the path. If we're following our Great Shepherd we can be assured that He will never lead us astray and He will take us to green pastures with living water. In His strength we will persevere to the end. He will never let go of us. He loves us too much.