

The Scariest Passage in the Bible

Hebrews 6:4-8

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, August 28, 2022

Go ahead and open your Bibles with me to the book of Hebrews. I will be out of town next week preaching at Squamish Baptist Church and filling in for the pastor there. Next week will be an opportunity for you to hear from one of our elders. I've said this before, but we do have three elders here at Grace fellowship, there is Kevin Lazer, Quintin Smith and myself. And we're all involved in the pulpit ministry to some degree. I am a full time elder. So this is what I do for the majority of the time, but one of the qualifications for any kind of elder, full time or lay elder, is to be able to teach and handle the Word accurately. And but all these men can do that they really excel at that. And in order for you to see this, we want to put them in front of you whenever we can. And that's what next week will be about. And so you'll be tremendously blessed. I missed you guys. But you'll be in good hands. And I look forward to hearing about it when I get back. But with that said, I don't want to waste any time today because we have a lot to cover in our message and I want to just go ahead and read Hebrews chapter five, we're going to read all the way into the middle of chapter six. But if you look in Hebrews five with me, the word of God says this,

For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men and things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was.

So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, "You are My Son, today I have begotten you"; just as He says also in another passage, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying, and tears to the One able to save him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest, according to the order of Melchizedek.

Concerning him, we have much to say, and it is hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permits. For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

We'll stop the reading there. But the reason I wanted to read all that to you is because you can tell it's pretty confusing when you get to the bottom part of the passage, but the context helps to see what he's talking about here. Because in the beginning of chapter five, it tells us that Christ is our high priest, or the one who took the place of all the Old Testament sacrifices for us. Then in chapter five, verse 11, if you follow along here, after saying that, he addresses a note of pastoral concern which will set the tone for the rest of the passage.

He says, "Concerning him [concerning Christ], we have much to say. And it's hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing." In other words, "I want to tell you more about this, but I can't. And I want to go into more detail about Christ and His high priesthood and what He has done for you on the cross. But I'm worried because I don't think you can take it because you are so immature," is what he's saying. You can almost feel the discouragement coming off the page as he says this. In fact, later on in the next verse, as we saw last week, he'll call them childish over this, then he'll call them infants who need someone to go over the elementary principles, or ABCs, which is what the word means in Greek, because it refers to someone who sits down with you and goes "a, b, c, d." This leads him to write the warning here in chapter six, verses four through six, which are some of the scariest passive verses in scripture and some of the strongest warnings in the Bible. Because it says, "For in the case of those who have been enlightened, [like you guys have is what he's saying,] and tasted of the heavenly gift and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance." Now, what does that mean? I'm sure as you read that, you have questions. What's he talking about here? What does that have to do with being childish? One of the concepts here was written to warn you that if you keep being lazy in the Christian life, and if you keep acting like a child, and you keep showing no signs of progress, do you know what could happen? You could end up leaving the faith altogether, like some of these Jews did. That's the way it comes together in the passage. If you notice, there is a progression of thought here.

And that said, if you start off being dull in chapter five, verse 11, and you don't repent, and then you move on to being childish in verse 12, and you don't repent, and then you act like an infant in verse 13, and don't repent, then you walk off the foundation in chapter six, and don't repent. Then you could come to the place where it's impossible to bring you back, because you walk away from the Saviour altogether. He doesn't walk away from you initially, but you walk away from Him. And we'll get into all that in a moment.

But even saying that raises more questions. I mean, even explaining what it's talking about doesn't solve all the issues that you have with a text like this, like, what about eternal security? I have always heard it said "Once saved, always saved," but what about a text like this? Once you have eternal life, you can't lose it, because it's eternal, so how do you reconcile that with this? Or what does it mean to fall away? How did they do that? Did they fall away into error? And if so, what error was it? What heresy do they believe? Or do they fall away into sin? Okay, well, what sin? Was it lust? Pride? Anger? Did they fall away into despair? I mean, what does that mean? And what about all these things about being enlightened and tasting of the heavenly gift? And partaking of the spirit? Where's he going with all that? I mean, needless to say, the questions are endless with a passage like this one. It really stretches your mind trying to figure this out. And without going into the details, I need to tell you that there's really three main views as to what this is referring to. And I want to talk about them on the front end, because I think it clarifies what he's saying. Because this stuff is so controversial, you really can't just jump into it, you've got to chew on it some.

One view is that this refers to people who were saved and they lost it. There are some commentators who hold that these people were true believers, but they ruined it due to sin. And the trouble with that view, is that verse six

says, for those who have fallen away, it's impossible to renew them. In other words, this is not a normal backsliding here that he's talking about. Because once these people are lost, they're permanently lost. And once they leave the faith, they don't come back again. So this is something different than that. The other problem with that view is that the Bible makes it clear that you can't lose your salvation once you believe. You are safe in the arms of Christ for all eternity. John six, verse 39, says, "This is the will of Him who sent Me that of all He has given me I will lose nothing." And that word, nothing is a beautiful word meaning that Jesus won't lose any of those who are His, which is why some scholars come up with another view.

Another view is that this passage refers to people who are genuine Christians and they are being confronted with a hypothetical warning here. And this is a little more complicated. But it comes from the King James translation of verse six, which says, "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened, and tasted of the heavenly gift, if they shall fall away..." In other words, they won't fall away, because a believer can do that. And it's not going to happen, because Christ won't let it occur. But if they could, this is what it would look like it would be impossible to renew them again. Now, the trouble with that position is that, as you can see, it's a little confusing. Because what's the point of threatening someone with a hypothetical warning? If they can't do it, why bring it up? And another issue with this one is that the word "if" is not found in most of your English Bibles, a lot of you could look at your Bible right now and search for the word written there. Most translations say, "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and tasted of the gift, and then have fallen away..." That's not hypothetical. It's a real situation described.

This takes us to a third view, and this is the one that I think is the correct one. And that is that these people were not genuine Christians at all. They just went to church. They weren't saved, or born again, or converted or regenerated. They didn't have new life in Christ. They just acted like it for a season until they fell away. And if that doesn't seem very likely to you, because it's kind of hard to think of anybody doing this, let me just give you one name to consider: Judas. He's a perfect example of this. You can read through the passage and see him in every corner of it. Because if anyone was enlightened, at one time, it was Judas. And if anyone tasted of the heavenly gift, it was him. And if anyone partook of the Spirit in an outward sense, a fleshly sense and a carnal sense, he was blessed with that. And yet Judas still turned his back on the Lord. In fact, Judas was so good at deceiving the other disciples that at the Last Supper when Jesus told the 12 that one of you will betray me, they didn't know who it was. They went around the room saying, "Is it I?" before they pointed a finger at him. And I would argue that the people in this passage are doing the same thing. They are the kind of folks who grew up in a church, but they never believed in Christ. They just go through the motions because they prayed a prayer, were sprinkled as a baby, did the catechism class, sang in the choir, served on the worship team, went on the mission trips, went to youth camps, VBS, Sunday school. But when it all came down to it, they never grew, they never changed. They never made any progress, like this passage is talking about. And as a result, they were lost.

The principle here, the reason the author's bringing it up in the book of Hebrews, is to tell you, you don't want to do that. You need to repent quickly, if you see your life going down that path. Which is a frightening thing to think about, right? And this really unsettles us. And I have to be honest, there's no way you are going to get to the bottom of the verse like this and solve all the issues. You can't deal with all the doctrinal problems that come up in a text of this magnitude. But let me just say on the front end, that you can get the main message behind it. And the main message is this: you need to be growing as a Christian. It should be of the utmost priority to you, because growth is a sign of life. It's what separates the real thing from the fake. Because it's something a lost person can't do. A lost person can go to church, can pray a prayer, can sing in the choir, but you know what they can't do?

They can't make progress in the things of God on the inside. They don't have the Spirit in them. But you can. As believers in Christ, that's something that you can do. And the message of the passage is, you have to take that seriously. It's not enough that you love Jesus today. You need to love him today, tomorrow and the next day. And it's not enough that you zealously follow Him. As a young person in the church, you need to follow Christ when not in your parents' house, in your 20s, 30s, 40s, and 50s to demonstrate this is not about your parents' faith. You love Christ on your own volition.

It all goes back to the issue of sincerity. I find it so interesting that the book of Hebrews talks about this so much. Seems like every couple of weeks we keep coming back to this topic. But the reason it does this is because this is what religious people like the Jews would struggle with. It's so easy to come to church and make the sacrifice, to go to the temple like they used to do and be insincere. Because you pray prayers you don't mean and you sing songs you don't mean, and you read scriptures you don't mean to the point that one day your soul just gets fed up with it and you leave. This passage is saying in the strongest way possible that it doesn't have to be that way. For us, there's a solution. And that is that as soon as you start faking it with the Lord, you need to cut it out. Turn away from it, make it right with God this morning.

I quoted Jonathan Edwards to you last week. He was asked to speak to a group of children from his church in the 1700s, I would love to sit in on a Jonathan Edwards sermon to children. And the subject of his message was this: you need to love God when you are young. Why? Because if you don't, you will learn how to come to church and not do it. If you don't love Him when you are a kid coming in here, you will begin to show up here and be a hypocrite and then die and go to hell. And he's right. You have two choices. When you come into a place like this. You can either love God, or be lost. There's no middle ground. And the question in this passage is, which one will it be for us? Which path will you choose? The narrow way or the broad way? Because if you choose the narrow way, you have to be earnest. These people that he's describing here were not earnest. They were slothful in the things of God and never meant anything to them. And we have to be careful not to copy their example.

Now, having said that, there are a lot of things you have to work through. In order to flesh all this out. I found about a dozen or so hermeneutical issues to wrestle with this week. And I really wore my Greek dictionary out. We don't have the time to get into all that. But let me just condense it for you by looking at a few things. Let's talk about three questions we can answer in this passage this morning. So if you're taking notes today, this is our outline and Hebrews six, starting in verse four, we're going to look at three questions to answer in this passage.

And the first one is, who is the audience here? We've already talked about this some but we're going to say more, because the first question you have to answer to get your mind around this is who is the audience? In other words, who is he addressing? I just said these are these people are not Christians. But where do you see that in the text? Let me take you there and show it to you. And if you look in chapter six, verse one, going back up again, to get the full setting of this. He says,

Therefore, leaving the elementary teachings about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again, a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits, for in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance.

Now, as you read that, if you notice, verse four starts off with the word “for,” which takes you back to the previous passage where it says in verse one, “Therefore leaving the elementary teachings about the Christ, let us press on to maturity,” that’s the call to action in the passage, pressing on to maturity, growing, making progress. And then in verse three, he says, “This we will do if God permits.” In other words, he thought the audience could do this. The author’s saying this because he really believed they were going to grow. But in order to give them a warning, verse four mentions a group of people who were not doing this, and he introduces them with the phrase “for in the case of those.” And to show you how he lays out the passage, he goes on to give you five participles to describe them. That’s how this all this thing is all put together. He gives them five brief descriptions in verses four through six as to what these people were like.

And before we get into them, I want to point out, as John MacArthur says, that none of these terms from verse four, all the way down to verse six, are ever used to describe salvation in the New Testament. That’s important. All these things are things a lost person can do, because a believer can be enlightened and a lost person can be in love. I know it’s different. But it can happen on some level. I’ll get into that in a moment, but I also need to mention that, to the best of my knowledge, none of these terms are ever put together like this in such a comprehensive fashion to describe the state of an unbeliever either, which is where some of the confusion comes into play. But I don’t know of any other time in the Bible, where an unconverted man is said to do all these things back to back like this. Because the point is that these people had had really gone deep into the things of God. These last people that were very committed before they fell away. They didn’t just come to church, they were the kind that were here all the time.

If you look in your Bibles, the first part is simple, it says they had once been enlightened, which means that at one time they had the light turned on above them and they had the veil pulled away from their eyes, not in a saving sense, but in an intellectual sense. Not in a conversion type experience, but in a heady type one where they heard the gospel and said, “Hmm, that makes sense.” And they heard about Jesus, and they said, “Okay, I get that I can see He’s the Son of God.” But it only lasted for a moment, because they never truly believed because it says, “For in the case of those who have once been enlightened,” and that doesn’t mean enlightened permanently, it means enlightened for a brief second in time. The Puritans used to call this the experience of being awakened, or a sinner is awakened to his need for salvation. But he never gets saved because they understood certain things about the Lord. But Christianity was just an academic thing for them. These are the kinds of people that often love to discuss theology and talk about doctrine until the wee hours of the night, and yet go home and yell at their wives because they like one part of faith, but not the other. They like the academic stuff, but not the moral stuff. They don’t want it to interfere with them. These are the kinds of people who will argue with you endlessly about the differences between Calvinism and Arminianism, or Premillennialism, post millennialism, or some other ism, and then go to work and cuss all day. They’ll show up on a Monday morning and start swearing, as if the Bible approved that. James chapter one calls them hearers of the word but not doers of it. Second Timothy three says they are always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. It’s a frightening image here.

In the next description, it doesn’t get any better, because it says they have tasted of the heavenly gift. And that one means that the gospel had a certain taste to them, or a flavour. Kind of like you experienced when you go to a restaurant, and you try something on the menu before moving on to something else. That’s what these people did with Christ. They didn’t swallow Him, they just tried Him out like a piece of candy. The term *heavenly gift* can refer to a lot of things in the Bible, like the Holy Spirit, or Christ or salvation, it can talk about that. But

interestingly enough, this word is often used in relation to the gifts of the Spirit that were poured out on the church in the first century. And I think that's probably what it was talking about, gifts like tongues and healings and prophecy, because these people saw that and said, "Wow." And they watched the apostles doing those things and said, "I want that; it looks good to me." There was even a man named Simon, in Acts chapter eight, who was a pagan sorcerer who saw those gifts and tried to buy it, remember that guy? That's what he's talking about here. Peter said, may your money perish with you. Because that's not saving faith.

This all leads you to the next principle, which says they have been made partakers of the spirit, or associates of him in some translations, which can be taken two ways. It can refer to someone who is associated with the spirit closely or from a distance. And these people were associated from a distance. If you notice, it doesn't say they were born of the Spirit, or they were sealed with the Spirit, or they were baptized with the Spirit or filled with the Spirit or guided by the Spirit or comforted by the Spirit. That's all stuff that happens to a Christian. These people were just partakers. They were the kind of people that come to church for the social stuff. And they come to the body of Christ because their friends and family are there and they want to go to the picnics, because they like what the Spirit is doing in someone else's life, but not their life. And they like to see how God is working out there but not in here.

The next description is just as serious as that one. It says that not only have they done all those things, but they have tasted the good word of God. That means they sat in church and listen to preaching. They were in the pew and they heard the Bible opened up and taught and proclaimed, and they enjoyed that very much.

The next one says they have tasted the powers of the age to come, which is just a repetition of what we said about the miracles in the book of Acts. The prophecies, and tongues and knowledge were all a hint of the powers of the age to come.

Now, I went through this quickly, because I didn't want to drown you in it. But let me just stop here and ask you this: Do you see the problem here? As you read over that list, can you tell what the issue is? The issue is that these people were not pagans. They were religious, weren't they? And the problem is that they weren't out there in the street somewhere doing drugs, they were right here in the church with us. Because all these terms were written in the strongest way possible, to say that they look like Christians and talk like Christians and walk like Christians, and yet they fell away. To remind you that if it happened to them, it could happen to anyone. If you are faking it this morning, again, this is not about those who are pursuing the things of God for real, but those who are playing games, this could happen to you.

Just take the phrase "they had once been enlightened." How many of you know someone who has been enlightened this way, and they are now lost? I mean, how many of you know someone who went to Bible College, Bible school, Bible seminary, Bible whatever and now they are not walking with the Lord anymore. I'm not even ask you to raise your hand because I think every hand in the room could come up in a town like Chilliwack.

Or take the phrase "partakers of the spirit." How many of you know someone who grew up in church and did the same thing. They were here, they were part of a body of Christ like ours, and yet they wandered away, because it was just social. How many of you know someone who tasted the good word and they love preaching, and then they just throw it away over some sin? And the point here is that you don't want to come to the place where it happens to you. Because listen, friends, let me say like this, you have not experienced half the things these people

did. They saw God do things on a level that few of us can fathom. I mean, they saw the apostles speak in tongues. They saw them heal people, they saw them raise the dead. Some of them, some of them probably met men like Peter and Paul, others of them since they were Jewish, they might have been sitting in the temple when they debated with the Pharisees. And yet, they still made this mistake. Because the lesson here is that, yes, you're saved by the power of God. And yes, you can't lose it. And yes, your soul is eternally secure, if you're a Christian, but you can deceive yourself. And that's the warning. You can fool yourself into thinking you are something that you are not. And that's the big idea.

In fact, I could give you the name of another person who has done this in recent history, who apostatized and left the faith after professing it for a long time. And that's the name Joshua Harris. Just to show you how relevant this is, I don't know if everyone knows who that is. But Joshua Harris was the former pastor of Covenant Life Church in Gaithersburg, Maryland. And one of the leaders in the Sovereign Grace Movement, not just a member, but a leader who recently came out as an unbeliever. After several years at his church, he resigned his position as senior pastor in 2015, to move to Vancouver, up the road to Regent College where he literally lost his faith. I don't know what happened. He didn't go into that in his interviews. But he did give out the following statement. He said, "By all the measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not one. Many people tell me there is a different way to practice faith. And I'm open to this, but I'm not there right now." And since making that statement, he's divorced his wife, marched in the gay pride parades in Vancouver, and renounced all of his books. Which really broke my heart because a lot of my friends and I read his books 20 years ago. I know people who said that they helped bring them closer to God. And now he's saying it was all for nothing. Because that kind of thing happens in the church, not just in the first century, but in the 21st century. It didn't just happen back then. It's happening now. Which makes you wonder, how could anybody do such a thing? The answer is, I don't know. But I know the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, it craves sin. It longs for evil and loves playing tricks on you, so you have to guard against this constantly.

I was doing research on this and I came across an interesting statement from John Piper. He's a pastor as well from Minneapolis. And he, in one of his sermons, he explained it like this. He said, "What do these verses mean for us? I'll be very personal. If in the coming years, I commit apostasy and fall away from Christ, it will not be because I have not tasted the Word of God, and the Spirit of God and the miracles of God. I have drunk of His Word, the spirit has touched me. I have seen His miracles, and I've known what they feel like firsthand. But if over the next 10 or 20 years, I began to cool off spiritually and lose interest in spiritual things, and become more fascinated with making money and writing books. And I buy the lie that a new wife would be better than the one I have. If that happens, then no, the truth is this. John Piper was mightily deceived in the first 50 years of his life. And if this possibility does not make me serious in the pursuit of Christ, what will?" He's right. The Bible says it's the goal of every Christian to make your calling and election sure. It's not your goal to earn your calling and election, you can't do that. It's not your goal to deserve it. That's not going to happen. But it is your goal to make it sure by growing. And that's the reminder here.

And this brings us to another question I want to answer in this passage. And that is, what happened to these people? I'm going to give you some hope in a minute. So if this feels really heavy, hang in there. We've got good news to come. But I do want to really get our minds around what this is saying. The first question is, who's the audience this is describing? And we've established that these are unbelievers who were influenced by the gospel, but it wasn't sincere. The second question to answer is, Well, if that's the case, what happened to these guys? Why did they act like this? Okay, if they've done these amazing things, and they've been enlightened, and tasted of the

gift, and then it all went away, what led them to that point? If you read in verse four, again, it says, "For in the case of those who have been enlightened and tasted of the gift, and been made partakers, and have tasted the good word of God and powers of the age to come and fallen away, it's impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame." Now, our focus is on the back half of that statement. But I didn't tell you this before, when you look at this text, verse four to verse six constitute one long sentence in the Bible, and give you one long thought in the mind of the author that builds and builds and builds on itself. So that by the time you get to the end of the passage, you would expect him to say that after they experience all these things, these people are saved. But he doesn't. He says the opposite, because verse six says they fall away. The way that's written, the phrase *fall away* is actually the sixth participle in the list, because it gives the final conclusion of all these things. They were enlightened, and then they fell away, they tasted the gift, and then they fell away, they participated in the Spirit. And the same thing happened. And this is the Greek word, *parapipto*, which means to fall by the roadside. Because the idea is that they were walking on the right road, then they veered off of it. They were going down the right path in a superficial sense. And they took a detour instead, kind of like the character named Ignorance in Pilgrims Progress, who sneaks onto the narrow road by some other way, until he eventually gives up because he didn't belong there. Because the idea is that you don't have to try real hard to fall, you just fall. And you don't have to do a lot of things to drift, you just drift, make one little compromise after another.

And if that's not enough, he goes on to say, once they've done that it was impossible to renew them again to repentance. And to be honest, that's the part of the passage that concerns us the most, at least it concerns me the most because when you read it, it sounds like it is saying that they wanted to come back to God again, but they couldn't. And after they did this, they wanted to be saved, but God wouldn't let them, but that's not what this is actually saying. At least I don't think that's what it is saying. I think it's saying they couldn't come back to God because they didn't want to anymore. They got to the point where they were lost and they stayed lost because they had no desire for the things of God. Their heart became too hardened. Just to give you some perspective on this, in John six, verse 37, Jesus says, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me, I will never cast out." And what that means is that Jesus will never turn away a person who comes to Him in faith, He will never reject them if they come to Him with a sincere heart wanting to be forgiven, but He will turn these people away because they are not doing it. And I kind of have to leave it at that if I go further, I'll be talking about things that are too much for me to know. But this passage makes it clear the reason these people were in this predicament is because they experienced the very best God had to offer. And it meant nothing to them. And they saw His miracles and signs and wonders in a way we can only dream of, and it didn't matter because they just brushed it off.

So the idea here is, what else can God do for them now? Nothing. They have exhausted every means of grace that were available. And the author says it wasn't God's fault. It happened. He was there. I mean, God gave them from verse four to verse five, opportunity after opportunity, after opportunity, after opportunity. And as a result, verse six says their behavior caused them to crucify to themselves the Son of God again, and this is where you see the responsibility really shining out here. If you thought the previous passage was intense, this is even more so. Because it means when someone leaves a church like that, this is what they're doing, they are taking the side of Jesus' enemies. And they are acting like the ones who betrayed Him and nailed Him to the cross and cried out, "Crucify Him!"

To pursue this even more, what the end of verse six is saying is that for the people who act like this, they believe Jesus really did deserve to be crucified. They made a trial of Him in their heart, and said, he's wrong. And they made a case against Him in their soul, where they became judge, jury, and executioner. And they said, He is no Messiah. He's not the real thing. And so He got what was coming to Him at Calvary. When this next phrase says, "they put Him to open shame," that tells you that not only are they doing this, but they're proud of it. In the case of someone like Joshua Harris, he could have turned away from the faith and not said anything to anybody. But he went online, he went on the media told the whole world because anytime someone does this, they'll inevitably talk to someone, and the conversation will go like this. I tried that Jesus thing already. And it didn't help me. And I believed on Him once and I grew up in church, but I'll tell you what churches are, they're just full of hypocrites. They're just a bunch of fakes. Their religion didn't work for me, so it won't work for you. But the point is that there is no way to help a person who does that and never repents. Because they get to a point where they are too far gone because of their sin. The reason it happens is because they saw the things God was doing, and they rejected it, because God gave them the light. God gave them a taste. God gave them a partaking, God held out his hand. They said, "No, I don't want it. It's not good enough for me." So a time finally came when the door was closed, which is important to remember, because we often see people reject the faith today. They say, I really would believe in Jesus if I could, I really would trust in Him. But there's not enough evidence. You guys have heard that before. There's just not enough proof. Can I tell you something friends? That's a lie. There's more than enough proof to believe Jesus is the Son of God. They just don't want to hear it. People don't leave Christ over some theological problem. They leave Him because they would rather sin instead. And all those examples I brought up to you of people turning the back on Christ, I can promise you that if you peel back the curtain on their lives, you would see some dark thing in there, because there is something they are holding on to that they love more than Him. It's not because they discovered that there is something wrong with Jesus; that has nothing to do with it. They just wanted to give into the flesh.

I can think of another example of a pastor in Tennessee who renounced the faith a couple of years ago and everybody wondered why they couldn't figure it out until it came out later. He was having an affair with someone in the church. And that's not random. There's a connection there. He abandoned Christ because Christ got in the way. So in his mind, the cross had to go. This is a reason why it's important to examine ourselves in these things. Because, listen, friends, we're all prone to do something like this from time to time, we all have the heart of a sinner in us. And if you don't take the time to find it, it can creep up on you and take over. It can be easy to read a passage like this and say, "There is no way, Pastor Jeremy, I would never take it this far. Because these people are crucifying Jesus again, and that's too much for me, I would never go that distance with my sin." But if you are saying that it shows, you don't understand your heart." I bet if you if you back the truck up 2000 years and talk to these Jews who did all this, they would say the same thing. Because all it took was one little lust here or there. And off they went. All it took was one little prideful thought that was not repented of and, and it started to fester and fester and fester. And this needs to be a reminder to us to be cautious in these things.

The story is told of a young girl who got saved, and she wanted to join her church. And so the pastor set up a time to interview with her. And he asked her, "Were you a sinner before you got saved?" She said, "Yeah, I mean, of course." He said, "Are you a sinner now?" She said, "Yeah, still a sinner." He said, "Okay, well, what changed?" She said, "Well, what changed is that when I sin, now I hate it. And when I fail God today, I asked Him for the grace to stop because He is the Lord of my life." And friends, that's the right answer. You have to make sure Jesus is Lord of your life over all your sin, and every form of wickedness in your heart.

And that brings us to one more question to talk about today. And this is the good news in the past is but that is, what are some lessons to take away from this? Just to review these other ones, we've talked about who the audience is, we've talked about what happened to them, the answer is that they fell. They were unbelievers who pretended. And then they fell not by accident, but on purpose. They saw something they wanted more than Christ, and off they went, which is bad news. But let's talk about some lessons we can learn here from all this. Let's talk about some good things. I've called this sermon, The Scariest Passage in the Bible, but you don't have to be frightened if you are a Christian. And let me talk about that.

Here are some lessons we can learn from this. I want to read the end of the passage first and explain it to you and then we'll get into those lessons. So if you look in verse seven, here is how the author rounds it off, he says, "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; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned." When you come to the end of the passage here, that can sound as mysterious as some of these other things. But the author says all this to give you an illustration from the world of farming, to tell you that both good soil and bad soil receive the same amount of rain, the difference is what they do with it. Both a productive field and an unproductive field can get the same amount of moisture. But the difference is that one goes one way with it and the other one goes another the same way with people. Two different people can sit in the same pew, hear the same sermon, read the same Bible and have very different responses. And the question he is bringing home to our hearts here at the end is which one are you going to be? The good field or the bad field?

Verse seven describes the good soil. It says these people drink in the rain. That means they don't just sample it and taste it and say, "That's nice, let me try something else." They take it to heart. They swallow it. They let the word of God go deep into their soul. And as they do that, verse seven says they bring forth vegetation. In other words, you can see signs of life on them. Now sometimes those signs are small, but they are there. And sometimes you look at their life and there are areas where they are battling. But you can still see little shoots of the Holy Spirit coming off of them. They are showing things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and self control. It says this type of ground is useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled. And that means as the word of God is being tilled, or ministered to in their lives, these people use it. They don't just hear it and walk away. They put the Bible into practice. They hear a sermon about loving their neighbour. And you know what? They go home and love their neighbour. It's not rocket science. It's not mysterious here. They don't make excuses for it, they just do it. They hear one about fleeing youthful lust and they flee youthful lust. They run away from the sins, and the passions and desires that once consumed them. They hear about being humble, they become humble. And as they do so, it says they received a blessing from the Lord.

Now, there has been some discussion as to what the blessing is here, but from what I read, it seems like the blessing is the blessing of assurance. Because when you obey the Lord like this, and apply His word and produce that good fruit, it gives you confidence that you are saved. It tells you that you are the real thing, as opposed to the fake because again, a lost person can do all that. But on the flip side, verse eight describes the different soil when it starts off with the word "but" which is a form of contrast, telling you this is a different type of person. And here are some things they do. For one thing, they don't drink in the rain. The bad soil lets the rain bounce off of them. Because their heart is so hard, the word never penetrates. And as it does so, they yield thorns and thistles, which refers to a sharp, prickly plant that grew in the desert of Palestine. And the Romans often planted it in the ground around their fortresses to ward off an invading army. Because that's all you did with thorns, they were just an

irritation. Because these people didn't help anybody, they didn't serve the Lord. The verse even says they're worthless. That's a really scary word. They heard a message about loving their neighbour and they didn't even try. They heard words about other commandments, they put those off.

And if you put all this together, verse eight says this, "But if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless, and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned." And the author says that because this is the end of hypocrisy. This is where this type of person will end up if they never repent. As we said earlier, they'll end up in hell. They start off in church in verse four, they end up in hell in verse eight. They start off being enlightened and tasting and partaking in the beginning. And if they reject it, they end up being damned. One commentator said that the terms worthless, cursed and destined for burning is a language of hell, because what brings the curse of God down on a person in this text is that they have seen the rain of God's goodness, year after year after year. But it brought no fruit out of it; they are not being punished here for being ignorant. They are being punished for being negligent, because God told them what to do and they didn't do it. He gave them a command, and they rejected it. So now there is nothing left for him to do but judge them. And again, this is put here all to ask you the question of which direction do you want to go in? Because if you want to be the good soil, it looks like this.

Which leads us to some of those lessons I wanted to talk to you about. Because we've talked about some heavy things this morning. Anytime you get into a passage like this, it's so easy to lose sight of the big picture and get drowned out in all these details. So what we like to do from time to time as a church is sort of back that truck up for a moment and talk about some general principles you can take away from this. So let me give you a few ones here. If you want to put these in your notes. The first one is this, and these are all very simple. Going to church does not make you a Christian. I think you get the message after reading this passage. And what I mean is if you don't hear anything else, I say today hear this, you aren't saved by walking into this room. And you aren't saved by attending our services. And you aren't saved by showing some interest. And you aren't saved by bringing your Bible and singing the songs and praying the prayers, because these people did all of that too, and they were lost. All the people we talked about this morning did that Judas did that, Simon the magician did as well, and it didn't do them any good because you're saved by Christ alone. You're saved by trusting in Jesus. And as you do that, then you go to church, then you attend services. Then you pray prayers and they mean something but Christ comes first. He's always at the front of the line. I think we can lose sight of this because it's so easy to pour all our time into the outward things and pay attention to the way we walk, talk, act and dress, but Jesus himself said in Matthew 23, that's like cleaning off the outside of a cup and not looking at the inside. And I don't know about you, but that's a funny illustration to me. I don't care what's on the outside of the cup. If the inside is full of filth, I don't want to drink it. And it's the same way with your soul. You have to take care of your heart first before you worry about other things. And the only way you do that is by fixing your eyes on Calvary, which is what we were singing about earlier. And another practical lesson we can see here is this: it's also possible to be deceived about your salvation. And that's what I've been saying over and over again. And we've talked about that one repeatedly. But the main point in this whole text is that it is possible to be fooled about the state of your soul. These people were classic examples of this. They saw God do things in the first century that have never been repeated since. And they watched the Spirit act in ways that the world had never seen anything like it. God turned the society upside down back then. And they liked it for a moment. But that was all, and he brings it up here to make a connection to all of us in our world today. Because it was good, because God knows that type of thing is not over yet, people still do this.

And if you are wondering how to prevent that, the answer is that you examine yourself. If you're wondering what that looks like, I did some research on it. Some of you are familiar with the name John Wesley. But in the 18th century, he started an organization called the holiness club at Oxford University. And to be a part of it, he gave the members a series of questions to examine themselves and point out any known sin so they could find it. Now, I want to read them to you. And you don't have to ask yourself these questions every day. But this is the type of thing you need to do in order to do some self-examination. This is the kind of thing it looks like. John Wesley asked them questions like this: Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I'm better than I am? In other words, am I a hypocrite? And if so, what am I doing about it? Am I repenting? Can I be trusted? With my word when I say something? Does it mean something? Am I a slave to dress? Am I a slave to work? Am I a slave to the opinions of others? Am I self-conscious, self-pitying or self-justifying? Does the Bible live in me today? Did I give it time to speak to me? Did I pray? And did I like it? In other words, not only did I just rush through it in order to check it off my list, but was I sincerely seeking the face of God? He asked them when the last time was they disobeyed and repented? Or the last time they were jealous, impure, critical, irritable, touchy, distrustful or proud and let it drag on and on and on. He had them ask themselves: Do I consistently find myself thanking God that I'm not like other people, as the Pharisee who treated the tax collector that way? Is there anyone I fear, dislike, disown, criticize, hold a resentment toward or disregard? And if so again, question, What am I doing about it? Did I grumble or complain today? I mean, some of those questions I find hard to ask. But John Wesley didn't ask those questions to beat up on those guys. He did it to keep them from falling into this pitfall that's being described here in Hebrews six. And that is the problem of self-delusion. Because a true believer can take a test like that and pass it not because he is answering every question perfectly and hitting a home run every time, but because he's doing it honestly. And when he fails, he makes it right with the Lord. That's what Believers do.

Which leads to another lesson here, and that is this: you don't have to worry about losing your salvation if you're in Christ. So don't let this make you feel anxious. And I want to put that one in there because there's a balance here with how you respond to this. Because on the one hand, you need to examine yourself and ask yourself questions like this. But on the other hand, you need to understand that we are saved by faith alone in the mercy of Christ. So anytime you fail in those areas, you go running back to the cross. And anytime you fail again, you go running back to the cross. And anytime you fail again, you go running back to the cross. You don't examine yourself to see if you're good enough for God, the answer is already, no, you're not. But you do it to be right with Him.

I love the way the author rounds this off here in the passage because you can imagine, after saying all this heavy stuff, he probably read back over the list and said to himself, I was really hard on these guys. I mean, I beat up on them. So maybe I should say something a little encouraging. If you look in verse nine, that's exactly what he does. Because in Hebrews six, verse nine, he says, "But, beloved, [that's the only time he uses the word beloved, in the book of Hebrews, by the way,] we are convinced of better things concerning you, and the things that accompany salvation." That is encouraging! He says, "Look, this is the way a Christian acts, this is the way a non-Christian acts, but I think you're acting like a Christian. I think you're doing the things you're supposed to." Because he saw them bearing fruit, and he wanted them to see they were acting like the good soil, and he wanted them to know it. So they wouldn't be rejected. And I think some of us need to remember that because I've talked to people who have studied Hebrews six before. And they said they are worried this is describing them. Because they think they've gotten past the point of no return with their sin. And they are torn up about it, sad about it, and it's keeping them up at night. And when I hear that my response is always the same to them. And that is that I don't think this

is describing you. Do you know why? Because this is referring to people who are not concerned about their sin, and you are. This is describing people who don't care, and you care. This is talking about people who sin and keep sinning, they fall and keep falling with no remorse, no guilt, no contrition. But if you have that, it shows you're not in this text. And you have to keep that in perspective. Because friends, you're always going to fail somewhere in the Christian life. And you're always going to have some room for improvement. But as long as you're humble, there's hope for you. As long as it leads you to Jesus, it shows that you are saved.

And then one more practical lesson here in order to wrap this up is this. If anything, this passage should be a call to us for perseverance. This is what you learned from the lesson on farming. Because any of you who have worked on a farm before know that you have good days and bad days on a farm. You have good seasons and bad seasons. Because there's times when you take the Combine out in the fields, and you don't bring much in. And there are years when you take the rake across the ground and you don't have anything to show for it. But you don't give up, you still keep working, you still keep farming.

And that's what God is calling you to do as a Christian. Friends, let me tell you, if you haven't figured this out yet, let me just break the news to you, you're going to have good days and bad days as a Christian. And there's going to be seasons when you try and try and try to get rid of your sin. And you fail. And it can be frustrating. And it can be hard. But the one thing that separates a believer from an unbeliever is that you don't quit. You don't give up because you know God will answer in His way and in His timing and in His mercy. It all goes back to how you look at this. You need to remember that success in the Christian life is not determined by how you start the battle but how you finish it. And it's not determined by how you begin the race. It's determined by the fact that you're still running it by the grace of God. And as you run it, God will give you the strength to keep going.

Let me close this by telling you the story of the time Charles Spurgeon came home after a long day of ministry, and he was worn out and ready to quit. He had had some discouraging conversations and it just tore him down. And he thought about throwing in the towel until he remembered the words of Second Corinthians 12 verse nine, which says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness," and he thought to himself, what does that mean? "My grace is sufficient for you." Well, that means that if I were a fish in the ocean, and I was thirsty, the Lord would say to me drink all the water you want little fishy, for My grace is sufficient for you. And that means if I were an eagle in the sky and I was gasping for air, he would say to me breathe in all the air you want little birdie, My grace is sufficient for you to. And if I were a mouse who had stumbled into a barn full of grain and I was hungry, he would tell me eat all the grain you want little birdie, My grace is sufficient for you. And if I were a poor, humble sinner, he would say to take all the help and mercy and forgiveness you need little sinner, for My grace is sufficient for you to. And friends, I tell you that story because he was right. God's grace is enough to get you through the day, if you will trust in Him and believe, even after studying a passage like this.

Let me pray for us now that God's grace would be seen in our lives, and that He will be glorified as we take the Lord's Supper. Heavenly Father, our hearts are full of in some ways. We think of what happened to these people in Hebrews six and we shutter; it makes us ashamed that the sins we've committed, the things that we've done against You, some of the sins that are still evident in our lives and apparent. The law, we can't stop there, we have to go back to your grace as well. Father, thank you for being a God who saves sinners. Thank you for being a God who has grace. That's enough to cover all the things we've done. And I pray for those who are here this morning, that they would strike this balance we've talked about of seeing their sin, as bad as it is, but seeing the cross as powerful and all mighty, and able to save them. Lord, thank You that we do have a Saviour like Christ. Thank you

that He's enough to save every sinner, even someone like a thief on the cross, who didn't have a hope in the world. Lord, as we come to your table this morning, we want You to be honoured in how we take it, because it is a time to do this act of self-examination. It's a time to look at our hearts and get rid of those known evil things that we're prone to do. Lord, as we do that, even then we remember that this is all about Your love and mercy. Father, thank You for what we've studied today. I pray that it would have been clear to the minds of those who've listened. I pray that those who are wrestling with assurance would know that Christ can save them. May our hearts and minds be open to these things. May we go home and be the good soil. May we be those who drink in the rain, for Your glory for Christ's kingdom. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.