

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 10 July 2022. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Don't Miss God's Call!

Hebrews 12:15-17

In 1968, a book entitled *Voices from the Edge of Eternity* was published. In this book, the editor, John Meyers, chronicled the experiences of a number of people who had been by the bedside of friends, loved ones, or acquaintances, as they slipped into eternity. Many of those who had known the Lord as their personal Saviour reported seeing angels, or saved loved ones who had gone on before, or the gates of Heaven, just before they died. Of those who did *not* know the Lord, many of them reported seeing demons coming to drag them to hell. Some even *felt* the flames of hell just before they died, and cried out in terror. However, in every case, these people had one thing in common: a sense of utter dismay and horror. In the last moments of their lives, they suddenly *knew* that they had missed the chance of salvation, and that they were only moments away from the Lake of Fire! One account goes as follows:

“Some time ago, a doctor called upon a young man who was ill. After examining him, he told him that he had but a very short time to live. The young man was astonished. He had forgotten that death often comes ‘in such an hour as ye think not.’ At length he looked up into the face of the doctor and, with a most despairing countenance, said, ‘I have missed it at last!’

‘What have you missed?’ asked the tender-hearted physician. ‘Doctor, I have missed the salvation of my soul,’ replied the young man. ‘Oh, say not so – it is not so. Do you remember the thief on the cross?’ said the doctor. ‘Yes, I remember the thief on the cross. And I remember that he never said to the Holy Spirit, ‘Go your way!’ But I did. And now He is saying to *me*, ‘Go your way!’

Then, looking up with vacant, fearful eyes, the young man said, ‘I was awakened, and was anxious about my soul, a little time ago. But I did not want to be saved then. Something seemed to say to me, ‘Don't put it off. Make sure of salvation.’ I said to myself, ‘I will postpone it.’ I knew I ought not to do it. I knew I was a great sinner, and needed a Saviour. I resolved, however, to dismiss the subject for the present, and to take it up again at a more favourable time. I bargained away, resisted, and insulted the Holy Spirit. I never thought of coming to this. I meant to have made my salvation sure, but now I have missed it!’

‘You remember,’ said the doctor, ‘that there were some who came at the eleventh hour.’ This gave the man no comfort. ‘My eleventh hour was when I had that call of the Holy Spirit. I have had none since – neither will I have one again. I am given over to be lost. Oh, I have missed it! I have sold my soul for nothing – a feather, a straw. Now I am undone forever!’ Then he buried his face in the pillow, and again exclaimed in agony and horror, ‘Oh, I have missed it at last!’ and died.”

As you can tell from this account, this young man apparently *knew* a great deal about salvation (which is not surprising, since he lived in a bygone time, when the average person was taught a great amount of Bible knowledge from childhood). Yet, he did not *possess* salvation. Most frighteningly of all, he knew, while he was still living, that he had passed up his last chance to be saved!

In the portion of **Hebrews 12** that we will be studying this morning, we will see that Paul was addressing, for the last time, those who had made a *profession* of salvation, but who did not truly *possess* salvation. Paul warned them that if they continued to resist the opportunity to be saved, they might miss it forever. Furthermore, he warned them that that time may already be at the door! My heart's desire is that *not one soul* in this room would fail to pass through the Door to eternal life! Please listen carefully this morning, as we see what God has to say about this matter. The title of this message is ***Don't Miss God's Call.***

Read Hebrews 12:15-17.

There are four truths about false professors of salvation that I would like to point out this morning:

I. False professors do not possess the grace of God (v. 15).

In the first half of **verse 15**, Paul says, *“Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God.”* What does Paul mean? Simply this: Paul is addressing the *true* Christians in the churches; and he is warning them that there may be some in their congregation who had *were not truly saved*. Why were they not saved? Because they had *“failed”* of God’s grace.

Now, in what sense had they *“failed”* of God’s grace? Well, the word for “fail” in Greek is *hustereo*; and it means “to come behind, or come short of; to lack; to be destitute of.” It is the same verb that is used in **Romans 3:23**, where we are told that *“All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”*

The meaning of **Romans 3:23** is obvious. Every single person has come *short of* God’s “glory.” Every person on the face of the earth is lacking, or destitute of, God’s standard of absolute holiness. It doesn’t matter if you come slightly *closer* to God’s mark of holiness than the murderer, or the drug addict, or the rapist does. It doesn’t matter how earnestly you may be *trying* to hit the mark. The fact is that **you still have missed the mark**. God cannot allow even the slightest sin into Heaven. God said, *“The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”* God solemnly warned Adam of this when He said, *“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”* Adam’s choice to disobey God made him a sinner and a rebel by nature, from that point onward; and it separated him from God. Tragically, Adam’s sin separated *all of us* from God, too. We have all inherited his sin nature. We are all rebels from birth, and separated from God. This is the meaning of *hustereo*: “To come short of,” or “to be destitute.”

With this in mind, let’s return to our verse in **Hebrews**, and plug in this word *hustereo*. Paul is warning that there were some in the assembly who were “coming short of,” or “lacking,” or “destitute of” God’s grace. They were destitute of God’s grace *because they never possessed it in the first place*.

Now, this goes totally against the thinking of the world. The world says, “How could a loving God send anyone to hell? If we are sinners, and if Jesus died for our sins, then surely God gives His grace to *everyone*, regardless of what they happen to believe.” This is, for example, the teaching of the apostate pastor Rob Bell. In his book, *Love Wins*, Bell claims that *everyone* will get to Heaven eventually, because God’s love will eventually melt every heart--even if it God must melt that person’s heart *after* death. My friend, if you think that you will have a “second chance” after death, I am here to tell you that you are tragically mistaken. God freely *offers* His grace to all; but He *gives* it only to those who will *receive* it as a free gift. **Ephesians 2:8-9** says, *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”*

Read Romans 5:15-17.

A “gift” that is given to someone in exchange for money is not a gift at all. Likewise, a “salvation” that you pay for by your own good deeds is not a gift at all. Yet, most people, in

their pride and self-righteousness, fancy that they can earn the gift of salvation. In fact, they think that they *deserve* it, because they have been so good. God, on the other hand, says, ***“There is none righteous, no, not one.”*** God says that salvation is a gift that His Son purchased with His own blood. God says that that we must receive His salvation *as a gift*. God also tells us *how* to receive that gift. God says that you must acknowledge that you have missed the mark, and that you deserve hell. You must admit that you can’t save yourself; and, in simple faith, you must ask Him to give you His gift of eternal life. In fact, you must ask to receive *Him*. Jesus *is* that Gift of eternal life. You must want *Him* to come into your life, and to be your Lord and Master. **John 1:12** says, ***“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”***

How can a person fail of the grace of God? It’s simple. Just keep thinking that you are good enough to make it to Heaven. By doing so, you are rejecting God’s free gift of salvation, and are continuing on in spiritual death (separation from God). Friend, I plead with you: *please* do not let your pride keep you from receiving God’s Son! God’s Son (not religion, or your good works) is the *only* one who can save you from the damnation of hell!

Another truth that Paul points out about false professors is that...

II. False professors often cause dissension in the church (v. 15).

Paul goes on to warn the true believers of the churches to look diligently, ***“lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.”*** Now, the question is, “Whom is Paul talking about?” Is he talking about saved people, or unsaved people? He’s talking about *unsaved people*.

Now, a saved person *certainly* can be guilty of anger and bitterness! If this were not so, Paul would not have exhorted the Christians in the church of Ephesus to ***“let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.”*** The humbling fact is that Christians are merely sinners who have been saved by the unmerited and undeserved grace of God. Those of us who are saved still have that old sin nature. Nevertheless, Paul is *not* talking about Christians, here. How do I know? Because this warning is part of the warning which begins in **verse 15**, and which continues to the end of **verse 17**. This statement is part of Paul’s warning to the genuine Christians **that there might be some in their assemblies who are not truly saved**. In fact, Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, borrowed this language from an Old Testament Scripture, in which God was describing the *unsaved apostates* who were among the children of Israel.

Read Deuteronomy 29:14-20.

This is *really* important, folks! Paul is saying that infectious bitterness is something to be *expected* in unsaved people. Scripture gives us a perfect example of such a person in **Acts 8**.

Read Acts 8:9-24.

Simon the Sorcerer managed, at first, to escape the scrutiny of even of Philip the Evangelist. His testimony had been believed by other Christians in Samaria, as well; and he had been

baptised into a local church. Yet, he wasn't saved. By the way, we know, from historical records, that this very same Simon Magus eventually dropped his mask, turned away from his bogus profession of Christ, and became a bitter opponent of Christianity; and he spread Gnostic poison throughout his part of the world. In time, his true spiritual fruit became evident. And what was the spiritual fruit that his life produced? Bitterness!

Why are unsaved people often so bitter inside? Because they have never known the grace of God! How can one who has never experienced God's wonderful, undeserved forgiveness possibly be filled with love and forgiveness toward others? How can he possibly feel a divine obligation to forgive others, when he doesn't think that *he* stands in need of God's forgiveness? He can't. And here's the scary part: when unsaved people slip "under the radar," and are admitted into the membership of a local church, they often spread a bitter spirit among the *saved* people in the congregation—especially those who are not spiritually strong.

I personally believe that this is why so many churches today are splitting. Tragically, believers have dropped the ball, and have admitted not just a few, but *many* unbelievers into their ranks; and the gall of bitterness from their unsaved members has spread. The unsaved among them (who have always thought in a fleshly, worldly way) get angry and upset when sin is preached against; when God's standards of separation from worldly dress, music, and methods are insisted upon; and when the Gospel message is hammered upon. It makes them uncomfortable to hear, over and over again, that they are undeserving sinners. The Gospel message, which is a comfort to the saved, is an *offence* to the unsaved. Why? Because they don't like to hear that they are really *in need* of grace. This hurts their pride, and cramps their style. Whether they themselves realise it, they are angry with God. They are bitter; and often, they spread that bitterness in the church.

Paul is giving a solemn warning to the saved. He's saying, "Be careful that you do not allow unsaved people into your number. They will cause huge problems in the church!" In giving this warning to the saved, Paul is also indirectly sending out one last warning to the *unsaved*. Many unsaved professors actually believe that they are saved; yet, their hearts are filled with galling bitterness. Why? Because they do not have the life-transforming power of Christ Jesus. Paul is sending out a red flag—a warning signal. To the unsaved professors Paul is saying, "You'd better check out whether the salvation that you *say* you possess is the real thing!"

Unsaved professors do not know God's grace. They cause dissension in churches. Thirdly...

III. False professors think only of fleshly things.

(Read Hebrews 12:16.) Another description that Paul gives of unsaved professors of Christ is that they have only fleshly, worldly appetites. Though they may believe that there is a real Heaven and hell, they don't really think about it. Mainly, they think only of the things of this life. A perfect example of such a man is Esau, the brother of Jacob and son of Isaac. Let's look at the Old Testament account to which Paul is referring.

Read Genesis 25:27-34.

Before we go any further, there's one thing that I'd like to make clear: receiving the birthright did *not* make anyone saved. Neither did *not* receiving the birthright make someone *not* saved. The birthright was simply the privilege of being made the spiritual and civil leader of the clan after your father died. Of course, only one man in the family could have that privilege.

For those families that were in the bloodline of the Messiah, receiving the birthright meant that the Messiah would come through *your* lineage, in particular. It was a high honour. However, it had nothing to do with whether or not you were saved. You could be a saved, godly man, yet not be the sibling that God chose to be in the bloodline of the Messiah. For example, **Japheth** was the eldest son of Noah, and he was a godly man; yet, God chose *Shem*, the youngest son, to be the one through whom the Messiah would come. **Reuben** was the eldest son of Jacob, and he was a saved man; but God chose *Judah*, the fourth son, to be the one through whom the Messiah would come. **Eliab** was the eldest son of Jesse, and it appears that he was a believer; yet, God chose Jesse's youngest son, *David*, to be the one through whom the Messiah would come, because he had an exceptional faith in God.

So, if getting the birthright didn't have anything to do with whether or not someone was saved, why does Paul bring up Esau, and his selling of his birthright, as he's talking about the matter of salvation? Simply this: *Paul is using Esau's selling of his birthright as an illustration.* Esau's forfeiting of his birthright is an *illustration* of what it's like when a person forfeits salvation. Just as Esau came to a point in his life where he forfeited his chance of receiving the birthright, so an unsaved professor of salvation can pass a point when he has *no more chance to be saved!* The *reason* that a person can come to the point of forfeiting salvation is the same reason that Esau forfeited his birthright: namely, **he despised it, again and again.** Esau was a lost man; and as a lost man, he thought **only of worldly things!** He had learned all *about* the true God from his parents; however, he thought nothing of God. In fact, to him, the things of God were like a noose around his neck. He wanted to live his life *his* way. What did *he* care about the precious promise of a Saviour who was to come into the world one day? What good did that do him? He thought only of the here and now—that *food*, for example, that he had to have *right now*, or else he would “die!”

By the way, worldly appetites can manifest themselves in many different ways. One way it manifested itself in Esau's life was in his sexual appetite. Paul reminds us that he was a fornicator. (He had had sexual relationships before he was married.) Now, the Old Testament doesn't specifically tell us this: however, we should not be surprised. Here's why.

Read Genesis 26:34-35.

The Canaanites were incredibly immoral people. Sexual perversion of every kind was part of the very *religious worship* of their gods! Yet, Esau married at least two wicked Canaanite women, against his parents' wishes: and he never felt any remorse about it, or admitted that he shouldn't have done it. Why, then, should we be surprised that he had been sexually active before he was married? Like countless people in our world today, he thought that marriage wasn't a “big deal.” “It's just a piece of paper,” he thought.

Now, someone might object, “Ah, but wait a minute! David committed adultery, and he was a saved man!” Yes, he did. However, as a truly saved man, David could not *continue* in his sin!

God chastised him sorely; and he repented with his whole heart. Esau, on the other hand, never repented of any of his sins. He lived his life his own way, from start to finish.

It's amazing how deceived the heart of an unsaved professor can be! I have talked with people who professed, "Oh, yeah, I'm a Christian. I prayed the sinner's prayer years ago." Yet, even as that person was speaking with me, a filthy, sexual, profanity-ridden T.V. show was playing in the sitting room; wicked rock music was blaring in another part of the house; a beer and a cigarette were in that person's hands; profanity occasionally slipped from that person's lips; and a "live-in partner" was glaring at me from behind the door. Could that person truly have been saved, yet very far from God at that point in his life? Yes, it *is* possible for a true believer to drift that far from God. However, the Bible says that those who are in Christ are new creatures! A true believer may fall hard; but the Holy Spirit, who indwells him, will *not* let him stay down. Those who claim to be saved, yet who have *always* lived for sinful pleasures, with no thought of spiritual things, are *not* new creations in Christ Jesus!

Some false professors may "clean up their act" for a while, and thus *appear* to be Christians. Such was the case with the false teachers that Peter warned about.

Read 2 Peter 2:1-2, 17-22.

In the end, false professors often show themselves to be what they always were—slaves to their sin. They may have gotten out of the "mud" of open, scandalous sin, and have gotten morally "cleaned up" for a while; but they were never saved. The "changes" were all outward. There was never an inner transformation. Esau was such a man. The Bible says that he was a "profane" man. Though he went through the motions of worshipping Jehovah while he was in his father's house, he thought only of the things of this world. His heart never responded to God in repentance. This brings us to the last truth about false professors of salvation.

IV. False professors can miss the chance to be saved while they are still living.

(**Read Hebrews 12:17.**) This is probably one of the most horrifying verses in the entire Bible. Paul reminds us that after Isaac had bestowed the birthright to Jacob instead of to Esau, Esau felt *remorse*. Yet, it availed him nothing. Let's look at the Old Testament Scripture.

Read Genesis 27:34-38.

When Paul says that "***he found no place of repentance,***" the "***he***" that Paul is talking about is not Esau. Esau *did* momentarily "repent" (change his mind). For a time, he *did* regret the loss of his birthright. Yet, in time, he forgot about it easily enough, and went back to his worldly way of thinking, and thus "repented" (changed his mind) yet again. Esau *did* have a superficial kind of repentance. Who, then, is this person who "***found no place for repentance***"? Isaac! The person who would not change his mind was *Isaac*. No matter how much Esau cried, he could find no place of repentance in his father. Isaac *would not* change his mind, and give him the blessing to Esau after all. Esau had lost the birthright forever.

Do you see where this is going? Paul is saying that those who think lightly of salvation, and who will not repent and place their trust in Christ, are playing an extremely dangerous game.

God will not be trifled with. He will not strive with man forever. The Bible makes it very clear that man, on his own, does not seek after God. Rather, it is God who seeks after *us*. Without the conviction and calling of the Holy Spirit, a person *cannot* repent! An unsaved person may experience *remorse* or *regret* (the superficial “repentance” that Esau had); but without the conviction of the Holy Spirit, he cannot *truly* repent (turn to God).

Read John 6:44 and 16:7-11.

If you have never truly been saved, the time to repent is *right now*, while the Holy Spirit is still tugging at your heart. Jesus said that there is absolutely no sin, no matter how terrible, that God will not forgive, *except* one: and that is “blasphemy against (or ‘insulting of’) the Holy Spirit.” To resist the Spirit’s call, and to tell Him to go away, is extremely dangerous, because He just may go away, and never knock at your heart’s door again. Many people have been doomed long before their death because they resisted God’s call to be saved one too many times; and their hearts, from that point onward, were as hard as stone!

Conclusion: In closing, I would like to relate one more account from the book *Voices from the Edge of Eternity*. Like the account I read earlier, this one is also from a bygone era; yet, its words are just as haunting as they were more than a century ago, because the lady described here is *still in hell!*

“A young lady, under deep conviction of sin, left a revival meeting to attend a dance arranged by a party of ungodly men for the purpose of breaking up the revival meeting. She caught a severe cold at the dance, and before long, was on her death-bed. When a local minister visited her, she stiffly repulsed his efforts to counsel, saying, “Mr. Rice, my mind was never clearer. I tell you all today that I do not wish to be a Christian. I would rather go to hell than to heaven; they need not keep the gates closed.”

“But you don’t want to go to hell, do you, Jennie?” the minister implored. She broke down and replied, “No, Mr. Rice. Oh that I had never been born! I am suffering now the agonies of the lost. If I could but get away from God – but no, I must always see Him. How I hate Him – I cannot help it! I drove His Spirit from my heart when He would have filled it with His love; and now I am left to my own evil nature – given over to the devil for my eternal destruction. My agony is inexpressible! How can I endure the endless ages of eternity? Oh, the dreadful thought of eternity!”

When asked by Mr. Rice how she got into this despairing mood, she replied, “It was that Friday evening last winter when I deliberately stayed away from the meeting to attend the dance. With all my might I drove the influence of the Spirit away from me. It was then that I had the feeling that He had left me forever. I knew that I had done something terrible, but it was done. From that time, I had no desire to be a Christian, but have been sinking down into deeper darkness and more bitter despair. And now all around, and above and beneath me, are impenetrable clouds of darkness. Oh, what horror!” Then turning to Mr. Rice, she said, “Go home now – I don’t want you to pray for me. I don’t want to be tormented with the sound of prayer.”

That evening she sent for Mr. Rice again, and said to him, “I want you to preach at my funeral. Warn all of my young friends... remember everything I have said and use it.” He again expressed the wish that she could be saved before she dies. “Now, Mr. Rice, I don’t want to hear anything about that. I do not want to be tormented with the thought. I am utterly hopeless, my time is growing short – my fate is eternally fixed. I am dying without hope, because I insulted the Holy Spirit so bitterly. He has just left me alone to go down to eternal night. He could not have borne with me any longer, and retained His divine honour and dignity.” Soon after that she began to struggle in the agonies of death. She gasped, “Oh, save me! They drag me down! Lost! lost! lost!” Then she whispered these words, “Bind me, ye chains of darkness!”

If you are unsure of your salvation, and your heart is racing a million miles an hour right now, *do not turn away the conviction of the Holy Spirit!* **If you are saved**, I would admonish you to be aware! Be aware of the lost souls around you. Do not simply assume that people are saved because they *say* they are

saved. Care enough for their souls to *ask* them about what has really happened in their hearts. Do not let them miss God's call, when you could have a hand in bringing them to the Saviour!