

## Hebrews 10:22-31

### A Fearful Thing – Falling into the Hands of the Living God

*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God – v. 31*

In our last study we noted the threefold exhortation that Paul gives to Christians: *Let us draw near – v. 22; Let us hold fast the profession of our faith – v. 23; and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works – v. 24.* This last exhortation *let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works* is the reason that Christians must come together – *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching – v. 25.*

The approaching day of judgment provides incentive for heeding the exhortations. The fact that we are cleansed from our sins and the fact that God is faithful to his promises also provides incentive to heed the exhortations. In vv. 26-31, however, we are given the most extensive reason for heeding the exhortations. These verses present to us a solemn warning about continuing with Christ. This is the second such portion of Hebrews that issues such a warning.

The first portion, you may recall, was back in chp. 6:4-6 *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.*

When we studied that portion of scripture earlier we noted the irony concerning those that could seemingly come so far and yet in the end be lost. There is a sense in which they could be enlightened and still in the end be lost to eternal darkness. They could taste the good word of God but in the end be left to the bitter taste of everlasting misery. I believe the case could be made to say that hell will bring the most torment to those who were exposed to the gospel but in the end rejected Christ. They'll have eternity to dwell upon how close they were to heaven and still managed to miss it.

In this portion of scripture from Heb. 10 Paul sees fit to sound the warning again. *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God* he writes in v. 31. The mention of hands leads me to think that the reference is to Christ. Here is a sad a tragic situation – those hands are nail scarred hands and those hands are spread and opened in invitation to sinners to come. As sinners we're exhorted to cast ourselves upon the grace and mercy of Christ. We're told to cast the anchors of our souls upon Christ's atoning death but now, in our text, we have an altogether different view of those hands.

It is a wonderful and blessed thing to fall into the hands of Christ when we see our salvation in those nail pierced hands but it is a dreadful and fearful thing to fall into those hands when they become hands of judgment. The picture presented in this portion of scripture is a terrible picture. We're facing judgment and fiery indignation. We're facing a

situation in which sinners are now viewed as God's enemies and fiery indignation, we're told, will devour his enemies. We are facing, what is called in v. 29 the sorer punishment and we hear the voice of God himself saying in v. 30 vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense saith the Lord.

We can't help but acknowledge that the verses before us are fire and brimstone verses. Fire and brimstone preachers don't have much appeal at times especially if their rantings and ravings and pulpit theatrics become sources of distraction. I will do my best this morning to avoid such rantings and ravings. All I want to aim to do this morning is to set the plain truth before you. And the plain truth of our text this morning says to us quite simply in words that need little or no explanation or embellishment that *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

You should keep in mind that the divine intent behind these verses is that you find deliverance from falling into the hands of the living God. The Jews, to whom this epistle was originally addressed, were on the verge of forsaking Christ and forsaking Christ can only lead to falling into the hands of the living God. To avoid such a fearful fall Christ should be embraced by faith. That was Paul's desire in penning such solemn words.

And so what I want to do this morning is raise and answer the question:

### Why is Such a Fall into the Hands of the Living God Such a Fearful Thing?

Consider with me first of all that falling into the hands of the living God is fearful thing:

#### I. Because of the Nature of the Crime

We are dealing in this passage with very deliberate sin – note the words of v. 26 *For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth.* This is something that is very deliberate. It's a deliberate turning away from Christ. It's a voluntary decision to live your life on your own terms rather than on Christ's terms.

Now there's a sense in which this is the mindset of every sinner that comes into this world. You were not born neutral you were born in sin. You were born in rebellion against God. You were born with the corrupted principle within your heart that said *I will live for myself.*

So there's a general sense in which this text could apply to every child of Adam. Paul, however, is dealing with a more particular case. He's not referring to sinners in general, he's referring to those, rather, who had been exposed to the gospel of Christ. They had received the knowledge of the truth v. 26 says. It's one thing for an ignorant sinner to be condemned. It's quite another thing for a man or woman who has been exposed to the truth to be condemned.

The nature of the crime in the case of the person who has received the knowledge of the truth is even more serious. Look at how the crime of Christ rejection is described in v. 29 – *Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden*

*under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?*

Treading under foot the Son of God. Albert Barnes notes in his commentary: *This language is taken either from the custom of ancient conquerors who were accustomed to tread on the necks of their enemies in token of their being subdued, or from the fact that men tread on that which they despise and contemn.*

The image that comes to my mind is that of an inconsiderate house guest who arrives at your home and before coming through your front door he first deliberately treads through mud. Picture such a person walking right through the mud instead of trying to find a way around it. The mud completely covers the tops of his shoes and then he enters into your home and proceeds to trample your freshly cleaned carpet under foot rather than removing his shoes. Could anything be more rude? Could anything be more inconsiderate? Could anything show more contempt for the one who invited you into their home?

And yet there are those that treat Christ with that kind of contempt. Rather than coming to him for cleansing you live to try to defile him with the filthiness of your sin. Such gracious provision in Christ's atoning death and yet its treated with spite and indifference. Love that is unlike any other love is shown toward such a sinner but he responds to Christ's love with hatred because he's too much in love with his own sin.

So he treads under foot the Son of God and he counts the blood of the covenant to be an unholy thing. That which could provide for him the cleansing he needs is treated as if it defiled him rather than cleansed him. That which God the Father and every true sanctified saint views as precious is treated in this hypothetical case as worthless.

Do you begin to see the nature of the crime that is depicted in this verse? The sinner treads Christ under foot as if he was nothing and he counts the blood of the covenant to be an unholy thing. As bad as this picture is – the sinner's contempt for God and God's provision runs deeper still. Note the end of v. 29 which tells us that such a sinner *hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?* The one who strives with him to convince him of sin is treated with spite. The one who could make the sinner sense the truth and the reality of heaven and hell and salvation is brushed aside with the back side of the hand, as it were.

What do you suppose the mind of God will be toward such as these when at last they fall into his hands? They spent all their miserable lives spurning his love, rejecting his grace and despising his salvation. They spent all their lives living for sin and living for self because they were under the delusion that they could get away with it. So much sin committed, they reason to themselves, and yet God hasn't done anything about it. Maybe he doesn't know or maybe he doesn't care, they say to themselves.

But then at last the appointed day comes. It comes to us all. We read this back in 9:27 *it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.* Here is where the deluded sinner who despised Christ falls into Christ's hands. It's at the time of his death and who can avoid death? We all will fall into God's hands when we die. And once the sinner takes that fall then he'll exert all his efforts into trying to fool God. Didn't I serve you, God?

Didn't I go to church, God? Didn't I do things for you, God? But there will be no place for delusions on that occasion. The truth of his crimes will come to light and it will be shown that he trampled the Son of God under foot, and he counted the blood of the covenant to be an unholy thing and he despised the Holy Spirit who enabled him to taste the good world to come. And now the time of God's vengeance will have arrived and the one who has forsaken Christ will have no advocate and will have no place to hide and will have excuse for his sin and will become the object of God's everlasting judgment.

The nature of the crime, therefore, makes this fall into the hands of the living God a fearful thing. But would you consider with me next that falling into the hands of the living God is a fearful thing:

## II. Because of the Hopelessness that Precedes It

That hopelessness is expressed for us both negatively and positively in vv. 26,27. The negative description is in v. 26. Notice what it says: *For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.*

Our hope for heaven is in Christ's once for all sacrifice for sins. Our hope for the cleansing we need to reach heaven is found in Christ's sacrifice for sins. As a Christian, I don't know that I could get out of bed in the morning if I didn't have the hope that by God's grace my sins could be forgiven. What an awful burden the day would bring if there remained no more sacrifice for sins.

And yet – this is the path that the sinner who forsakes Christ chooses for himself. There is no sacrifice for his sins, which means, of course, that he'll have to pay for his own sins. He'll have to bear his own guilt. To the Jews who gained the knowledge of the truth, they would certainly have to acknowledge that their animal sacrifices wouldn't gain them anything. How do you turn back to animal sacrifices once you've learned that they were designed to point the Jew to Christ's sacrifice? And now the Hebrews were in danger of turning away from that sacrifice. Where could they go once they turned away from Christ's sacrifice? There would remain no more sacrifice for sins if they turned their backs on Christ's sacrifice for sins.

There is no place for any sinner to turn who turns his back on Christ's sacrifice. What a dreadful thing to have to bear the weight of guilt because there remains no more sacrifice for sins. Some of you have read Pilgrim's Progress and some of you have seen that vividly illustrated abridged version of Pilgrim's Progress entitled *Dangerous Journey*. The first thing you see in *Dangerous Journey* is a picture of Christian with this heavy burden attached to his back. The burden weighs him down and troubles him day and night. He can't relief for his burden no matter what he does.

That allegory was designed by John Bunyan to portray the awful weight of the guilt of sin. At last Christian gains an understanding of Christ's sacrifice for sins and his burden drops from his back. The Hebrews, to whom this epistle was originally addressed were in danger of having those burdens reattached to their backs. Forsaking Christ, you see, is to

forsake the One who can remove the burden of the guilt of sin. And if there remains no more sacrifice for sins then there will remain instead the heavy burden of guilt. So v. 26 gives us the negative side of the picture that precedes falling into God's hands. But notice, if you will, that while there remains no more sacrifice for sins – something does remain. A vacuum isn't created – something takes the place of no more sacrifice for sins. This is the positive side to the hopeless estate of the one who forsakes Christ.

Note vv. 26, 27 *there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.* Fear remains in the heart of the one who forsakes Christ. But not just a fear but a magnified fear. Notice that this fearful looking for of judgment is a *certain fearful looking for of judgment*. The Hebrew, it would seem, would have harbored doubts about Christ. But in forsaking Christ he would harbor no doubts in the depth of his heart that judgment and fiery indignation awaited him once he fell into God's hands.

This sense of impending judgment is all the more magnified in his conscience by his knowledge that his punishment for sin will be in the words of v. 29 a *much sorer punishment*. He'll know that while all sinners deserve judgment those that have forsaken Christ deserve sorer judgment. They knew the truth and chose sin anyway. They knew about salvation but still chose sin over Christ. They could have had one to bear their sins but now must bear their own sins. The knowledge of what they could have had but rejected will certainly be an added torment to their afflicted souls while they face an eternity of God's fiery indignation.

And this brings me to my last point. We've seen that it is fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God because of the nature of the crime that leads to it and because of the hopelessness that precedes it. Consider with me that it's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God:

### III. Because of the Tragedy of Such a Fall

The tragedy of such a fall into the hands of God is magnified by the fact that the ones viewed as falling into his hands are described in v. 26 as those that had *received the knowledge of the truth*.

These are not ignorant sinners in view by the text. The question is sometimes raised about those who never heard the gospel. How can God condemn those that never heard the gospel? And Paul answers that question in the opening chapters of his epistle to the Romans by making it plain that those who never heard the gospel will not be judged by the gospel. And those who unlike the Jews had never received the fuller revelation of God's law will not be judged by that law. No man will be judged by a standard that he's never been exposed.

But then Paul goes on to say that all men will be condemned because all men have sufficient knowledge of right and wrong within the realm of their own conscience to condemn them. In the case of the Hebrews, however, to whom this epistle was addressed they knew the law and they knew the way of salvation. They had received the truth. How

tragic is a man's condemnation who knew the truth of the gospel. And for the generations that have followed the generations of the Hebrew Christians their condemnation is tragic because they knew the truth.

It grieves me to think of children who grew up in Christian homes and were taught the truth of the gospel and yet forsook Christ. It grieves me to think of young people that have attended this church and have attended activities associated with this church as our youth camp.

And there are many who have been to our camps that would have to testify, if they were honest, that the Lord manifested himself to them. The closest thing we have ever seen to revival, I believe, has been through some of the unusual manifestations of God's presence in our youth camps. It doesn't happen every year but it has happened more than once that the Lord has made his presence a felt reality in the hearts of many.

There are many that have come through our camps or come through our churches and have in some sense tasted and seen that the Lord is good. They have experienced a measure of enlightenment. They have somehow been made partakers of the Holy Ghost in the sense that the Holy Ghost ministered reality to their hearts and they have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come who tragically somehow walk away from it and remain in their sins.

I can only attribute such a phenomenon to a powerful love of sin. I know I have said it before that the love of sin is something to make me marvel. Sinners cling to it even when it makes them miserable. They won't let go of it even when it costs them their jobs and their families and their health and their reputations.

And in the case of our study in Heb. 10 this morning we could add that they won't let go of their sins even when they learn of one who died for their sins. They won't let go of sin even when forgiveness for sins is freely offered to them. They won't let go of their sins when escape from hell is presented to them and the sure hope of heaven is set before them.

Their lost condition is not only tragic but it will be eternally tragic when all the while they're being punished they'll be afflicted with the knowledge that they were so close to salvation. They were at the very threshold of the kingdom of heaven – they were at the very brink of being saved.

Their parents and their friends and their minister pleaded with them to come to Christ. They were instructed as to their need of Christ. They were knowledgeable of the love of Christ. They knew that there was no love like Christ's love. There were times when they felt their emotions swayed by contemplating the one who left heaven's glory in order to die a most cruel and agonizing death. And they saw the impact on the lives of others. They saw others escape the depths of despair who gained the joy of salvation.

And they'll have all of eternity to ask themselves – why? Why did I not respond? I knew in my heart the gospel was true – why did I forsake Christ? What have I gained by rejecting Christ? Why didn't I listen to those who pleaded with me to embrace Christ? I

could have been with those who truly loved me. I didn't have to end up in the isolation of darkness with weeping and gnashing of teeth. And then in their anger they'll blame Christ or they'll blame others and they'll feel sorry for themselves till eventually that gets old and then they'll start the cycle over by remembering how close they came to heaven.

I can't think of anything so tragic as a sinner perishing who knew the truth of the gospel. Now remember what I said in my introduction. The author of this epistle is giving you fire and brimstone in these words so you might avoid fire and brimstone as your eternal destiny.

There's a lot of grace, you know, in fire and brimstone preaching. When God sent Jonah to Nineveh it was to preach a fire and brimstone message of judgment. And Jonah didn't want to go because he knew that God was gracious. God is gracious in giving us this epistle to the Hebrews.

The Hebrews were on the brink of forsaking Christ. I wonder how many here under the sound of my voice have forsaken Christ? May the Lord save you this morning from a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. May he save you from being an adversary that will be devoured not merely from punishment but from the much sorer punishment that those who know of Christ and still forsake him earn for themselves.

As I said in my introduction – the hands of Christ are nail scarred hands that are open wide to receive anyone and everyone that will come to him. Christ has wrought salvation by the piercing of his hands and feet. What a blessing to fall into the hands of a saving Christ – but what a crime and what a tragedy to fall into the judgment hands of those that forsake Christ.

May the Lord stamp the solemn warning of his word on all our hearts and work in each heart in accordance with his knowledge of every heart need.