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“Don’t reject God” – Heb 10:26-39

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○ A man in America keeps a six foot long rattlesnake as a pet. Strange choice! He has told the story of how he lost his index finger. One day, he took the snake into the living room and released it just to tease his wife. Stranger choice! As she fled in terror, he quickly took a stick and placed it behind the reptile’s head, holding it firmly to the floor. As the irritated snake twisted the man pushed harder to maintain control. Suddenly the stick gave way with a loud crack. As quick as a flash, the rattler arched its back, with its deadly fangs filled with venom, struck the man on the hand. Medical treatment saved his life, but his finger had to be amputated. Sin can be like that rattlesnake. You can tease it or play with it, but it will never be satisfied until its poison is injected into your soul. And you could lose far more than your finger.

Over these last few weeks, we have seen that God has done everything possible to open up the way for us to enter into His presence without any fear of being struck down; we are loved, accepted and forgiven. And in fact, God is calling us to draw near to Him. And so now the writer of Hebrews addresses the problem of sin; of tolerating and even pursuing sin, and the consequences of turning your back on God.

You see, ○ Judaism was a recognised and approved religion within the Roman Empire, however Christianity was not, and Christians were persecuted under Roman permission, and so it was tempting to return to Judaism to escape persecution. For some of these Christians too, they had come into a new freedom and as they no longer felt under the weight of their sin as they had in the past; they now knew their sin was forgiven, then for some, they now began to treat their sin less seriously. So, beware... This passage refers to those who have walked away from their faith, or are at risk of doing do. And so, these are words of warning for us. ○

**V.26-31. If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**

The writer doesn’t want to see the saved, lost. He says, ○ “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, then no sacrifice for sins is left. What is left, is the fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.” If you deliberately sin; you keep on sinning, as an enemy of God, having once walked with Him and talked with Him, then you will face judgement and a raging fire.

You see, for some of these Christians, they knew folk who were no longer meeting together; no longer encouraging one another; no longer spurring one another on to love and good deeds; and no longer drawing near to God. Are you drawing near to God? What does your relationship with God look like? Are you giving deliberate thought to other Christians and how you can encourage them?

For some of them, the pendulum had swung too far the other way, and they were no longer concerned about their sin, and its consequences. However, sin still has consequences, and unaddressed and tolerated sin can lead to a loss of faith in God. So, if you deliberately keep tolerating sin, and you treat Jesus' sacrifice as though it means nothing to you, then you will face judgement; and for the enemies of God there will ultimately be a raging fire that consumes them; that continues to devour them; a place where the worm does not die; a place of eternal torment.

As they were brought up within the constraints of Judaism, and they knew the Law so well, he warns them of rejecting God; he reminds them that, ○ **“Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?”**

Wilful rejection of the law of Moses led to death. If 2 or 3 witnesses would testify that someone deliberately disobeyed the law of Moses, then they would be stoned to death. Disobedience was treated seriously. But where there was accidental disobedience then sacrifices were offered, and forgiveness extended.

So, what do think should happen for those who discard and disregard Jesus' sacrifice; those who trample Him underfoot and reject His holy blood as cleansing and removing their sin? They have insulted the Spirit of God who called them into faith, and insulted the grace of the Father which was so mercifully extended to them. They have turned away and rejected Christ, and pursued the passing pleasures of this life instead. What do you think will be the result of deliberate rejection and disobedience?

If wilfully rejecting the law of the Old Testament ended in death, then how much more severe will be the punishment of those who wilfully reject Jesus? They will face judgement and the raging fires of destruction – for they are called the enemies of God; no longer His friends.

And the people would have also recalled the words of the Old Testament, ○ and knew that it was God who had declared, **“It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.”** The writer concludes, **“It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”** His warning then? If they were thinking of turning back to Judaism, then think again. Don't reject Jesus; don't turn your back on Him; don't lose your faith; don't keep tolerating sin, justifying it, and becoming insensitive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Don't become a victim of the slow fade. Draw near to God; hold onto the hope that you possess; and consider how you may encourage and build one another up in faith.

Now, for those of you who may have been tolerating sin – all is not lost. Draw near to God; turn back to Him and ask for forgiveness; seek His mercy. And as you continue to draw near to Him, ask for His strength to stand firm in saying no to further temptations. We can always draw near to God confident that Jesus blood has paid the price for our sin and opened the way to keep us coming back to our Gracious God.

The writer then moves into another line of thought – that sometimes we handle upfront persecution and remain more faithful through these tough times, than we do when life is a little more comfortable. And he calls upon them to remember their past faithfulness through tough times. V.32-35, ○ **“Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.”**

These were difficult days when Christians were facing persecution from both Rome and those who were zealous for Judaism. Remember Saul as he made it his purpose to track down new believers in Jesus and have them thrown into jail. This was also a time when it was sanctioned by Rome that Christians could be persecuted under law; whipped, beaten, flogged, put in jail, and even fed to the lions in the Colosseum; the property of Christians was to be confiscated. Imagine losing everything just because you were a Christian?

They endured great conflict full of suffering; they were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; yet they joyfully accepted the confiscation of their property. Would you or I? They did! Why? ○ Because their confidence was in their God, and they knew they had better inheritance that was eternal. Wouldn't our confidence in God be tested if we were to lose everything we owned? He says to these folk, “You didn't let those days of persecution diminish your faith, so remember those days, and remember the strength of your determination to stand firm for the Lord. **“So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.”**

And of course, this is not the way of our world, is it? His encouragement is diametrically opposed to the thinking of the world. The world seeks comfort, escape from calamity, deliverance from trial, the favour of men. The world demands promotion, not demotion, the world looks for accumulation of property and wealth, not its seizure, victory and never defeat. And this kind of thinking creeps into the hopes and expectations of us as Christians.

We don't expect to suffer, be ridiculed, or have our possessions seized. And we would demand justice and take our fight to A Current Affair. But in v36-39 there is no argument for demanding justice. ○ **“You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For, “In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay.” And, “But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.” But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.”** (36-39)

Once again, this passage is not supporting our culture's push to make sure that our rights are upheld, and justice delivered. That's not the writers concern, but rather that we endure the suffering. The writer quotes from Habakkuk chapter 2, when Habakkuk saw the armies of Babylon sweeping down from the north, and vulnerable Israel lay in its path. He says, "You need to persevere just as you did through your days of suffering and persecution." He's calling God's people to stand firm in their faith in God even though their whole world seemed to be turning upside down and inside out. He says that although destruction is coming, "In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay, but my righteous one's will live by faith."

Now, if the readers of this book lived to see the awful war between the Jews and the Romans from AD66-70 and the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem and their revered Temple, I think they may have well said, "now that's what he was talking about. Destruction is coming, and in fact has come." But he also said, "the righteous will live by faith, and that the Lord is not pleased with those who shrink back. So, let us keep our eyes on the bigger picture and on our eternal reward.

As we look at our world; a world of chaos and hopelessness we too may think that we're heading for tough days. So, let us hear these words of warning, and these words of assurance. ☉ God does not take pleasure in the one who shrinks back, but the faithful will be saved; the righteous do live by faith; and in a little while Jesus will return. It was 2000 years ago that the writer of Hebrews said, that in a little while Jesus will return, so remain faithful and you will be saved. Can you join your voice with the writer in v.39? If we remain steadfast in our faith in the Lord, then we have nothing to fear for are saved! We are saved by faith, and we are called to live by faith.

So, Christians, be encouraged and be warned, do not reject God, as Jesus said, "the one who endures to the end will be saved." (Matt 24:13) And to those of you who may not have accepted God's love and forgiveness, acknowledging that Jesus blood has paid the price for your sin, then you must be warned that you are rejecting God and that there will be consequences. Please don't delay in becoming a Christ follower.

Song: TN269 Lord I need You