

Text: Heb 6.7-8

Today we get back into our exposition of Hebrews verse by verse.

We spent several weeks before Christmas wrestling with Heb 6.4-6, a widely contentious passage.

Everyone who comes to this passage brings with him his presuppositions.

- Some Christians believe that it is possible to lose your salvation. They come to this passage and read it that way.
- Some Christians believe salvation is eternal and cannot be lost. They come to this passage and their thinking is governed by that presupposition.

There are variations on the themes, and the way various interpreters answer the questions, but these are the two main presuppositions.

You know my presupposition: salvation gives believers eternal life. Whatever this passage means, it cannot mean that people who have eternal life can lose eternal life – eternal life cannot die, or else it is not eternal.

The passage gives a very plain warning, though, of something bad that will happen to believers who have “fallen away” (“fallen alongside the path” — “fell into the ditch”).

After the warning, the author of Hebrews gives us a parable, an illustration, to help our understanding.

Last week I mentioned this new book I got on the subject, *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*. I made it through 20% of the book the first week, and another 17% this week, so I am 37% of the way through. I have to say, this book has been most helpful in bringing light to the problems in this and the other warning passages in Hebrews.

Let’s read the passage, including our text today:

Heb 6.1-8, text 7-8

You see the little word “for” that begins v. 7. This word is a very important word in the Bible. Whenever you see one, you want to understand what the “for” is doing in the verse.

“The presence of γάρ, ‘for,’ establishes that vv 7–8 are an integral part of the argument in vv 4–6.”¹

¹ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991), 143.

Usually “for” explains, it tells you a reason for what was just said.

That is the case here. The author said, it is impossible to renew a believer who has fallen away (fallen off the path) to repentance.

As an explanation, we have “the parable of the ground.” I’ve called our message:

The Fate of the Ground

Proposition: The ground remains the ground, but some ground is joyful and some ground is miserable.

I. One field, not two

A. There is a tendency to divide up the parable

1. So, the NIV:

Heb 6:7 Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God.

Heb 6:8 But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

2. It is as if there are two distinct kinds of people

a. Those that drink in rain and produce good crops

b. Those that do nothing but produce thorns and thistles

KJV also gives a sense of “two fields” — starts v. 8, “but that which” as if it is a different field

B. Reality: One field, one person, one warning

1. Notice the NAU again:

Heb 6.7-8 For **ground** that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God;⁸ but if **it** yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

a. The ground drinks the rain in verse 7 and in verse 8

b. The difference is in what it produces: vegetation or thorns and thistles

2. Thinking back to Heb 6.4-6

a. Hypothetical group of people (note plurals), but seen as a unit

- 1) These people were enlightened and tasted the heavenly gift
- 2) They were made partakers of the Holy Spirit
- 3) They tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come
- 4) And have now come to fall away

The whole group is seen as a unit — not some with all those spiritual blessings, and some who fell away — one group, one field, one category

b. The consequence for anyone in this category: impossible to renew to repentance

- 1) We are saying of these people, they are God's field
- 2) They received God's rain
- 3) And they produce thorns and thistles (in the warning)

“Verse 7 speaks of the positive result of fruitfulness when the rain falls on the land and the result is vegetation. Verse 8 speaks of the same land, which received the same rain, but ‘thorns and thistles’ are the result, not fruit.”²

II. Two possibilities for the same field

A. Let's identify this field:

1. Every Christian has these characteristics:

- a. They are enlightened
- b. They have tasted of the heavenly gift
- c. They have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit,

² David Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary 35 (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Publ. Group, 2010), 378.

- d. They have tasted the good word of God
- e. They have tasted the powers of the age to come

How did they get there? By the new birth, by being born again:

- They heard the gospel message that all men are sinners
- They heard that they could not save themselves
- They heard the wages of sin is death
- They heard about the perfect man, Jesus Christ, who came to earth to die in their place
- They learned that this perfect man was the Son of God, able to take up his life again, and grant his life to anyone who put their trust in him
- And they believed... they became God's ground, God's field

2. The field is every believer, born again, trusting God

B. God cares for his field (7)

1. He waters it
2. He tills it

That means such things as Bible preaching, Bible study (personal and in church), Christian fellowship, the whole gamut of Christian life, water pouring on the field, the farm labourers going around and hoeing up the weeds, tending the field, caring for it.

C. The crop varies in God's field

1. Some seem to produce more and some less

Mt 13.8 "And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.

2. Now, note, the focus in our parable in Hebrews is on the field
 - a. The crop doesn't depend on the sower
 - b. Nor does it depend on the tiller

- c. The picture is just of the field, and the water comes down on it
- 3. The crop differs, but in this case drastically
 - a. The field might produce a good crop (7)
 - b. The field might produce *NO* crop (8)

D. The consequences vary for the field

- 1. If it produces good crops, it receives a blessing from God (7)
- 2. If it produces only thorns and thistles, it is no good to God (8)
 - a. Worthless = “unapproved”

Paul worried that he himself might be disqualified, unapproved

1 Cor 9.27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be **disqualified**.

Like a runner who failed to pass the baton properly, he is disqualified: but not abandoned.

b. Close to being cursed — “nearly cursed”

This is not the same as truly being cursed, but it is a serious problem.

c. Ends up burned

- 1) Here is where many go astray in interpretation: “Oh, this must mean hellfire”
- 2) But consider this:

“The ‘burning’ of land that did not produce vegetation was a common act in the first century AD. The purpose was to cleanse the land of the ‘thorns and thistles’ so it would bring forth fruit. The land was not destroyed in the process.”³

³ Allen, *Hebrews*, 370.

3) And consider this

¹ Cor 3.12-15 Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but **he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.**

III. Identifying the ground in Hebrews

A. We need to go back to Hebrews Introduction for a bit

1. The book is written to Hebrew Christians
2. Where are they located?
 - a. At the beginning of our study, I concluded it could not be in Jerusalem, possibly Antioch (following various commentaries)
 - b. However, the church teachers for the first eighteen centuries taught that the recipients were in Jerusalem (or Judea)
 - c. Through my studies, I've become convinced the old view is right: these Hebrew Christians were in and around Jerusalem
3. There is a definite Jewish background to the teaching of Hebrews (no one denies this)
 - a. The whole argument is against reverting to Judaism
 - b. The basis of the argument is the superiority of Jesus
 - c. The goad (motivation) of the argument are the warning passages

B. The significance of a parable about "land"

1. "The Land" is a big concept in Judaism (*eretz* – the name of Jerusalem's newspaper is "*ha eretz*" – "the land")
2. We saw the comparison with Israel in the wilderness and the hardening of the heart at Kadesh
 - a. All that generation believed God and followed Moses across the Red Sea

- b. They received the covenant from God at Mt Sinai
 - c. They committed themselves to it
 - d. Then they came to Kadesh and turned aside, desiring to go back to Egypt
3. When Israel turned aside, the Lord determined to destroy them, but Moses interceded

Num 14.11-20 The LORD said to Moses, “How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst? ¹² “I will smite them with pestilence and dispossess them, and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they.” ¹³ ¶ But Moses said to the LORD, “Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for by Your strength You brought up this people from their midst, ¹⁴ and they will tell *it* to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, O LORD, are in the midst of this people, for You, O LORD, are seen eye to eye, while Your cloud stands over them; and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. ¹⁵ “Now if You slay this people as one man, then the nations who have heard of Your fame will say, ¹⁶ ‘Because the LORD could not bring this people into the land which He promised them by oath, therefore He slaughtered them in the wilderness.’ ¹⁷ “But now, I pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared, ¹⁸ ‘The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth *generations*.’ ¹⁹ “Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.” ²⁰ ¶ So the LORD said, “I have pardoned *them* according to your word;

4. Consequently, the Lord declared that the exodus generation would die in the wilderness, they could not enter the land
- a. The ten spies with the bad report died of a plague (Num 14.37)

- b. Joshua and Caleb remained alive [and had a promise of rest] (Num 14.38)
- c. Moses told the people what all this meant, and they mourned in repentance (Num 14.39-40)

Num 14.39-40 ¶ When Moses spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people mourned greatly.⁴⁰ In the morning, however, they rose up early and went up to the ridge of the hill country, saying, "Here we are; we have indeed sinned, but we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised."

- d. God did not allow them to enter. Why?

Heb 6.6 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.

- e. Instead, they remained the people of God, but not in the land
- 1) They were under God's protection (pillar of cloud)
 - 2) They ate manna every day
 - 3) They wore the same clothes for forty years
 - 4) They walked around in circles till they died

C. The application of the parable to New Testament saints

1. There is such a thing as professing believers who aren't real believers

¹ Jn 2.19 They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.

2. There is also such a thing as carnal believers

¹ Cor 3.1-3 ¶ And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.² I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Indeed, even now you are not yet able,³ for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?

3. And there is such a thing as hardened believers, who walk in the wilderness, and bear thorns and thistles, and are tried by fire in this life

Conclusion:

Proposition: The ground remains the ground, but some ground is joyful and some ground is miserable.

The first thing every one who hears a message like this needs to do is answer the question, "Am I really a believer?"

The second thing believers need to answer is, "Am I right with God?"

If you won't walk God's way, you are headed for misery.

If you will walk God's way, you will have joy.