

June 16, 2018

Reflections

REFLECTIONS

“But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned again and hardened his heart, he and his servants.”

Exodus 9:34 (NASB)

Hard Heart, Hard Road

The last time we considered hardened hearts, it was in the context of the hardened hearts of those around us. We learned that there is nothing we can do to soften the hearts of others. We must "just you wait and see" and allow God to do that work, because we are not able.

But what if we are the ones doing the hardening? That changes everything, as we see in Exodus 9:27-35, where in at least one instance God did not harden Pharaoh's heart—Pharaoh did. That hard heart headed to a hard road.

In that passage, Pharaoh finally came to the place where he was willing to admit that he had sinned. He realized that he needed Moses help, so he asked Moses to “make supplication,” and promised to let God’s people go so they could worship Him. Moses, for his part, was not fooled. He promised that he would indeed ask God to relent, but Moses also pointed out that Pharaoh did not fear God—at least not yet. Moses knew that although the flax and barley were ruined by the hail God had sent in judgment of the Egyptians, the wheat and spelt were not. And as soon as the thunder, hail, and rain ceased, Pharaoh sinned again, refusing to let the Israelites go, just as the Lord said. And so Pharaoh ended up just where he had started—with a hard heart, facing a hard road.

God could and did harden Pharaoh's heart. There wasn't anything Pharaoh could do about that. But there were times when Pharaoh was responsible for the hardness of his heart. That could be changed, if Pharaoh were willing to genuinely repent, turning away from his sin and toward God. Otherwise, as Pharaoh discovered, a hard heart heads to a hard road. That was true for Pharaoh. It was also true, eventually, of God's own people when they were headed to the promised land. (cf. Hebrews 3:1-11)

That is no less true for us. We can sit here, week after week, hearing God's word, and choose to ignore it, heading right back to where we left off come Sunday morning. That is, we can harden our hearts. That’s all “hardening one’s heart” means. It means rebelling against God, refusing to follow His commands or do what God tells us is best for us. Everyone, the Bible tells us, has a hard heart because everyone has sinned. We have all rebelled against God, refusing to do what He asks us to do, even though what God wants for us is best.

A hard heart heads to a hard road. But the good news of Jesus Christ, the gospel preached to us before we knew God, is that God invites us to head back. We can harden our hearts as Pharaoh did in Egypt, or as God's people did in the wilderness. Or, we can soften our hearts, head back to God, and find rest.

I know this is "basic" gospel stuff you’ve heard before. But the gospel is central to our lives and it is good for us to remind ourselves of its basic truths so that we can live in them. One of the basic truths of the gospel is that a hard heart heads to a hard road. Another basic truth is that we can always head back. The gospel provides an opportunity for us to turn around and head toward God. That is called repentance. If Pharaoh had genuinely repented he could have headed off a world of hurt and so can we.

*Pray for our church plant
in Clifton Park, NY.*

Pray With Us

Gerri Greene: Pray for Judy and Henry Ruble's business to grow and do well. Pray for those who work at SAFE Hydroponics, for their safety and that the business will prosper.

Frank Mace: Their daughter Charla is having a caesarean section on Monday, pray for baby and mom to both be safe. Frank's sister Linda fell pray for her healing and relief from her pain.

Chantel Bink: Pray for the staff and campers as camp starts next Sabbath. Pray that the Holy Spirit is there and touches hearts, so the campers will respond to the gospel. Pray also for safety.

Casey Greene: She flies Monday to Wisconsin. Pray for a safe flight. As she does her dedicated service at Camp Wakonda, pray that she can effectively communicate the gospel.

Matt Olson: Continue to pray for Donna Avery, that the results of her chemotherapy are encouraging for her and Russ.

Paula Dibble: Thankful to be here worshipping this Sabbath. Chris Yerdon's dad Don fell and is home recuperating. Pray for healing. Continue to pray for Paula's son James, for his future and decisions to be made. Also pray for the marriage of her grandson Jon and Olivia, that it is healed.

*Berlin Youth Fellowship,
Monday, 6:30-8:00 pm
(grades K-12)*

Weekly Events

Women's Bible Study, Evening study Tuesdays, 7 pm in the church library. Daytime study Wednesdays at 10 am in the church library.

Bennington YF, Wednesdays, 6 pm, at the Bennington Rec Center.

Men's Bible Study, Thursdays, 7 pm in the church library. (will restart in September)

Upcoming Events

June Operation Christmas Child Collection: Craft items (Coloring books, crayons, markers, paints, play dough, and so on).

Loving our Neighbors: Pray for the employees of SAF Hydroponics. Pray for health and safety at work and for God's blessings upon them. We will reach out to one more business and then take a break for the summer.

Vacation Bible School: Vacation Bible School will be held July 9-13, from 6:30-8:00 pm and is hosted by our church.

Streaming

Don't forget we are now streaming our service each week. You can watch live on YouTube on Saturday mornings at 10:30 am or watch it later at your convenience.