

DON'T LET YOUR HEART BECOME HARD

Recently, while doing my Daily Bible reading, I was fascinated once again by the story of Moses' encounter with Pharaoh. And as I read that tragic story, I was struck by just how vivid an example this was of the challenge every one of us face, almost on a daily basis. Every one of us every day have to deal with whether or not we are going to listen to God or not. When you boil it down, really, that is what a life of faith is all about. Are we going to listen to God and do His will or are we going to listen to our own thoughts, our own heart, our own desires? Solomon said that is the essential challenge of every life. In **Ecclesiastes 12:13**, he said, "*The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*"

- What is the whole duty of man? To fear God and keep His commandments.
- But what if we don't fear God? What if we do not keep His commandments?
- What if, and I think this is the case for most people, we don't even know what His commandments are?
- Wouldn't it be a great tragedy if we came and went and failed to accomplish what is our most fundamental and critical duty?

The Lord taught the same thing, didn't He? In **Matthew 6:33**, He taught that seeking the Kingdom of God is our highest priority. In **Matthew 7:21**, in a scene picturing people standing before the judgment seat of God one day, he said, "*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*" In other words, it isn't what one says that counts. It is what one does.

And Jesus didn't just talk the talk. In **Hebrews, chapter 10, verses 5-9a** we read this about Jesus:

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; 6) in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. 7) Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'" 8) When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), 9) then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will."

Why did Jesus come? He came for many reasons, but here we read that He came to do the will of God. Think about that; why have you come?

Are you doing the will of God? If not, why not? Why do we keep letting other things take precedence over God's will? Why do we let so many things interfere with and weaken our faithfulness? Why are so many Christians lukewarm? Half-committed? Why do people call Jesus Lord, but live like they're the one really in charge?

I think the answer is, at least in part, that somehow people's hearts become hardened to the will of God. They may know what His will is, they may even want to do His will, but their heart has gotten harder and harder.

So I am asking you to really think about this, please, please don't let your heart become hard!

Don't do what Pharaoh did.

His is such a sad, sad story. I think about all of the trouble and suffering and death that resulted from this one person's hard heart. It was all so unnecessary, wasn't it? The story begins with the calling of Moses as God spoke to him from a burning bush. This is all related in the 3rd chapter of Exodus. God calls Moses and tells him he wants him to go down to Egypt and bring His people, the descendants of Abraham, out of the slavery into which they had found themselves. Jacob and his sons and their families had moved there over four hundred years earlier. They had multiplied until they numbered over a million people. The Egyptians had become afraid of them so they enslaved them. But the time had come for God to fulfill the promise made to Abraham some four hundred years earlier. That promise not only included making a great nation out of Abraham's descendants, but also giving them a land which we know today as Canaan or Palestine.

In **Exodus 3:10**, God told Moses, *"Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."* And then dropping down to **verse 19**, God said: *"But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out my hand to strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do, and after that, he will let you go."*

Now before I go any further, I want to deal with something that I know has confused some people and caused others to stumble in their faith. Open your Bibles to **chapter 7 and read verses 1-4**.

And the LORD said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. 2) You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land. 3) But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, 4) Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment."

Did you notice that in **verse 3**, God said, *"But I will harden Pharaoh's heart?"* A lot of people read that and come away thinking the reason why Pharaoh's heart was hard was because God hardened it. After all, He said He would do that. And He did do that, but not in the way some people think. This wasn't some sort of divine imposition of God's will over Pharaoh's will. That isn't what happened. In fact, if you will read the account of this classic struggle between God

and Pharaoh, you will see again and again and again, it was Pharaoh who hardened his own heart.

- When Moses and Aaron went before Pharaoh, Moses threw down his staff and it turned into a snake. The Pharaoh's magicians were able to duplicate the miracle, except that Moses' serpent then swallowed the other serpents. **Verse 13** says, "*Still, Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.*"
- The next contest brought Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh as he was out bathing in the Nile. Moses struck the water with his staff and **verse 20** says, immediately "*all the water in the Nile turned into blood, and the fish in the Nile died, and the Nile stank, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile.*" But **Verse 22** says the magicians were able to replicate that miracle by their secret arts, "*so Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.*"
- The third contest involved the plague of frogs. The Lord sent Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh with the request, "*Let my people go, that they may serve me. But if you refuse to let them go, behold I will plague all your country with frogs. The Nile shall swarm with frogs that shall come up into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed and into the houses of your servants and your people, and into your ovens and you kneading bowls.*" And of course that happened, and it got Pharaoh's attention, but the magicians were able to replicate that miracle also, especially now that they had plenty of frogs to work with! But the problem was the land is now crawling with frogs. So Pharaoh calls for Moses and Aaron to plead with their God to remove the frogs. They did but **verse 15** (chapter 8) says, "*But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.*" Do you think maybe the people of Egypt were beginning to wonder what in the world is going on?
- The fourth contest involved the gnats; great swarms of gnats. When Pharaoh's magician's were unable to duplicate that feat, they said, "*This is the finger of God.*" **Verse 19** says, "*But Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.*"
- The fifth plague was that of the flies; again swarms of flies everywhere, on the ground, in their homes, everywhere except in Goshen where the Israelites lived. At that, Pharaoh relented and decided to let Moses and the Israelites go offer their sacrifices to God. He said, "*Plead for me.*" Moses did so, but **verse 32** says, "*But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go.*"
- So that set the stage for the next plague, which cost the Egyptians all of their livestock, including their field animals, their horses, donkeys, camels, their cattle herds and their flocks of sheep. The next day after giving Pharaoh the warning, all of the livestock was dead; except for the animals belong to the Israelites. **Verse 7—chapter 9—**says, "*But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.*"

Can you believe this guy? Who does he think he is, GOD? Think of all the misery and havoc he is bringing upon himself and his people, and all because he doesn't want to humble himself before the Lord and do His will.

- The seventh plague brought upon the Egyptians was a hail storm that came upon land. Once again Moses went to Pharaoh and said to him, *"Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, 'Let my people go, that they may serve me.'* A hailstorm of Biblical proportions was unleashed upon Egypt, everywhere except in Goshen, destroying every plant, shredding every tree, killing all of the animals that the Egyptians had started obtaining again. And oh, this got Pharaoh's attention; after all, this was hitting him in the pocket book. **Verse 27** says, *"Then Pharaoh sent and called Moses and Aaron and said to them, 'This time I have sinned; the Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. Plead with the Lord, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail.. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer."*

So it looked like God had finally gotten through to him, to his hard heart, but sometimes repentance is only a matter of words. And so in **verse 34**, we read: *"But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again and hardened his heart. ... So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people of Israel go, just as the Lord had spoken through Moses."*

- The eighth plague brought in swarms of locusts, or grasshoppers as we call them. There were so many that it was said, the people would not be able to see the land, and they would eat everything left from the hailstorm, and destroy every tree.

And interestingly, at that, **10:7** says that Pharaoh's servants began urging Pharaoh to let Moses and Israelites go. They said, *"Do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?* So he relented just a bit and was willing to let Moses and the men go, but to leave the women and children behind. So the locust plague was unleashed until, as **verse 15** says, *"not a green thing remained, neither tree nor plant of the field through all the land of Egypt."* Pharaoh quickly calls Moses and Aaron back, and again says, *"I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you. Now therefore, forgive my sin, please and plead with the Lord your God only to remove this death from me."* So Moses did, and a great wind arose sweeping all of the locusts into the Red Sea. Then **verse 20** says, *"But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go."*

- The ninth plague was darkness over all the land for three days, and don't you know that would get your attention. Once again Pharaoh was willing to let Moses and all the people go, but not to take their animals. When Moses would not accept that condition, Pharaoh became angry and **verse 27** says, *"But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go."* He told Moses, in so many words, *"Get out of here and if I ever see your face again, I will have you killed!* And Moses said, *"You have said it, I will not ever see your face again!"*

- And of course you know about the tenth and final plague, that of the death of the firstborn of both man and beast. It was the basis for what became known as the Passover. The Israelites were to take a lamb or a goat, and shed its blood, sprinkling it on the framework around the doorways into their homes in Goshen. That night, an angel of the Lord passed through the land and throughout Egypt, wherever a firstborn of man or beast was found, by morning light it was dead. This included the Pharaoh's own son.

Then and only then did Pharaoh reluctantly decide to let the Israelites go, although **14:5** says, *"When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people and they said, 'What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us!'"* And of course you recall they pursued the Israelites all the way to the Red Sea, and then after God made it possible for the Israelites to pass through the sea on dry land, Pharaoh and his army went in after them, and the walls of the sea were released, drowning all of them; their bodies and equipment washing upon the shores of the sea.

I read all of that last week and I thought to myself, what a tragedy. None of that had to happen, but it did and all because a heart was hardened. So it is with great fear that I read in my New Testament when a warning is given not to let one's heart become hardened, but this time that was not said to a pagan king. It was not said to an unbeliever. It was believers to whom it was said, as we read in Hebrews 3, beginning in **verse 12**: *"Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it is said, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.'"*

Is this scripture speaking to you? Could that happen to you, that your heart would become hard? Is it possible for you to fall away from the living God? Could you be deceived by sin? Is it possible that you could hear the voice of God again and again and again, but you are not really hearing it anymore? The sound goes in your ears, but the words never really find a home in your heart.

What are the symptoms, or signs of a hard heart? Have you ever thought about that? We probably should, shouldn't we? We think about the symptoms of heart trouble. If we begin to see and experience some of those signs, we would make a beeline for the doctors. But what are the symptoms of a hard heart? Well, if you go back and re-read Pharaoh's story, you will find them. It always involves a failure to obey, a tendency to put off, making light of God's will, trying to come up with excuses, or compromises. At some point, like Pharaoh you will experience anger at those who try to remind you about the will of God, but most of all, you will just never get around to doing what you know. You may tell yourself that you want to, that you will someday, but in the meantime, your heart gets harder and harder. Every time you refuse or fail to do what God wants you to do, every time you choose to go your own way, to do what

you want, the harder it becomes. And if you don't realize what is happening, there is a good chance that one day your hard heart will leave God no choice except to destroy you as He did Pharaoh.

Trust me, you don't want that, and it doesn't have to be that way. There is a better way, and it is the way that leads to the greatest joy. It is the way of obedience, of obeying the will of God each and every time you hear it. Do you hear God now? Do you hear him asking you, pleading with you, "Don't let your heart become hard." Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. Humble yourself before God and obey His word. Will you come while together we stand and sing!