



Message Transcript

Beware

Jeff Schwarzentraub

Today, I want to talk to you about warning signs, warning signs. We see them all over our culture. We see them everywhere. Sometimes when you're purchasing products, it will say, "Keep out of the reach of children." Or it may say something like this, "Don't get near your eyes." Warning signs aren't always bad. As a matter of fact, sometimes warning signs are very good for us. Warning signs tell us what direction we need to turn onto a road and what direction to avoid. Stop signs are warning signs for us at an intersection. Yield signs are a warning for us at an intersection. Yellow lights sometimes, not all the time, but sometimes, are warning lights for us to begin to slow down. And we're called to pay attention to those things. Good parents have warning signs for their kids. You'll remember the movie, A Christmas Story when he wanted the Red Ryder BB gun, "No, no, no, you'll shoot your eye out." It's a warning.

Warnings are important. If you've ever been to Israel, or you've certainly, if you've been with us, you know when you go to the Dead Sea, which is seven times more salty than any body of water on the planet. It's so salty you can literally sit in it and float. People are there reading newspapers and doing all sorts of stuff. But there's a warning that comes with it. We tell everybody every time we go, "Ladies, don't shave your legs on the day before you go. Men, don't shave your face. It will burn badly if you do." We tell people, "Don't splash, it can't get in your eyes. It's really important that you don't do that. When you enter, enter backwards, go real slow and slowly sit down." Why? Because it's a warning sign.

Warning signs are important for us to pay attention to because they're for our own good. And here in the Book of Hebrews Chapter 10, we're going to see the fourth

warning sign in this book, the fourth warning sign. It may be the most severe warning sign in the entire New Testament, or even in the entire Bible, for those of us that are students of God's Word. And it's important for us today, wherever we are, that we pay attention and we heed attention to the warning.

So I'd like you to open up your Bible to Hebrews Chapter 10, starting in verse 26. And as you turn there, we're going to read through this together. And then we'll unpack four ways that we're called to beware. Four warnings that we need to pay attention to from God's Word directly. Notice to what he says. Hebrews 10:26.

He says, "For if we go on sinning willfully, after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire, which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severe punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge his people.'

"It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But remember the former days, when after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through approaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed

sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For, "Yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come and he will not delay.' But my righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to preserving of the soul."

And here in this text, a very sobering warning passage for us. Signs that we must beware of, signs that we must pay attention to. And it's important that we do. Some of us are good at paying attention to those signs. Some of us sometimes think we can plow through the signs. So this text is here to enlighten us as to what God wants us to beware of. And throughout the Bible, there are warning passages. And I just want to start, in our introduction, just by talking to you about what groups of people need to hear warning passages from God's Word. And there are really three groups of people.

And the first group of people is this, warning passages encourage the believer to persevere. Warning passages encourage the believer to persevere. They're more or less guardrails. They help us stay the course. They tell us, "Don't look to the right or to the left." They remind us that the road is narrow and that the gate is small, leading to salvation. They remind us to examine ourselves and make sure we're in the faith. These warning passages remind us, "We get it, life's hard. Stay the course. You're going to make it. Continue to persevere." So when we see these warnings, it gives us

ample opportunity, for those of us who are born again, to say, "I needed that."

And why do we need that? Because so often, we like to take shortcuts, don't we? So often we see the cone there and they tell us, "Hey, run around the cone." And we're like, "Eh, it's a little closer if I go that way." A teacher says, "Hey, do your own work, but the answers are in the back of the book. And we look them up. We have this proclivity inside of us to take shortcuts. Warning passages tell us, "Don't take the shortcut. Do the right thing." Can I just tell you this? It's always the right thing to do the right thing. It's always the right time to do the right thing. And God gives warning passages for the believer. So if you're born again here today, this is a passage for you to encourage you to continue to do what God's telling you to do.

Secondly, a warning passage does this, it invites the nonbeliever to trust Christ. Warning passages remind us that eternity is at stake, and this is the pathway to God through Jesus Christ. He's guiding us to the Father. And what are you going to do with Jesus Christ as Lord? Because what you do with Christ will determine, not only your present and not only your future, but it will determine your entire eternity. Warning passages are there to tell those who aren't in Christ that today is the day of salvation. Warning passages are there to say, "If you hear the Lord's voice today, don't harden your heart. Don't wait around. Don't give it a second thought. Come to Christ and come to Christ right now." That's what a warning passage is for. It's reminding you that regardless of what else is going on in your life, and what else you think you need to be thinking about, the most important thing you need to be thinking about is what are you going to do with the Lord Jesus Christ? It invites the believer to trust him, invites the

nonbeliever to trust him.

And number three, it does this, it sentences the apostate with judgment. It sentences the apostate with judgment. You're going to hear a verdict about what happens to those who have come close to knowing Christ, who have heard the truth about the gospel. They know that they know that they know that Jesus is Lord, and they get close to a point, but they never personally welcome Jesus Christ into their life. And there's a sentence and a verdict on that person's life. When a person has been given the truth, when a person knows the truth, when a person has been enlightened to the truth, but they refuse to do anything with the truth, then there's a verdict and a sentence. And here's the verdict and the sentence, that they are no longer going to have opportunity to trust Christ. And they've sealed their fate for all eternity.

We went through this in great detail back in Hebrews Chapter 6. You'll remember verses four, five, and six of Hebrews Chapter 6. "In the case of those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, or committed apostasy, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucified to themselves the Son of God and put him to open shame."

When we give warning passages, we're giving warning passages so that you will know what will happen to those who know the truth, who have been exposed to the truth. And then say, "I refuse to accept the truth." It'll also give you insight. Here's what

happened to so and so. For those in the community that look like Christians, pretended to act like Christians, attended all the right Christian events. And then at some point in time, they get in their life and they say, "I want nothing to do with Christ ever again. I'm done with Christ."

When I talk about apostasy, I'm not talking about Christians who have sinned. I'm not talking about people who are feeling in their conscience that they've done wrong. By the way, some of you have such a sensitive conscience that you start thinking to yourself, "Maybe I'm an apostate. Maybe I did it wrong. It's probably me." That's not an apostate. An apostate is one who willfully and publicly says, "I want nothing to do with Jesus. I want nothing to do with God. I'm done, finished. The Jesus thing's over for me." They know the truth and they publicly reject it. That's an apostate. That's what we're talking about here.

So there's this message here that tells us four things to beware of, four warnings to beware of. And the first is this, as we get into the text. Beware conscious, willful, intentional sinning has a consequence. Conscious, willful, intentional sinning has a consequence. Notice what He says, "For if we go on sinning willfully, after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire, which will consume the adversaries." When He's talking about sin here, He's talking about conscious, willful, intentional sinning. Deliberate sinning, continual sinning, habitual sinning. Somebody that says, "I'm going to sin however I want, however often I want, in any way I want. And I don't care. I can do whatever I want."

Friends, there's a consequence to that. You want to hear what the consequence is? He tells us right here in black and white. He says, "For if we go on sinning willfully like that, after receiving knowledge of the truth," that means after you know that Jesus Christ is Lord. After you know that He's substituted himself for you. After you know that He's made a way through his shed blood on the cross, and that he's rose from the dead. After you know that He's willing to bring you into his family. After you know that He'll turn no one away who comes to Him. After you know that His grace and mercy is abundant and He wants a relationship with you. After you know all that truth, and then you say, "I reject it all. I want nothing to do with that." That's what He's talking about.

Here's what happens. He says, "There no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." It's over. You don't get your sins paid for. It's tragic. It's terrible. It's horrible. But what do you get instead? But a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire, which will consume the adversaries. Terrifying means this, it means scared, fearful, dreadful, knowing bad things are imminent. And by the way, you're going to see this word again. Think about terrifying, have you ever been to a movie where you've been terrified? You ever been a situation where you've been terrified? Or a haunted house where you've been terrified? Or maybe you were a little kid and you hit your sister, right as your dad was pulling into the driveway. I don't know if that happened to you. It may have happen to me. And you're terrified because you know the dread that's coming. Bad things are imminent. Shouldn't have done that. That's what you have to look forward to, once you've been exposed to the truth and you reject it.

Now, the Bible makes clear that all people need to hear the gospel. The Bible

makes clear that no one is saved apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, which should give us a passion for getting out and sharing the gospel for mission. It should. It should break our heart that there are people in the world that haven't had a chance to respond to the love and grace of God. And they're still accountable because Jesus Christ died on the cross. And that's still the message by which all people are saved. But this is talking about what's even more tragic. This is talking about a group of people, they've heard the message. They have had every opportunity to be saved. They've had every opportunity to come to Christ. Maybe they've come close. Maybe they haven't. But at some point in time, aware of all the truth, they've said, "I reject the truth." For that person, that group of people, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but only terrifying judgment that will come.

It's sobering. It should sober your heart. Because when we talk about eternity, we're talking about forever and forever and forever and forever and forever. Now, we live in a culture where everybody wants to change the Bible and not preach the truth. I'm not one of those people. I will preach you the truth. Heaven and Hell are real places. If you could see with spiritual eyes, everything that's going on in Heaven, and you could see with spiritual eyes everything that's going on in Hell, it would change the trajectory of how you worship. And it would change the trajectory of how you evangelize. Because they're real places where real people go every single day. Some people say, "Well, there's no such thing as Hell." Well, there is.

Let me give you five verses that talk about Hell. This is not an exhaustive list in

the Bible. But in Matthew Chapter 25, Jesus says, "Then He will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels.'" So Hell is an eternal fire. And who is it prepared for? God intended it to be for the Devil and for his angels that are following him. However, if you reject Christ and choose to follow your father, the Devil, then that becomes your future too. Meaning this, God did not create Hell for people. God created Hell for the Devil and his angels. But it is a real place where real people go, who refuse to repent and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Five verses later, Matthew 25 verse 46. "And these will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." Eternal punishment is just as long as eternal life is. You think about the worst pain you've ever had. Some of you have had such acute pain, one minute of that pain feels like years. You think about that physical pain. Some of you had emotional pain, where one minute of emotional pain feels like years. Picture emotional, spiritual pain for all eternity. And there is no relenting and there's no opportunity to come back. That's Hell. It's a real place where real people go every day. And if the Lord would give us a video of just one person going there, you would repent on a dime. And you would want to go out and tell every person you know, even people that you don't like, "Listen close, you need Jesus in your life. You do not want to go where I just saw." That's how real Hell is. And people go there by the masses every day.

Revelation 21 verse eight says, "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all

liars - they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. That is the second death."

Second Thessalonians 1:9, "They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his might."

Jude 7, "In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of..." There's that word again, "Eternal fire."

Now, you will hear all sorts of people in our generation write books about why Hell is not real. And they will twist the scripture and they will tell you, "It's not a real place. And how could a loving God send somebody to Hell that he created?" Wrong question. The question is, how could a holy God ever allow one sinner into his presence? And the answer is, through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and no other way.

So I want to be very, very clear on this point. The point is, God didn't create Hell for anybody here or anybody anywhere. He created you to be in relationship with Him. However, the only way to be in a relationship with God is through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. And no one comes to the Father except through me." And no matter where you go, and no matter what group of people you talk to, no matter what nationality or gender or height or weight, you can proclaim the living message of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because he's true for all people, regardless of age, or background, or sin level, or anything. It's

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. But beware, beware. Conscious, willful, habitual, over and over, "I'll do whatever I want, whenever I want, however I want," does not enter the Kingdom of God.

Now, I believe this is teaching here, in truth with the rest of the Bible and the rest of the book of Hebrews. This is not talking about a Christian who is losing his or her salvation. I believe that once you're in Christ, you are sealed with the Holy Spirit eternally. But I will say this, for some of my brethren who believe that you can lose your salvation, which I personally don't, here's what they're saying. They're saying some of the same things that I am, that you can't continue to sin and expect to be saved. Meaning this, you're not saved by your good works. Nobody's going to get to Heaven and say, "Look at what I did, God. Thanks for bringing me in. We did a good job together." Nobody says that. We're not saved by our works.

But if you've been saved, you've been saved for good works. And if you've truly been born again and you love God, you will notice a change in your heart. You will notice a change in your heart and your desire to worship and honor and love the Lord. You'll notice a change in your heart in a way to serve and bless others. Not perfectly, but increasingly. And there'll be a desire to continue to do that. Don't lie to yourself and say, "Well, I know I'm going to Heaven because I walked an aisle and prayed a prayer. And the pastor told me I was going to Heaven." I think there's scores of people that have walked an aisle, prayed a prayer, and are going straight to Hell. Because they never asked God to be the Lord of their life. They never asked Jesus for the forgiveness of their sin. They never repented. They didn't care. They were looking for

some magical answer just so they could go to Heaven. Who doesn't want to go to Heaven? Everybody wants to go to Heaven.

It's not about, do you want to go to Heaven? It's do you want Jesus Christ to be the Lord of your life? If you do, the result of that, someday, is Heaven. That's what he's talking about. So the warning here is for those who have come close to Jesus, but aren't in Christ. Exhibit A, Judas Iscariot. For three years, he went out and did all the ministry everybody else did. He did all the ministry all the other 11 disciples did. But what did he never do? He never turned from his sin and trusted Jesus to be the Lord of his life. As a matter of fact, he was angry that Jesus was doing the things the way that he was doing. Sold him out for 30 pieces of silver.

And oh, just so you know, yes, all sin is the same. Unbelief keeps you out of the Kingdom, but there's different levels in Hell too. Think about what Jesus said when he was standing before Pontius Pilate. You think of all the sin you can sin. The worst sin you can ever sin is apostasy. It's knowing the truth and then rejecting it. When Jesus answered Pilate, he said, "You would have no authority over me unless it had been given to you from above. For this reason, He who delivered me to you has the greater sin. Pilate, you're going to sentence me to death, and you're going to be held accountable to that. But I'm telling you, the one who turned me over to you, he has a greater sin because he was around me for three years."

So please don't say, "Well, if Jesus was alive today and I was around him, then I would think different." No, you wouldn't. You've been given every opportunity to hear the gospel. And I hear people ask this question all the time, "What about that migrant

farmer in Africa? Or that kid in middle of Asia, in a slum, he never heard of the gospel?" Still accountable. That's why we got to get the gospel out. That's tragic. But you know what's more tragic? Is to sit in a church like BRAVE for month after month, week after week, year after year, to know the truth, and then say, "I want nothing to do with it." That's way worse.

The question is what are you doing with Jesus? Have you welcomed him in to be the Lord of your life? See the gospel is not just cognitively knowing, "Yeah, I guess there was a guy named Jesus that died on the cross. And I guess I'll pray some prayer if he'll accept me. And I guess that's okay. And now I'm going to go live my life any way I want." The gospel is that God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten son that so whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. If you believe Jesus died for your sin, and you're willing to turn from your sin and turn to Christ, and come to Christ, you can be saved, and you can be saved to the full for all time. And His Holy Spirit will come in and dwell you. That's the good news.

So as a warning passage, it's encouraging you who are believers today, "Yeah, thanks for reminding me of that. I want to stay on that path." It's telling some of you who are here who are kind of wavering, "I don't know if today's the day." Hey, today's your day. And it might be telling some of you that are in a place where you're like, "I don't know that I'm going to believe in Christ anymore." Hold on, you don't want to do that. That's the worst thing you could ever do. Beware. Conscious, willful, intentional sinning has a consequence.

Number two is this, beware, God is unmerciful to apostates. He's unmerciful to apostates. Now, we love to talk about the mercy of God, don't we? We're saved by His mercy. Lamentations 3 says, "His mercies are new every morning: great is your faithfulness." Says, "His mercy and loving kindness chase us down every day," in Psalm 23. We love His mercy. He's totally merciful. He gives us what we don't deserve. He doesn't give us what we do deserve. He's so merciful. Not to the apostate. Not to the one who has been given enough light to trust Him and then rejects Him. Notice what the Word says, notice what He says, "Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severe a punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and he has insulted the Spirit of grace?"

Now, you may not be familiar with the law of Moses, but when people broke the law of Moses, God's law, they died. They were killed. Listen to Deuteronomy Chapter 17, starting in verse two. If you want to turn there, I'll just read a few verses. This is God's law for Old Testament believers. Now, he's talking to a group of New Testament Jews who have come to Christ, and he's referring them back. He said, "Remember how severe it was under the old covenant when we sinned against God? How much more severe do you think this is going to be? This was old covenant. This was Old Testament.

"If there is found in your midst, in any of your towns, which the Lord your God is giving you, a man or woman who does what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, by

transgressing His covenant and has gone and served other gods, and worshiped them or the sun or the moon or any of the heavenly hosts, which I have not commanded, and it is told to you and you have heard of it, then you shall inquire thoroughly. Behold, if it is true, and the thing certain, that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, then you shall bring out that man or that woman who has done this evil deed to your gates. That is the man or woman, and you shall stone them to death. On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he is to die and shall be put to death. He shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness."

Old Testament, here's what happens. You start worshiping something other than the God of the Bible, and it's found out by a couple of people, they bring you out to the city gates and they establish it thoroughly. "Yeah, he's worshiping the moon, rather than worshiping the God that created the moon. He's worshiping the sun, rather than worshiping the God that created the sun. Hey, he's taken them to worship other gods and false gods other than you." And it's established by two or three witnesses. You stone them right there. Why? Because God takes his worship so seriously.

Isaiah 42 verse eight says, "I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not share my glory with another or give my praise to idols." We think of worship as an activity that we do for a few minutes on a Sunday, like, "Yeah, I'll come in. And as soon as the band gets done, maybe the preacher will be up and do something. That's okay." God wants us to worship Him through singing. He wants us to worship Him through our praise. He wants to worship Him through our lifestyle. He wants to get all the other

honor and He doesn't want to share that with anyone else. He wants to get all of our gratitude. He wants to get all of our thanks. You say, "Well, that was the Old Testament God, that one was mean. He put people to death. New Testament God, he's not like that."

Friends, God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He has not changed. And the author is saying, "If you thought that was serious, how much more severe will it be when under the new covenant? Here's what you've done. You've trampled the son of God underfoot." That means this, after proclaiming or professing Jesus, you now reject Jesus' Lord and want nothing to do with him. It's like you've walked over his face. If God put people to death for worshiping the moon, how much more trampling Jesus' face are you going to be held accountable? How much more? That's what He's saying.

Then he goes on to say this, "Or regarding as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified." Now, if you were here a couple weeks ago, I talked about the blood. I think I mentioned the word blood in my sermon over 100 times. We just kept talking about the blood, the blood, the blood, the blood, the blood. It's the blood of Jesus that cleanses us from all unrighteousness. It's the blood of Jesus that sets us free. When a person knows that that's true and then says, "Yeah, but I don't think it's that. I think the blood of Jesus is unworthy. I think the blood of Jesus is unnecessary. The blood of Jesus is stupid. You really believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father? I think you're stupid." When people do that, how much more severe do you think their punishment is going to be. Friends, I'm here to tell you, Jesus Christ is the

only way. And his blood is the only way to the Father.

And when it's referring to the sacrifice of Him, notice what it says here in the text. It says, "As regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified." I think that He is talking to Jesus because in John 17, in verse 19, when Jesus was praying his high priestly prayer on the night he was betrayed, he says, "For their sakes, I sanctify myself, that they themselves may be sanctified in the truth." This sanctification is talking about what Jesus did to set himself apart so that we could be sanctified. And when they trample that underfoot, they're doing this third thing, they're insulting the spirit of grace. The very Holy Spirit that convicted them of their sin, and provided direction to Jesus, and showed them the way. They rejected that. That's an apostate. There's no mercy for apostates. There's none. There's just terrifying expectation of judgment that is to come.

Notice what the text says in verse 34, "We know Him who said, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge his people.'" It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. It's a terrifying thing. Now, I don't know if you've ever sat around and thought about terrifying ways to die. If you do, don't think about that very often, it's not fun. But sometimes, you'll see a movie and you'll say, "I wouldn't want to go that way. That'd be terrifying." Regardless of what someone could do to you here, that's not what's terrifying. What's terrifying is, if you die apart from Christ. That's terrifying.

Notice what Jesus said in Matthew Chapter 10 in verse 28, he said it this way. "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul. But rather, fear Him

who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell." Don't fear how you're going to die here. There's some bad ways you could go, but don't worry about that. Don't live in fear about that. But if you don't know Christ, you should be absolutely terrified. Because even if you die in a peaceful way, it is going to be the most terrifying experience you've ever had. If you could see the demeanor on people's faces the moment they die apart from Christ, and meet Him face-to-face, and hear these words, "Depart from me you worker of iniquity, for I never knew you." And you see the terror on them, there would be part of you that would raise up and say, "I've got to tell my family and friends about Jesus." There's part of you that would raise up and say this, "Even the people that have treated me poorly, I don't ever want that to happen to them."

And here's the truth of the gospel. God takes no delight in the death of the wicked. I don't know who the most wicked person who ever lived was. God does. But even when that person died or will die, God's not up in Heaven saying, "See, I got you." It breaks God's heart, for God created all people. God wants a relationship with everybody. Listen to me closely, God wants a relationship with you. He wants you to come forward. But you need to know the sobering truth. If you choose to reject Him, there's no mercy for you. Now, at a Bible church like ours, we're going to preach the truth. We're going to hold the standard high. God has standards. God has ways in which he wants us to accelerate to. And God wants us to grow in them. And God wants us to persevere in them. And God wants us to partner with Him in that and get closer.

But sometimes, what happens in a church that teaches a lot of truth, because we know truth, when we see people that aren't aligned with the truth, we begin to have a heart towards them that's not the heart of God towards them. We begin to think, "Well, they're just sinning like that. And they're just this kind of people. And they deserve whatever they get." No, they don't. You do too. And God in His mercy saved you. And what our heart should be is, "Yeah, this is the standard. And yes, I won't change the standard because this is what God said is a standard. But I tell you what, I'm going to love them and pray for them until I see them come to Christ." And if they don't, it's not going to be because I didn't pray for them. And if they don't, it's not going to be because I didn't share with them. And if they don't, it's not going to be because I didn't show love to them.

Now, hear me close on this, nobody's going to Hell because of your disobedience. Nobody's in Hell because, "Well, if you would've shared with them, they wouldn't be in Hell. But now for all eternity, they're in Hell because you didn't do your..." That's not true. But what I find in Bible churches sometimes is, our heart gets hardened because we hear the truth over and over. And even though we know we can't accomplish the truth on our own, we expect nonbelievers to. And they can't. And so God calls us to love people that are unlovable. And God calls us to love people that are sinning in ways that we're uncomfortable with. And God calls us to love people that vote differently than us, and act differently than us, and see marriage differently than us, and see gender different than us. And they can be totally wrong in the way that

they see it, and yet still experience our love and compassion. Because we love Jesus and we love the gospel, which tells us this. The standard's the same, but His love for people remains.

How severe do you think it's going to be for those who know the truth and have walked on Christ's face and say, "I no longer want to be a part of this"? You say, "Well, how's that going to happen?" Friends, it's happening all the time. The last couple years, there's some pastors that have come out, but led very large congregations saying, "I no longer believe in Jesus, the Jesus of the Bible. I'm still a good person. I still kind of love people. I'm still spiritual. Getting divorced from my wife, because that's really not the way I see marriage anymore," and all this. And, "I'm going a different way now, but I love you guys." What's that called? That's called an apostate that was never saved in the first place. And they can share all their feelings, and all their emotions, and all the reasons why they really are spiritual. And here's what you'll notice about apostates, apostate sometimes leave evangelicalism and then go to more liberal places to worship. Sometimes, they leave evangelical places and they just go away from church altogether.

Now, let me be clear on something. Where do these apostates come from? The church. Apostates are people that have been raised in the church. Apostates are people that know the truth, because they've been in church. You can't be an apostate if you don't know the truth. Apostates are people that have known the truth. They've gone to seminaries. They've taught in seminaries. They've been in the church. They've pastored in churches. But they've never had a personal relationship with Jesus. You

say, "Well, I've never heard of that before." It's all over the place. The longer I live, the more I see it.

First John Chapter two and verse 19 says it like this. "They went out from us, but they were not really of us. For if they had been of us, they would've remained with us; but they went out so that it would be shown that they are not of us." Sobering. We should pause here for just a second, shouldn't we? We should pause here for you just to ponder people in your family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, maybe those people that God's brought into your life that are just hard for you to even be around. Even before they open their mouth, and twice as hard to be around after they open their mouth. Maybe you need to bring those people to mind when we're thinking about this. Believer, we need to be thinking that way. Maybe some of you here today need to recognize, "I've never personally trusted Christ. I've been religious. I've been trying. I'm getting a little better as a person. But I don't know that Jesus has ever been the Lord of my life." And today's the day of your salvation.

And for some of you, you're being warned today because you know, "I've gotten kind of close and I think Jesus is okay. But listen, I'm looking forward to divorcing my spouse here real soon, setting up a different kind of lifestyle, going a different way." This is your last warning. This is God saying, "Hold on, brother. Hold on, sister. Don't do that." It's a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Terrifying, terrifying. Friends, why do I talk about this? Because Heaven and Hell are real. And for as long as you're going to live here, it is but a vapor compared to how you're going to spend your eternity, vapor. You can say, "Well, I'm going to live my life anyway I want

here." Vapor. "I'm going to live my life for Christ here. It's been real hard." Vapor.

Compared to what's coming, this is like not even the opening act, this is like the introduction to the eternal play that's going to play out. This is sobering.

We should have on our hearts the standard of God's Word and His holiness. And we should also have on our hearts the names of the people that we're praying for, that are far from God, because God's love for them is so great. Friends, Jesus died on the cross, and would've died on the cross if you were the only person that he came to save. But I want to tell you this, Jesus Christ died on the cross so that anybody, anywhere, at any time, that would want to come, can be saved too. Which means, even that person that's super far from, "They'll never come to Christ. There's no way they'll become a Christian." That's who he died for too.

And for some of us, we remember where we were before we were saved, and the direction we would've been heading had we not been saved. But some of us, it's so easy to forget that apart from Christ, we can do nothing. That the gift that we have of salvation has nothing to do with us. It has everything to do with Christ. And when we share the gospel, we're not badgering people with, "Hey, you're doing bad things. Don't you want to become a good person like me?" That's not the gospel. The gospel is, "Hey, one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. I was in need of Christ. I know you're in need of Christ. He sees your brokenness. He sees your hurt. He sees your pride. He sees how you're not in [inaudible 00:35:59]. He sees all that. He still loves you. There's a way out of your predicament. Come to Christ."

God is unmerciful to apostates. Don't ever forget that. He's merciful now. He's merciful now. But most people have this view of Jesus coming back and being calm, meek and mild. Coming back and talking to us and having collaborative, small groups to think about how we feel about the world and politics and all these different... That's not how he's coming back. He came the first time as humble servant, was persecuted, was crucified. Friends, let me tell you, when he comes back, he's coming back as King of Kings and Lord of Lords to reign over the entire planet. Amen. And he is coming back for those who are eagerly waiting for him. For those who are not waiting for him, it's terrifying expectation of what's coming. Worst moment of your life, that will begin the worst moments of your eternity.

I love you enough to tell you the truth. This is not a text. If I was a guest speaker and say, "Hey, you can preach from anywhere in the Bible." This is probably not the text I would pick. But BRAVE Church, I love you so much. I love you enough that I know when I get to Heaven, I'm much more concerned about what Jesus is going to say about my faithfulness than how you feel about me. "Hey Jeff, did you tell everybody in the church that I am who I say I am? And that I'm merciful to a point, but if they reject me, I'm not merciful. Did you tell them?" "Yes, I told them." "Thank you."

You've heard it, which means this, guess what? You're accountable. You're accountable. You run away from this truth, you're still accountable. You get up and leave right now, you're accountable. You go to sleep right now, you're accountable. Well, I'm never coming back here again, you're still accountable. You know the truth. Jesus Christ died for you. He rose for you. He's the only way to the Father and you're

accountable for knowing them. God is unmerciful to apostates.

Let me tell you another one you need to be aware of, beware that following God will cost you. Following God will cost you. Notice verse 32, "But remember the former days when after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings. Partly by being made a public spectacle through approaches and tribulations; and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated." Here's what he's saying, now listen real closely. Jesus said in John 16:33, "In this world, you will have tribulation, but take heart, I've overcome the world." I want to give you peace in the middle of tribulation.

A lot of people falsely believe that when you come to Christ, everything's going to be great. Your finances are going to grow. If you're married, your marriage is going to grow. If you're single, you're going to find the person of your dreams. If you're married, you're going to have kids galore. You're always going to have the perfect job. Every day you wake up, it's just going to feel like, "I can't believe how great my life is because I'm in Christ." Here's the reality, because you're in Christ, the Bible says in Second Timothy, 3:12, "Anyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." You say, "Well, Pastor Jeff, I've been a Christian for five years. Nobody's ever persecuted me."

Open your mouth, start speaking about Him and live it better, and they will. Open your mouth at work and tell people that Jesus Christ is the only way. And if you don't trust Him, we know you're going to Hell. And you need to repent. See if you don't

experience a little bit of persecution. Try it at your school, see if you don't experience a little persecution. Try it outside the walls of this church and see if you don't experience the persecution. If you want to live for Jesus to the full, you will experience some hardship. And he's telling them, one of the signs that you're a believer is that you're experiencing some tribulation because you're a believer.

Now, I've pastored this church for 10 years and I've heard this story so much. It almost feels like a biblical truth. And it's not true for everybody, but I hear it over and over and over again. "When I got to BRAVE church, I thought I was a Christian, but I realize I wasn't a Christian. I just prayed some prayer, but I never had Jesus in the center of my life. And now, he's the center of my life. But do you know what? Ever since coming and letting Jesus be the center of my life, my life's gotten really hard. My job's become hard. My marriage has become hard. My kids, relationship with them has become hard. It's harder now that I'm walking with Christ." "Hey, welcome to the family."

You're not doing anything wrong when you're suffering for knowing Christ. That's part of the package that comes along. So he tells them, "Hey, remember when you came to Christ, you suffered, you suffered greatly? You were kind of a reproach to all people." Or that didn't happen to you, but you started partnering with people who are Christians. And then you became a reproach for partnering with them. See, one of the reasons that some people don't grow in Christ is, they want to save themselves from any suffering. They want to save themselves from reproaches. They want to save themselves from anybody thinking that they're like those people. So they'll talk like this,

"I'm one of those cool Christians. I don't really go to church that much. I don't really hang out with people because I'm a cool Christian." No, you're not. Because when we see other Christians suffer and aren't willing to suffer with them, we're not being who God wanted us to be.

When we see other Christians rejoice and we're not rejoicing with them, we're not being who God wants us to be. One of the ways our faith gets strengthened is being around other people. Because at any given time in the church, there's always something going on. I love the seasons in my life, and I've shared this before, where everything's going perfect, where my marriage couldn't be any better. And Kim arises in the morning, tells me how wonderful I am. And my kids are telling me how blessed they are to have me as a dad. And everybody on our staff is doing awesome. And the church is just great. And all I do is get letters of encouragement. And when those three seconds expire and I'm back to normal, isn't that the way it feels sometimes? And we have this false expectation that that's how life's supposed to be lived, and it's not. That's not what grows us. If God gave us everything we desired here, we would never yearn for Him to come back.

Think about the parable of the soils for a moment. You got hard soil that's not able to receive the word. You got rocky soil that can receive it, but when persecution comes, it falls away. You realize persecution is part of the way God grows us. Now, we like to talk about the persecuted church over there, persecuted church over in China. The persecuted church has never had problems growing. Persecuted church never has problems growing. In the last two years when we experienced a little bit of

persecution here, our church grew. Tongue in cheek, I'm saying this, I'm kind of praying for the next pandemic to happen so that we can continue to explode the church.

Because there's something about persecution that weeds out those who really aren't, and brings in those who are really hungry. It's an exciting church to pastor during persecution. God uses that in your life to see, are you going to fall away or you being persecuted and making you stronger? God uses tribulations in our life to see, are you going to fall away or make that stronger?

And then what about the thorny soil? The worries of the world, the wealth of the world, the desire for other things. God uses things in this world to say, "Hey, are you more committed to them or committed to me?" It's not how much stuff you have, it's how much stuff has you. We like to look around and say, "Oh, they have so much stuff." Friends, I can show you people all over the world, every single person in here has more stuff than a lot of people I've met. You make more than \$2 a month? You have a lot more than a large percentage of our world. We have a lot of stuff. We like to compare it to people that have more stuff than us. But you have a lot of stuff too. It's not how much you have, it doesn't have you.

Because notice what it says here, after they endured these reproaches, they still were showing sympathy. It says, "For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one." Showing love to the prisoners, who are the prisoners? Those who are mistreated because of their faith in Christ who are in prison. And in prison, they don't eat unless you bring them food. In order to bring them food,

you got to associate with them and tell them, "Hey, the reason they're in jail is because they're a Christian. And the reason I'm bringing them food is because I'm a Christian too." That's partnering with people that are in need. That's associating with people that are hurting.

We love it when people stand up and are bold and like, "Oh, love that guy. He's willing to tell anybody anything." We love that. Are you willing to stand with him and say, "I associate with him." Not really, I love watching the podcast though. It's really cool. God wants you to be bold. God wants you to be resolute. God wants you to be engaged. God wants you to do that. That's what he's sharing here. He says, "Beware, it'll cost you something." Now, the gospel doesn't cost you anything, I just want to be clear on that. Jesus Christ paid for everything. You don't owe anything to him to be saved. That is a free gift. But when you welcome that free gift in your life, the cost of being a disciple in Jesus Christ is going to cost you everything.

And God uses all these circumstances in our life, oftentimes, the ones we don't like. Many times, as I'm learning as I get older, oftentimes, the ones we can't explain, and we don't have answers for, and nobody seems to have answers for. To grip our hearts and to show us, "Hey, just stay rooted in me. You're not going to know the answers on this side of Heaven. You're not going to figure it out on this side of Heaven. It's going to be hard for you until you get to... Just trust me." That's what he uses to grow us, to see are we still going to remain faithful even when things are challenging? And why? Because what's coming is greater. They said they welcomed the seizure of

their property. Would you welcome the seizure of your property in an unjust manner?

We read through the Book of Revelation in the last couple of years. There's coming a day where the government's going to seize your property and take it in an unjust way, unless you're going to give allegiance to the world dictator. And if you don't, they're going to take everything you have. And it won't matter whether you're a billionaire or a pauper, they're taking it all. Are you going to be okay to say, "You go ahead and take it because I have a possession that's greater than anything I have in this world"? That's what He's talking about. It's not what you have, it's what has you. Can you give it? Can you be generous? Can you hold... There's nothing wrong with having nice things. There's nothing wrong with enjoying the gifts God's given you, as long as you're not holding onto them as if they're your identity. If they were to be taken away tomorrow, are you cool with that? Still have the same joy in the Lord? Or are you upset because now you don't have the same identity you used to have?

He says, "Hey, look back, because following God has a price tag. It costs you." Now, the beauty of all this is this, when I played football in high school, I happened to play on two really good teams. We were 27 and 1, my junior and senior year in high school went to two state championship games. We should have won both. I didn't get to play in the first one. We can talk about that, it's a whole nother sermon. But the point is, when we get back together, and when we talk about what's going on, it's five minutes that we talk about a certain play we ran, or who was the best player, a certain tackle that happened or whatever, five minutes. And then the rest of the time, you know what we talk about? "Hey, remember the time so and so puked at conditioning

because he wasn't in shape when he got here? And remember the time this guy got chewed out over there?"

What we remember is all the hard times we had that bonded us together as a team. When we get to Heaven, you're going to have stories to tell and you're going to hear other stories from people about all the hardship they endured that brought them there. There'll be nobody that you meet in Heaven that's like, "I don't know what you're talking about. I trusted Christ and here I am." Unless they trusted Christ on their deathbed, that may be a possibility. But friends, you want to have stories that you're able to tell. You don't like them when they're happening to you. I never like them when they're happening to me. I have stories to tell. Stories I could tell, "I hated it when... I hated this when... I hated it in my family when... I hated it in church when... I hated it when I was trying to honor you when... I hated it with my money when... I hated it. I hated it. I hated with my health when..." I have all those things. But all those things remind me of what's coming is so glorious, I won't even care anymore.

We look backwards so that we can yearn for what we're looking forward to. And the reason we partner with other people in the church, and we don't give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing. But all the more as we see the day approaching, is because as we see other people hurting and we're helping them bind their wounds, and binding their wounds, and then they're helping us do that. We as a family of God are getting closer to that day. And it's awesome. And that day's coming soon. But make no mistake about it, beware because following God will cost you.

And I'm not talking just you individually. I'm talking us, as a church. That's why

we're called to support one another, build up one another. If you've truly trusted Christ, then you love other people in a radical way. So their problem is now what? It's your problem. Bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ. This person I know is hurting, guess what? I'm hurting. This person's struggling, then I'm struggling. We're family. That's what grows your faith. You cannot live the gospel on your own and be the fullness of what Christ wants you to be. You can't live apart from the church and be what Christ wants you to be. Get connected. Following Christ will cost you.

Let me get this final one. Beware, endurance is the essential ingredient to Christianity. Endurance is essential to Christianity. It's essential. Now, you'll see this word endurance all the time in your Bible. It might say endurance. It might say steadfastness. It might say perseverance. It's a Greek word, [foreign language 00:49:27]. It means to remain under. Picture a heavy weight on your back, or pressing in your front and back, it's just squeezing. You're like, "I would do anything to get out of this right now. I hate my life circumstance." Hey, that's endurance. Stay the course. Remain under it. We need endurance to follow God. You know what endurance means? It means you're going to get knocked down in life. It means you are going to have hard times in your walk with Christ. It means circumstances are going to unfold for you that you don't like. There are going to be times where you feel so weighted down, you won't even know what to do and people around you won't know what to do to help you. That's what it means.

So keep on walking when those things happen. "Don't you ever give up," that's

what He's saying. You keep praying and you keep walking. Notice what the text says, verse 35. "Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward." Confidence is the word [foreign language 00:50:22]. It means boldness. Being brave stands for boldness. It's courage. Do not throw away your courage. Don't back up. Don't give ground to the enemy. Don't worry about what people outside the church are saying. Stand firm and be bold. Because a great reward is coming. As Christians, I say it all the time, your greatest days are ahead of you. I promise you, if you're a born again believer, your greatest days are ahead of you. We can high five a billion years from now, and you'll say, "Pastor, you were right. The greatest days are ahead of us."

For you have need of endurance. We have need of it. We have need of it so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. In order to make it to the end, you need endurance. If you're a believer, God's going to give you the grace to endure. And if you're a believer, you're going to partner with God with that grace to make it all the way to the end. He who perseveres to the end will be saved. You say, "Well, how do I know if I'm going to persevere?" If you're a Christian, God will give you the grace to get there. And if you get there, then you know God gave you the grace because you were a believer. And when we cross that finish line, when we cross it, it's going to be like, "Yes." There'll be nothing on this planet that you were living for in this moment of vapor that is any greater than what you have coming for you. What's coming is awesome. What's coming is fantastic.

Notice what He says, He quotes [inaudible 00:51:50], chapter two, verses three and four, "In a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay." I tell you

when Jesus is coming back, I've been clear from this from the time we started the church. Do you know when? Soon, very soon. One day soon's going to mean a lot to you. But I know I'm telling you the truth, He's coming and we're seeing it approach quicker. He will not delay, but my righteous one shall live by faith. That means keep on faithing until you see Him. And if He shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in Him. Jesus said, "If you're ashamed of me and my words, I'll be ashamed of you when I come." Don't shrink back. Don't shrink back. Don't turn the other way. Don't get this close to the gospel and then go. If you're that close to the gospel and you're not in Christ, make today the day you trust Christ. If you're in Christ, keep seeking Christ, keep walking the narrow way.

And then he talks to the believers, you're like "But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction." Believers, are we? We're not going to do that. But of those who have faith to preserving of the soul. We're not going to shrink back. If you're a believer, you're not going to shrink back. Now, we have times as believers, we have little seasons in our life, days, moments, sometimes a week, where we're in sin and all this kind of stuff. But then conviction hits us, and like, "I'm not living here anymore. I'm coming back. I got to get right with God. This is wrong. I don't feel joy on the... I need Jesus back." We all have that.

We're not going to shrink back. All of us are going to have moments we stumble. All of us will have moments that we feel like we're going to fall on our face. All of us will have those things. But true believers are going to keep on walking, and keep on walking, and keep on walking, and keep on walking. And when you cross the finish line,

I promise you, in glory, it'll be a great thing. What's coming is better than anything that we can experience here. Look forward to what's happening.

I remember hearing a story from a pastor several years ago, about when he took his sons fishing. They were out on the dock, and his 10-year-old was there with his 3-year-old. And he told the 10-year-old, while he went back into the shed, he said, "Hey, watch your brother. I'll be right back." And he went into the shed to get some equipment to take out in the boat. And all of a sudden, he heard a splash and he heard his 10-year-old son yell, "Dad." And the father turned around and he couldn't see his 3-year-old son. And the 10-year-old's like, "He fell in."

And so he started sprinting back to the dock and dove in, looking for his 3-year-old son. And he couldn't see him anywhere. Water was murky. Couldn't find him. Was holding his breath as long as he could. Came up for air, said, "I'm going back down. I'm going to find my son even if this is the last breath I ever breathe." Starts swimming around, swimming around, swimming around. Finally, feels his son who is clinging to the post, underneath the dock. And he pulls his son up, and both of them are gasping for breath, and they're laid out in the dock, and they can't even talk to each other. And after about five minutes, when they're all coming to and they're able to breathe, the father said to his 3-year-old, "What in the world were you doing down there holding onto the post?" He said, "Dad, I was just waiting for you. I knew you'd come."

Friends, some of you are here today wondering, "Where's God?" Just waiting for him. He already came. He came and He died on the cross for you. He shed His blood

for you. He rose from the dead for you. So no matter what you've done, or no matter how wicked you think you are, no matter how much you think you don't belong, Jesus Christ wants to have a personal relationship with you. Friends, it's the most important message I share as a pastor because all of us are terminal. There's coming a day, we don't know when that day is, but there's a day that's coming.

Some of you remember my friend, Matt Pate, he spoke at Band-e Amir, ALS. He went home to be with the Lord last week. I'm doing his funeral this afternoon. And I remember when I got the news last week, I started crying when his sister called me and told me. And then that shortly shifted into great joy because I'm like, "Here's a guy that suffered with ALS for five years and now he's healthier. He's happier. He's more joyous than he's ever been in his entire life." And guess what else? Amen. And I was telling his sister on the phone. I'm like, "He's not even thinking about us right now. He's not even looking backwards right now, because he's got it so good because he persevered to the end."

That's what this text is telling us. Hang in there, it's worth doing the right thing. It's worth waiting for. Because Jesus Christ is really Lord. Can you welcome that warning passage into your life? Can you hear it as love from God for you? If you're a believer, it should remind you, "Hey, stay on the path." The world may say, "You're silly." The world may say, "You're stupid." The world may say, "You're irresponsible." But you're doing it right. Keep going.

If you're a nonbeliever here and you've been thinking about the truths of God, He's saying, "Hey, make today the day of your salvation. Allow Jesus to be the Lord of

your life." And perhaps for some of you that are right at the precipice of saying, "I'm done with Jesus." He's saying, "You came today, because this is your final warning. Don't go the way of the cliff. Turn and come to me because my mercies are still available for you." We sing the song we're going to sing, Lord, I need you, Lord, I need you. Every hour, I need you. It's for the believer saying, "Lord, I need your help to persevere. I can't do it without you." It's for the nonbeliever saying, "I need you to be in my life. I need you. Every hour, I need you. I'm coming to you, Lord." That's what He wants from us. That's what He wants from you.

So as we conclude our service, as we sing some worship songs, and as we hear from the Lord as we worship, feel free to respond to Him in any way that you want. But don't walk out of here without responding to the God of the universe who's warning you, not because He doesn't love you. He's warning you because His love for you is immense. It's beyond measure. He's been looking for you this whole time. Would you stand with me. Father in Heaven, as we worship your name today, Lord, we gather and we ask you to use your Word to make a difference in our lives.

If you're here today and you've never trusted Jesus as your personal Lord and savior, you've never welcomed him in as the Lord of your life to save you, here's how you can pray. Lord Jesus, I know I'm a sinner and I'm separated from you. But I believe that you're God and that you love me. And that you came for me by dying on a cross and rising from the dead. Jesus, I now confess that I'm turning from my sin and I'm coming running to you. Lord, heal me, save me, set me free.

And for those who are here today, who are believers in Christ, where's the Lord tugging on your heart? Where's He reminding you to repent? Where's He showing you the way to stay on the straight and narrow? Tell Him that you need Him. Sing to Him that you need Him. Trust Him, that you need Him. Father, we give you all the glory and honor and praise in the mighty and matchless name of Jesus. Amen and amen. Could we give God praise today for who He is? Let's worship the Lord.