

## Warning!

[Announce Text] Please keep your Bibles open to Hebrews 6:1-8.

[Scripture Introduction] My name is Brett Sweet and I'm one of the pastors here. We're in a series on the book of Hebrews- which was written to Christians who weren't quite sure they wanted to continue to be Christians.

[Prayer for Illumination] Please pray with me...

[Illustration] Last October a tsunami struck Palu, Indonesia without warning. Three massive waves moved buildings from their foundations and flooded cars. It claimed the lives of at least 1400 people, and this is less than two decades after the colossal tsunami that killed around a quarter of a million people. That disaster led to hundreds of millions of dollars spent on tsunami warning systems...what happened? The city was equipped with tsunami sirens but the earthquake that caused the tsunami had knocked them out. The text-message alert system also failed because many of the cell-phone towers had already been destroyed. It only left for people to yell to one another about the incoming danger- warnings that went ignored. Why do we have warning systems for Tsunamis, Volcanoes, Hurricanes, and Tornadoes? Why did people inhabit watch towers in the rugged mountains of the our continent to look for forest fires? The reason is simple, warnings save lives.

Our text today is one of the most difficult in the New Testament. It is the strongest warning passage of all. Its meaning has divided Christians for centuries around the issue of whether Christians can lose their salvation. But what is clear is that the warning found here in Hebrews 6 was written to save lives. The Hebrews are thinking of walking away from Jesus Christ. They have one foot out the door. Some of them are likely not born again. So the author lovingly confronts them with warning. Our application is simple:

### **[Proposition] Heed God's Warnings**

Warnings aren't meant to be a buzzkill to our fun, but rather grace to keep us alive. We understand warning labels on cigarettes, heavy machinery, and electrical boxes are meant to preserve our physical lives- but how are we to make sense of God's warning here for our spiritual lives? Let's learn together how to

heed God's warnings by looking at three things: **The Immature need God's warnings, those who ignore God's warnings, and help to heed God's warnings.**

### **[Main Point 1] The Immature need God's warnings**

This passage comes to us directly connected to last week's command to grow up- knowing that infant Christians, if they stay that way, will prove to not be Christians at all. So let's review that again briefly

Look with me at vv. 1-3-

*Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.*

The sort of people who need warnings are those who need to grow up. Those whose faith is so elementary that they don't know that their lack of growth may be due to a lack of life. And, as I mentioned last week, these things, though they are foundational and were essential to their earliest instruction as Christians, were being doubted and needing to be retaught over and over again. Is it clear in our minds today that the foundation of our believe is that we are saved by grace alone by putting our faith in Christ? That that faith means repenting of relying on our works? That Jesus will come and raise us from the grave judge? This is where we start as Christians. This foundation is a good thing. But we need to be building on it, not re-laying the same foundation over and over again.

God sees that these people, who are so immature that they are struggling with the most basic aspects of our faith, these sort of people need God's warning. And God gives His warnings out of love for us. Because He loves us. The immature need God's warnings. Now let's look at

### **[Main Point 2] Those who ignore God's warnings**

This is where we'll spend a great deal of our time. We need to examine what those who ignore God's warnings may seem like. Those who ignore God's warnings

[Subpoint 1] Look like Christians

Read along with me as we read from verse 4 through the beginning of v. 6

*For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance...*

This should be very sobering to us. The Bible says repeatedly that we cannot lose our salvation- just go home today and read all of John 6 and listen to Jesus' great promises there. So many people I respect take these words as a means of making sense of those who have fallen away. They looked like Christians, but they weren't- they have seen the Spirit at work, experienced the word of God, been enlightened, but (people would say), they were not converted. I think that that is right- but I don't think that that's the purpose of this passage. The warning is for you and me. The primary purpose isn't to make sense of apostates, but to motivate us to persevere in faith. Do we hear this warning today? Are we deceiving ourselves? Do we know all the right answers but don't truly love God? Those who ignore the warnings look like Christians. They look like you and me.

What else do we learn about those who ignore God's warnings? Those who ignore God's warnings

[Subpoint 2] Continue to harm themselves

Verse 4 says that it's impossible and then we pick up in v. 6

*To restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.*

When Jesus was crucified crowds gathered around. People who were normally enemies, Roman soldiers, Jewish leaders, lawless thieves- were all united in mocking and ridiculing our Savior. They held Him in contempt. They tried to heap shame upon shame upon the One who lovingly came to save them. When people are around Christianity, understand the gospel, and then walk away in unbelief they are continuing to say that Jesus deserves the shame He was treated with. He isn't the Savior, so He deserves to be mocked and ridiculed to this day. And notice the present tense of the verbs "crucifying" and "holding"- they continue to do this. But what is the result? They cut themselves off from their only hope at salvation and they continue to harm themselves.

So those who ignore God's warnings often look like Christians and they continue to harm themselves. But that's not all those who ignore God's warnings

[Subpoint 3] Will experience God's curse

Read vv. 7-8 with me

*For the land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.*

The author tells us to imagine a field. Much work has gone into preparing this field. It's been plowed. The seed has been carefully planted. The rain has come from the heavens. But what happens when what grows isn't what is planted? Instead of life-giving crops we get thistles and thorns- the very things that represent God's curse on the earth for Adam's sin? The field, that land will be burned as the final conclusion to God's curse. And all of this images people. People who have had the benefits of the church. People who have knowingly experienced God's blessing- but born horrible fruit. The God's curse is coming. When it says in v. 8 that it is "near to being cursed" it means that the curse is coming and is almost here. Like someone saying, "When will these apostates be punished?" Answer, "It's nearly here. It's nearly time. They will experience the curse soon."

[Illustration] Harry R. Truman ignored the warnings. On May 17, 1980, Mt. St. Helens had been threatening eruption for nearly two months. People were being evacuated. Earthquakes were getting stronger. A massive bulge was growing on the side of the mountain. But Truman, at age 83 refused to leave his home where he operated Mount St. Helens Lodge. Geologists and local authorities repeatedly told him of the danger. He's reported to have said, "This area is heavily timbered, Spirit Lake is in between me and the mountain, and the mountain is a mile away, the mountain ain't gonna hurt me." But on May 18<sup>th</sup>, the mountain erupted and the largest landslide in recorded history along with a boiling cauldron of muddy water engulfed Spirit lake and buried the site of his lodge under 150 feet of debris. His remains, nor the remains of his 16 cats were ever found.

Harry R. Truman had been warned. Harry R. Truman could have survived the 1980 eruption if he had heeded those warnings. But in his stubbornness. In his unbelief of the weight of the warnings- because they were issued by “geologists with hair down to their butts”- he died. He thought some trees and a small mountain lake could protect him. But the power of the volcano revealed that his hopeful protectors would be unable to keep him safe. And for all his bluster, when his niece showed up in the days before the eruption, to plead for him to leave one last time, he was too afraid to drink the whiskey she brought him because at the time he was unsure whether the shaking was coming from his body or the earthquakes.

[Application] God is warning you today. God is telling you that if you continue to benefit from the work of God’s Spirit in the lives of others, but refuse to make it your own, you are only harming yourself. God’s curse is coming on those who ignore God’s warnings. We think feeble good intentions or wishful thoughts can protect us from His wrath toward us and our sin, but if we really started to see things accurately, we would be shaking in fear. Unless we have a better protector. The author of Hebrews holds out these warnings and he holds out the protector. Jesus’ death on the cross wasn’t just a public shaming. It has eternal and cosmic impact. It was nothing less than Jesus experiencing the volcanic wrath of God in the place of all those who truly heed His warnings. We must not be like those who ignore the warning and look like Christians- we must truly believe- for ourselves. That on the cross the eruption toward us is over and all that remains is God’s favor.

We must heed God’s warnings. Warnings that the immature need. Warnings that are ignored by many- despite appearances, despite the fact these people only harm themselves, and despite the fact that the curse is coming. Is there anything else that can be drawn from this? I think some practical thoughts will help:

So let’s turn to...

### **[Main Point 3] Help to Heed the warnings**

If you are not a Christian, then your main application has just been stated. Heed God’s warning and turn from your sin. But when you do so, know that the you need to count the cost of what it means to follow Jesus for your whole life. Now I want to address a few types of Christians-

[Subpoint 1] First, the mature Christian. You are here and you are not thinking of leaving Christianity. You are faithfully pursuing Christ. It is important for you to note that there may be times in the future where you will need to remember these warnings. Most of us don't spend everyday thinking about what to do if there's a house fire. But if we get caught in the middle of one, the warnings and instructions we received come back to us, "Stop, Drop, and Roll" if we're on fire. Stay close to the floor beneath the smoke. Exit immediately. So if there are days in the future where you find your heart drifting a little bit you'll need to remember these warnings. The point of this passage is not to simply make sense of people who looked like Christians and walked away, it's to warn us to continue faithfully.

True Christians will heed these warnings and cling to Christ. They function like someone driving down a narrow road with danger on either side. If I go off the road to the right I will go off a cliff if I go off the road to the left I will crash into those trees. So I am going to keep my eyes on the road. I'm going to drive boldly forward but carefully forward. I will sin at times and start kicking up dust along the shoulder but I'm going to keep moving toward Christ by trusting in Him as my Savior and Lord. And I know that while I'm on the road laid out before me by Christ Himself I will be safe.

How do you do that? It's supernatural power unleashed through ordinary means. The God who issues warnings initiates a relationship. Maintain and grow your relationship with Him. Listen to Him in the word of God, through Christ-centered sermons and books, through conversations with others who know Him. Remember the saying I've said before and will say again, "Read your Bible when you feel like it because it's a blessing. Read your Bible when you don't feel like it because it's a warning." Listen to Him when He corrects you, respond with repentance. Speak to Him in prayer. Be honest with Him. Voice your struggles to obey and believe. Ask for power to change. Ask for power to persevere. Go to home group and experience fellowship and accountability. These are practical ways to heed God's warning.

[Subpoint 2] Second, some of you here are Christians and you are hurting. When you heard this read your thoughts went to people you love. Parents. Children. Best friends. Close members of your church family. Do not give up hope. When

this passage states that it is impossible to restore them again to repentance I believe the present tense verbs of verse 6 are important. So long as they are continuing to crucify and shame Jesus, so long as they continue to hold Him in contempt- there is no hope. But God gives dead people life. In Christ people become new creations. If that crucifying and holding in contempt suddenly becomes past tense, by God's Spirit, they will turn to Jesus in faith. Let's pray and pray and pray for these people together.

[Subpoint 3] This also means that we all need to have room in our theology for the fact that people may look like Christians, they might be leaders, for not just months and years but for multiple decades and they may not be genuinely converted. If this were the only passage of Scripture, I would be confident telling you that this seems to teach that genuine Christians can lose their salvation. But the overwhelming majority of the New Testament, and the very nature of Jesus' death as our substitute on the cross clearly states that those who put their faith in Jesus will be saved and receive eternal life. That Jesus will raise them up on the last day. That no one, including yourself, is able to snatch you out of the Father's hand- because He's stronger than anyone else. So this means that those who "fall away" weren't Christians. For those of you who are sports fans you know that sometimes there are lots of highlights for one team, yet they lose at the finish. Having said that, we should take people at their word and by their fruit within the household of faith. Let's not hold everyone under a constant microscope- but let's be prepared that we may have some heartaches ahead of us from people who don't really believe. And let's be confident that God knows what's really going on and that He cares for us and that He will use these warnings to preserve His people to the end.

[Subpoint 4] I want to address several of you who are facing big transitions. You might be getting close to graduating from high school. You might be getting close to retirement. You might be thinking of a move or career change. In your spiritual life you need to be ruthless. Do not assume that because things have been going pretty well in your current place in life that a quick change will make things easier. You need to believe the gospel every day. People who were self-deceived probably began with just taking a little break. It's just a "season." I have a new baby. The kids are in lots of sports. There's no great church in the town, but college is only four years and I'll be home for the long breaks. We'll be able to fit

church in between our travels and golf trips. If you are looking for excuses to be unfaithful today, don't expect that to change tomorrow.

On the other side, take the long view. In Hebrews, salvation is often used in future language. Salvation has begun now but it will be completed most fully on the last day. Are you cultivating habits that will serve you well for decades? Are you ministering to those in your home group and your family in a way that is helping them continue to grow over the coming years? Are you an encourager? Are you receiving encouragement? We all need these regularly- to be told that we are growing up. That we are living more in the freedom and grace of Christ. That God is pleased with us in our simple trust in Him. That God loves us.

[Conclusion] Warning your children not to put their fingers under a moving lawn mower blade is a sign of loving protection. Warning people of the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse is loving. Warning citizens of tornados, Tsunamis, or Volcanoes is a way to protect them. And God's warning to His people of the danger of falling away from Christ is a way that He loves us and will protect us. Let's heed His warnings together.