

2021.01.17 Sunday Sermon <Not to Have a Hardened Heart>

Matthew 5:3-5

³ *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

⁴ *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

⁵ *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

Exodus 11:9-10

⁹ *The Lord had said to Moses, "Pharaoh will refuse to listen to you—so that my wonders may be multiplied in Egypt."* ¹⁰ *Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh, but the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go out of his country.*

Let us start this sermon by looking at the image on the screen. This is one of the images from the capitol riot on January 6th. What happened on this date is very disheartening. I started to ask the question - *why did this happen?* I prepared this message after thinking about this question for some time.

When human organs start to harden, this leads to loss of life. When we look at today's scripture, we can see Pharaoh's heart hardening as he tortures the Israelites. Let us look deeper into this chapter, not only to learn about Pharaoh vs. Moses, but to look deep into our own hearts.

1. Symptoms of Having a Hardened Heart?

As we are all aware, some of the symptoms of COVID-19 virus are fever, coughing, shortness of breath, fatigue, body ache or sore throat. Similarly, there are symptoms for hardened heart when we look at Pharaoh in Exodus.

- **Exodus 7:13**

¹³ *Yet Pharaoh's heart became hard and he would not listen to them, just as the Lord had said.*

- **Exodus 8:19**

¹⁹ *the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the Lord had said.*

- **Exodus 10:7**

⁷ *Pharaoh's officials said to him, "How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the people go, so that they may worship the Lord their God. Do you not yet realize that Egypt is ruined?"*

While we see Pharaoh not listening to the Lord or anyone else, we see the opposite in Moses. When we compare the two, we can say that Moses is the clear winner who was able to give glory to the Lord.

- **Deuteronomy 34:4**

⁴ *Then the Lord said to him, "This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it."*

- **Exodus 18:24**

²⁴ *Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said.*

2,500 years ago, the Chinese philosopher Confucius asked Lao-tzu, the founder of Taoism, "What is Tao?" Lao-tzu opened his mouth but said nothing. Confucius left with a smile, but his students were puzzled. Confucius explained,

“Lao-tzu has passed us the Tao. In his mouth, there are no teeth but only a tongue. The hard ones (teeth) died, but the soft one (the tongue) lives; the soft power is stronger than the hard power. That’s the Tao!”

Let us ask ourselves, "Am I able to listen to the Lord's message and others surrounding me?"

2. Causes of Having a Hardened Heart?

Now that we learned the symptoms of having a hardened heart, what causes our heart to harden? Let us look at Pharaoh again in Exodus. Pharaoh's sins grew and grew, to the point where the Lord left him alone. For this is the biggest punishment the Lord can give.

- **Exodus 11:10**

¹⁰ *Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh, but the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not let the Israelites go out of his country.*

- **Exodus 8:32**

³² *But this time also Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go.*

Again, contrast to the Pharaoh, Moses was a humble man who put others before him.

- **Numbers 14:19**

¹⁹ *In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now.”*

- **Numbers 12:13**

¹³ *So Moses cried out to the Lord, “Please, God, heal her!”*

- **Exodus 32:32**

³² *But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.”*

In Himalaya, when they trade sheep, they actually look at the sheep's personality instead of the size. In order to test their personalities, they take the sheep to the mountains. The ones that go up to the mountain (the lean sheep) have better personality compared to the one which just rolls around the valley (the heavier sheep).

3. Solution to Healing a Hardened Heart?

The most important question is, "what are the solutions to soften our hearts?" Let us look into Acts and see how the Lord was able to soften the most hardened heart - transforming Saul to Paul.

- **Acts 9:17**

¹⁷ *Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”*

It was the Holy Spirit that allowed Saul to become Paul. Just as the hard soil receives the rain to become softer, Saul received the Holy Spirit from the Father and was able to change.

Story of Pastor Melvin Trotter (1870 - 1940) - Prior to becoming a pastor in Chicago, he was an alcoholic. When his child died of hunger, he even took the child's shoes during the funeral so that he can trade for alcohol. Twenty-years later, he gave his testimony to his church. He told them, he was so filthy inside and out. However, the only person to save him was the Lord. Aside from sharing his messages to many churches, he also helped and rescued those who were suffering from alcoholism.

In addition to receiving the Holy Spirit, we must refresh our souls with the Word of God.

- **1 Corinthians 3:6**

⁶ *I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.*

- **1 Corinthians 16:18**

¹⁸ *For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition.*

Lastly, we must crack down the harden soil with the Word of God to fully humble our hearts.

- **1 Corinthians 9:27**

²⁷ *No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

- **Matthew 11:29**

²⁹ *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

An abbot was in charge of the educating a smart and promising young monk. He wanted to teach the young monk how to be humble deep within his heart. One day the abbot showed the monk a hardened soil and asked to pour water in to the soil. The young monk poured water into it, and the water flowed down to the side. The abbot began to crush the hardened soil with a hammer. He continued hitting the soil with the hammer and said to the young monk, "This soil is too hard to absorb water. That's why you have to break it. Nothing grows in a proud heart. If you don't keep breaking it down, you will never be able to soften your heart.

In order to soften our hearts, we must follow these three solutions:

- *Let it rain and let the Holy Spirit pour down on us*
- *Pour the water by searching and reading the Lord's words*
- *Break the harden soil to reach deep into our hearts*

Lord Father, let your rain pour onto all of us and let your words seep into our hearts and let your words truly break the harden hearts and minds.