

**Scripture Reading: Acts 28:23**

**“So when [the Jewish leaders] had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. 24 And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. 25 So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, 26 saying, 'Go to this people and say: "Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive; 27 For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them." 28 "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" 29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves. ”**

## **"Paul Confronts the Apostates"**

**What we see in our text this morning is rejection of the Savior Jesus by those who were God’s covenant people and it brings up the discussion of apostasy. An apostate is someone within the Church who rejects Jesus: For the children, apostasy means defection, departure, revolt or rebellion. We expect those with hardened hearts in the world to simply reject anything we say about Jesus and we know they will end up in hell if they do not repent.**

- **We consider them to be unbelievers because they have never been a part of God’s Covenant people nor shown any interest in the things of God. We simply pray that God would have mercy on them.**

**The more difficult matter is to consider those who reject Jesus who are members of his covenant people: What we call apostates.**

- **Those who were circumcised in the Old Testament and those who are baptized in the New Testament.**
- **Is their apostasy real? And if it is, what does it mean to say they were in the Covenant in the first place?**

**Yes, debates on this subject have raged for the entire two thousand year history of the Church, and I don’t expect to be able to solve all aspects of it this morning. However, it is what we see in our text, so I will attempt to give us some Biblical guidelines and examples to help frame our thinking about this important subject. It comes to us in our text this morning as many of the Jews reject what Paul had shared about Jesus from morning until evening...**

- **As they leave Paul gives them a final warning from the Prophet Isaiah.**

**The warning is quoted from the sixth chapter of Isaiah right after the Prophet appears before God’s throne and has his sins cleansed by the coal from God’s Throne... A scene that we remember often here at Church of the King and one that graphically pictures our need of Christ’s sacrifice to forgive our sin.**

**If we are honest, the Lord’s response to Isaiah’s willingness to serve is a bit troubling even here in Isaiah:**

**8 “Also I heard the voice of Jehovah, saying: "Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." 9 And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' 10 "Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy, And shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed."**

- **We might be tempted to say that this is best left as part of the shadowy parts of the prophets that are difficult to understand and just move on into the New Testament.**

Well, not only does the Apostle Paul quote this portion of Isaiah to these Jews... But these happen to be the MOST quoted verses of the Old Testament that we find in the New Testament! God's words to Isaiah are quoted in all four Gospels, here in Acts & Paul also uses them to explain the apostasy of the nation of Israel in Romans chapter 11. Jesus uses these words to begin his ministry, as related by Matthew, Mark and Luke AND John quotes Isaiah at the end of His ministry, where we read in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of his Gospel:

John 12: "35 Then Jesus said to them, "A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. 36 While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them. 37 But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, 38 that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" 39 Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: 40 "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with their eyes, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them."

- In ALL six places where these words are quoted, as well as when they were spoken by the Lord to Isaiah, the audience is God's covenant people!

This should cause a bit of heart-burn for Calvinists and other evangelicals who believe in the security of salvation! Making it a bit personal, should Thomas be able to know that the salvation he has claimed this morning at his baptism is secure or should he be concerned he might one day turn away from Jesus?

- The Biblical answer is YES he can know & yes he should be concerned.

Jesus said that His sheep hear his voice and that no one can take them out of His hand... If Thomas, or any of us, have heard the voice of Jesus, then we are His sheep and we can know that our salvation will never be lost: As we read last week from Romans, NOTHING can separate us from the love of Jesus, not even us! *[that last part is the real comfort!]*

On the other hand IF we have heard the voice of Jesus and He has changed our nature, then we are no longer children of Adam and should no longer act like we are children of Adam!

- In other words, if we claim to have heard the voice of Jesus but NOTHING changes in our lives, then at some point we will be seen as false brethren... From a human standpoint we will lose our salvation.

As John says in I John 2:24 speaking of the apostate anti-Christ of his day... "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us."

This balance is the Biblical road we should travel when it comes to knowing our salvation is secure, and again it has two very dangerous ditches on either side. On the one side is the ditch of presumption: Someone who becomes a Christian and then goes out and does whatever they please: Claiming to be 'saved' no matter what they do. The other ditch is full of fear and anxiety where we are never sure that Jesus is our Savior always worrying about whether our commitment is real.

As I have often shared, the Lord used Colossians chapter two for MANY years to drive home this point to me: Colossian 2:6 simply says, "6 As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving."

- I had to learn that because as I had NOTHING to do with getting myself into the Kingdom, thus I could not take myself out of the Kingdom!

Paul goes on to remind us that we should not allow anyone else to disturb us either, which is why you hear me expose the lies of the world so often!

At verse 8 Paul continues “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; 10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality & power.” We are complete in Christ and that is the true source of our security!

- Still, Apostasy is a serious matter and as such it has been greatly debated right down to our day.

What I want to leave with us today, especially for our children, are some Biblical guidelines and examples that should help frame our thinking on this subject. We are not all going to agree in every detail, but I believe we must stay within the framework I have outlined to be Biblical. *[staying on the road!]*

Part of the confusion on this subject comes with the various terms that we use: We refer to someone as being ‘saved’ or even use the more Biblical terms of regeneration or born-again.

- You also have the broader understanding of salvation with election or predestination.

When we are thinking about the security of our salvation and certainly when we are discussing it with others, we need to make sure we are using the same definition of these terms. If when someone says a person is ‘saved’ they mean that he or she is one of the elect, then by definition those who are saved cannot lose their salvation. If on the other hand by ‘being saved’ we mean someone who makes a decision for Jesus, joins a church or even is baptized, then we know that some such people are not all truly elect: Some can later become apostates.

Jesus gave us a very important parable to help us understand all of this which we will look at in a moment... But first I want us to consider where much of the confusion comes from: You see IF we consider salvation from God’s perspective it is pretty straight forward:

In eternity past the members of the God-head covenanted together to save a particular numbers of Adam’s children from the ravages of sin that would come as a result of the fall. To accomplish this, Jesus was sent as the Son of Man, born of a virgin and sacrificed at Calvary to pay for the sins of God’s people.

Jesus was then raised in power, seated at God’s right hand and the Holy Spirit was poured out to bring all of the elect to salvation. The elect are regenerated as their hearts of stone are turned to hearts of flesh, they are given the gift of saving faith with which they repent and claim Jesus as their Savior. Then this same faith helps them to live righteous lives doing the works they were created in Christ Jesus to perform and at the last day they will be raised and glorified as those whose names were written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

IF we were privileged to watch history from God’s throne we would see how this works out in the life of each and every one of those God has chosen and more fully understand how and even why those who are not chosen are condemned already as Jesus explained to Nicodemus.

- Our problem is that as creatures we must observe all of this in history and sometimes that gets very messy.

Sometimes we think someone is saved when they are really lost and sometimes someone we would never think could be saved is one of the elect. To help us think more Biblically about this subject, let me turn now to one of the most important parables given by Jesus and some examples from the Old and New Testaments.

- The parable that I have in mind is given by all three synoptic Gospel writers and appears to be one of the first told by Jesus, and is in fact where Jesus first quotes the passage from the Prophet Isaiah that Paul used in our text this morning...

We should be familiar with the parable of the Sower where seed is cast in various places. The Disciples come to Jesus and ask: “Why do You speak to them in parables?” 11 He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.”

- Brothers & sisters, PLEASE understand that this promise about knowing mysteries continues down to our day: It applies to us!

12 "For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. 13 Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive; 15 For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.'"

- Jesus then assures His disciples, and all of us, that we as His sheep are not left in such darkness because our hearts have been changed: Our eyes have been opened!

16 "But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; 17 for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. 18" Therefore hear the parable of the sower: *[let us listen with ears of faith!]* 19 "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. 20 But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. 22 Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. 23 But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

Now there is very little dispute over the meaning of the first and last examples:

Those who are not elect, those who remain as children of Adam have hearts of stone and cannot receive the Word of God... It simply bounces off of their heart of stone. Those who are elect have had their hearts changed: They are the good soil that can receive the seed and then bear fruit: Some a little and some much!

**BUT** what do we do with the two examples in the middle?

- Were they elect or not?
- Were they saved or not?
- Did they have hearts of stone or hearts of flesh?

IF we were watching from God's perspective these would be easy questions to answer, but we often see such cases right in the middle... Because they did not persevere, neither could have been elected, neither in the end was saved and thus they did not receive new hearts, or good soil.

- Just as we see three different types of fruitful soil, some bearing 30-fold, some 60-fold and some 100-fold, so I believe this parable also illustrated various types of depravity.

First we have a hardened heart that simply rejects God's Word, next comes a hardened heart that is willing to hear God's Word and appears to respond but has no real faith, and finally a hardened heart that is so surrounded by the things of the world that God's Word is choked out.

- All three different in appearance, but in the end all three are lost.

So again, it is very easy to see the difference between the first and last examples: With one there is no response and with the other we see growth and real fruit.

**It is more difficult for us to judge the two in the middle...**

- **And this is where I think some Biblical examples might be helpful.**

**I think we can all agree that King David and the Apostle Peter would be examples of the good soil... Of course both David & Peter remind us that we can even make mistakes when it comes to the good soil:**

- **IF we came upon King David about a year into his sins of murder and adultery with Bathsheba, would we not wonder about whether he was saved?**

**Or consider this: What if we had read only that one of the disciples was going to betray Jesus, but not told who:**

- **Then we heard Jesus tell Peter, “get thee behind me Satan.”**

**Or if we watched Peter deny Christ three times in his greatest hour of need, would we not wonder about his salvation thinking he was the betrayer?**

- **And yet we know that in the end both David and Peter were among God’s elect & they were brought to glory despite all their short-comings.**
- **But we also see Biblical examples of those who are lost and these can help us understand apostasy better than most of the books or articles I have read on the subject!**

**The two I have in mind relate well with King David and the Apostle Peter: I want us to consider King Saul and the Disciple Judas Iscariot. Judas was certainly NOT one of the elect & most think King Saul proved himself to be a reprobate in the end as well.**

- **The problem with both of these men is that they were NOT examples of the seed falling on the road.**

**In both cases we see them responding to God’s Word: King Saul is anointed King, he is filled with the Spirit, functions as God’s prophet and wins many of God’s battles.**

- **But in the end, we see King Saul, as Jamie Soles so aptly puts it in song, attending the Last Supper of the damned with the witch at Endor.**
- **And then we have Judas, who I believe is the best Biblical example of an apostate that we have, whose life can teach us many things.**

**Again, if we had shown up before the last supper, and had not had the benefit of reading the Gospels, we would have seen Judas as one of the disciples. IN fact, even the disciples who walked with Jesus & Judas did not know that he was going to be an apostate *[explain]* We know that Judas was NOT one of the elect and yet, he was circumcised, he was chosen by Jesus, he was filled by the Spirit, was able to heal the sick and cast out demons and was disciplined by Jesus Himself.**

- **Yet, in the end Judas chose to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver!**

**So what does all of this mean for us? Do we all have to go around wondering if we are just another Judas? Can we know that our salvation is secure?**

- **The answer to the first question is NO and the answer to the second question is a glorious YES!**

**Again it is Judas who helps us to get the answer to the question about our doubts right: I would argue that two people knew that Judas was not one of the elect:**

- **Jesus and Judas himself!**

**Remember, Judas was stealing from the money bag and when he innocently asked Jesus at the Last Supper, “is it I” he already had the silver in his pocket.**

- **Not only will sheep be sheep and goats be goats in the end...**

**But in their heart of hearts they know who they are now.**

**As I said earlier, those who have heard the voice of Jesus will not be lost and they can know that they are secure in the hand of their Savior Jesus!**

- **But what if I have doubts or fall into grievous sin? ...Some may ask.**
- **What if I don't have my theology right? ...Others may ask.**

**Again, the Biblical examples I have suggested should help: No one who knows the Psalms of David could believe that he never had doubts and we certainly know about his sins. The sign that David had a new heart and was bearing fruit for the Kingdom was the fact that he always looked to God's promises to ease his doubts and honestly confessed his sin when he was confronted with his sin.**

- **King Saul wallowed in his doubts and fears and made excuses when confronted with his sin.**

**And of course Peter should be an encouragement to us all: He wavered in his faith as he walked to Jesus on the water, he was rebuked as one who promoted Satan's agenda, he denied Jesus in His greatest hour of need and even went fishing after the resurrection! And lest someone say all of this happened BEFORE he was filled with the Spirit at Pentecost, the Apostle Paul had to call the Spirit-filled Peter on the carpet for refusing to eat with his Gentle brothers.**

- **Yet we know in the end that Peter knew the Savior and was his faithful witness!**

**I was not sure how to bring this discussion to a close until I read Psalm 73 yesterday as part of our suggested reading on the Church calendar. It is a Psalm I have often quoted when dealing with despair and discouragement because Asaph had gotten pretty low, but listen to how he concludes after seeing things from God's perspective:**

**"21 Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. 22 I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You. 23 Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. 24 You will guide me with Your counsel, And afterward receive me to glory. 25 Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. 26 My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. 27 For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry. 28 But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in Jehovah God, That I may declare all Your works."**

- **May we always be those who trust in Jesus and declare all His works!**
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### **Communion Meditation: John 6:28**

**"54 Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed... 60 Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" 61 When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you? 62 What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? 63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. 64 But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. 65 And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father." 66 From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.**

**67 Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" 68 But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."**