

THE HARDENING OF THE HEART

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GREETINGS: It's a great blessing for me to just bring you the Gospel of God's grace. Today I am going to be teaching from Romans chapter 9. We are going to be talking about the hardening of Pharaoh's heart and what Paul tried to communicate in Romans chapter 9. So many times, we read that passage and we just feel that we are just looking at a God that is not just... A God that is not loving because one day He is just decides to supernaturally cause people to be hardened to not believe in Him. That is what the scripture seemingly says that God just hardens the heart of Pharaoh. We are going to look at that and Romans chapter 9 in what Paul is saying.

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for Your love and Your kindness and Your grace. Thank You that You care for us. Thank You that Your love is shed abroad in our hearts --- the message of Your hope. Thank You that we can know that You care for us in a great, great way... not just in a way that is measured by the shallowness of how things go in this world. But it is so great that it is greater than this life itself. It is the extension of this life. It's the resurrection and Your life poured out into our hearts. Thank You that You encourage us and strengthen us every day and that we can have joy in the midst of whatever is going on in this world. You are a good God that love us. Thank You, Holy Spirit, that You will powerfully speak through me today and encourage every person that is hearing this message. Amen and amen

I want to read from Philippians 4:6. The reason why I'm going through this passage is because there are many people who are struggling in this time. Many are going through a very difficult time because of the lockdowns in the different countries. Shortage start to settle in people not having money. People are really suffering. Some people that we know of here in South Africa are not having food to eat, really going through very, very difficult times. You might be facing that difficult time. You might be making your calculations and seeing that you are going to be there soon not knowing what to do in these difficult times.

I want to encourage you by reading **Philippians 4:6 *Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.***

It says, "Be careful for nothing..." Some translations say, "Be anxious for nothing..." I like the word, careful, there because it talks about taking care. When you take care of something is when you take responsibility for its life. So what God is saying is, "Don't take the responsibility of making this lockdown end. Don't make it your responsibility or your life, your own responsibility, wherein you must see that you live a long life.

Who, by being anxious and worrying, can add one cubit to his stature? Who can grow three inches taller by just the simple act of worrying about it? Who can change the color of his hair? We can, normally, dye it but if you look at how it comes out of your head, who can change that color? If you are gray, who by worrying can make it not gray anymore? It is impossible! You cannot do it! You can, maybe, have more gray hair by worrying.

Paul says, "Take care of nothing. Who can become taller? Who can have longer arms... longer legs? Who can have that by worrying? Nobody! You cannot add one inch to your stature by worrying. In the Greek understanding, worrying is explained by you trying to take care and making yourself the responsible one to make things work. You cannot do that.

Make your requests know to God through prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. Yesterday somebody spoke to me about this. It's a time when we wouldn't maybe call somebody and say, "Can you pray with me." We wonder, and this is something that I thought about before and still thinking about it, is why would we call people to agree with us about something? How does that make sense if we can talk to God ourselves? But there is just something inside us that makes us want to speak to somebody about our situation. We want him to pray for us. I believe the reason why we do that is because we are family orientated beings. Whenever we go through difficult times... let's say that you were in a car accident or you scratched your car, or your dog died or something like that happened. What are you going to do? You're going to call your family. You tell them, "This is what I am going through. This is what is happening to me."

I believe, for the very same reason, we speak to friends about our situation and what we are going through. We want them to know what we are going through and be in communication to God about that. It's just a family act. We find Paul saying that. He says, "Pray with me." He thanked people for praying for him. He even said in one place, "Pray that God would deliver us from wicked and unreasonable men."

I also find that when I am in a time where I am very grateful, I would just say to my wife, "Let us just thank God for this beautiful thing that is in our lives." We would sit together and thank God and I find there's a unity in that thanking of God, where we do that together. Or, on the other side, we can also go and say when we are in a difficult time. Not long ago, Helena and I did the same thing. You know, there are some people in this world that just want to make life very difficult for you. We just had somebody that wants to just put our ministry through a very difficult time and Helena and I just said, "Let us pray about this." We sat together and we prayed about it. The beauty about this thing and how it works, the dynamics of prayer together, is that as we were speaking to God about it, and I heard what she was saying to God. In my mind I was thinking and pondering, the Lord spoke to me. What He basically said to me is, "Bertie, I gave you this ministry to minister to people. If I cannot keep it and keep it safe, how can you ever do that? If I can't do it, how will you?"

See, the thing is, the moment you hear about something that is not good, you want to take care of it. Where God says, "Don't take care of it." That means don't make it your responsibility to be the provider of safety and life for that specific thing. The greatest thing that He is mentioning is, especially if you go to the cross reference in Matthew 6, He is talking about your very own life... what you will eat, what you will drink, what you will wear. He says, "Don't take care of these things for God takes care of you! God cares for you!" Now some might say, "But, should I just be irresponsible and not do anything?" No, let God take the care, the responsibility, on Him to make things work. Then, as He does that, He will work things in your heart to do and you just follow after that and that is quite simple.

The point that I want to make is that in these times, husbands and wives pray together. Speak to God about this. Do some practical things as pertaining to this where you are just speaking to God. In my family I don't make a massive thing out of that of hours and hours. We just keep it short and simple. We pray about that. We encourage one another in that time. As we are talking about the greatness of God there is mutual encouragement. Then later on, in the weeks to come, we would talk about what God has done in our hearts while we were speaking to God. That is just how it is. Most of the time when Helena and I pray about something, it maybe lasts ten minutes... maybe 15 max. And we get encouraged and we continue with our lives. It's just short and simple. Glory to God!

It's not some "magical" thing we try to do to work ourselves up. It's a communication that we have together with real and a true God. Now, I want to encourage you to get your family together and pray about things. Talk to God and let everybody partake in that if that is what you feel to do. That is what Helena and I do when we, as a family, want to thank God for something. We all come together and we thank God. When we want to pray about something that is a family matter, we all come together and we talk to God about it and each one gets his opportunity to speak and we agree together and that is very encouraging.

I would like to encourage you to do that and to know that God is the One that carries the responsibility to bring forth life in these times.

I want to encourage you with this passage:

Matthew 6:25 *Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor yet for your body, what you shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?*

Take no thought for your life is, basically, the word anxious or to take care. When you take a thought it is not when a thought comes to your mind. It is basically when you are saying, "How can I fulfill the responsibility to make this thing work?" It's like in ministry. I mean, if you are a preacher, a lot of you must be going through terrible times especially those who have the whole setup of a church with hundreds of people gathering on a Sunday. The whole dynamic of your fellowship was around that and now during these times those people are starting to listen to other people online. The giving is down and you don't know what is going on.

When it says here, ***Take no thought for your life***, that would basically be that you don't have to take responsibility to make this work. The way that I would reason is this way: Well, if that is what we have done up to now and we've gathered like that and that is now come to an end say, "Thank You, God, that I could be part of that and that I could encourage people that way." This is what my prayer would be: "My desire is that I would love to continue to minister to people because that is what is burning in my heart. I thank You, Father, that I can just say that I allow You to bring that forth in my life. Amen" And that would be it.

If you have a desire in your heart for something, it is actually just God asking you, "Is it okay if I bring it forth?" Then you just yield to that or just basically say, "God, it is okay." The scripture says in Psalm 37 that you sit back and you rest and He brings it forth.

One thing I have also seen, and that the Lord has spoken to me as some practical encouragement, is the way I got to where I am is by simply resting in the finished work of Jesus, His death and His resurrection, to rest in the hope of the Gospel and Him bringing forth His fruit in my life. And now when there is a lockdown and when things don't work out the way we think it should work out, why are we now going to jump through ten hoops to try and make something work? That would be a sign of you taking thought of, or being anxious, or you saying, "I'm taking responsibility to make this thing work because I think God cannot." God will still make it work.

Mark 6:26 *Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns.* You can say, "God, I'm not serving and reaping now. I'm not working. I'm not doing something like that. I'm at home. I lost my job... or whatever." It says, "Look at the birds of the air: ***for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns: yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much better than they?*** You are of greater value than the birds of the air and God will take care of you.

Helena and I were sitting and praying about what is going on because we look at the massive poverty that is breaking out in South Africa. I figure we live in a third world country. The government can make a lot of promises and try to keep them but we simply don't have the infrastructure to get things to the people fast enough. I was looking at all of this and how many thousands of people will, according to my mind and if you just look at the stats, they are going to be without food, really with great hunger. I was praying about that and saying to the Lord, "I want to see what I can do." And I felt the Lord saying to me, "Bertie, don't take responsibility to care for all the people. I will work in your heart on what you need to do. But I am the Father of all the people in the country and the promise is that they can look to the birds of the air that don't sow or reap or gather into barns, for I am their heavenly Father that feeds them. I will also feed them. You cannot become their father! I am their Father. It's not your responsibility to see that the whole of South Africa is fed. It is My responsibility and I will put in your heart what you can do."

Helena and I just felt in our heart that we are going to just take two or three families and care for them, making sure that they have rent money and food and everything for this whole lockdown time. That is what we can do and we will encourage other people that do have finances, that can do that, to do that. I want to tell you that if we, that do have in this time, find God bringing forth this in our heart and we can do it even if it's just for one family. If we do have in this time, by the power of the Holy Spirit, can care for one or two families, I'll tell you that we will get more done than what the government can ever do. It would be much quicker and there would be no corruption involved. There would be so many things not involved. It would just be something that is really simple and that would not be a one-man governed thing. It would simply be God giving life to people.

So, I want to encourage you. Look at the birds of the air. They sow not neither do they reap nor gather into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them. You know, in this time, there were some people that got really ill. It's the lockdown. It looks as if they are losing their business and then they got very ill. Some people in our web church are in the hospital in a critical situation and all those kinds of things. And I find that those people still have the joy of God on account of looking at the Good News of Jesus and God taking care of them. If it's true for them, it is true for all of us. Let us not make it our responsibility to make things work.

I want to end off with this and then I will get into the message in Romans chapter 9: When we look at Acts 14 from verse 17 onwards, Paul comes and says that the people that were not believing in God, the Gentiles, God never left Himself without the testimony in that He gave them rain and He gave them seasons and good crops and all those things and their hearts were filled with joy... and this was while they worshipped idols! So, there are no five principles that we can do in order for God to take care of us. God cares for us! Let us simply just believe in that! And that is all and God cares for you! You might say, "But there are poor people in the world. What if I become poor?" You know, the scripture does say that we will always have the poor with us. There will always be poor people. Yet, the scriptures also say, "Behold, there are those who are poor of this world, who are rich in faith." So, what it means is, rich in faith talks about flooded with the message of the resurrection and the hope, the fruit of the Spirit, joy and comfort and all those kinds of things.

2 Corinthians clearly states that those who were poor were the greatest givers. They were flooded by the grace of God and they were givers. That means that they didn't lack in joy and contentment and life. It is just a lie to think that our life consists in the abundance of our possessions. The beautiful thing is the moment we realize that our life consists in God giving us life, we find a lot of these fears falling off. And I want to tell you this: The biggest thing is, "What if this happened? What if that happened?" I want to tell you the other side of the 'what if?': God is already there and He has provided for you! Jesus could have said, "What if I die on the cross? What if I get buried? The Father was already on the other side of the 'what if' and there's always resurrection and there's always life! Amen

Father, thank You so much that I can pray for people right now. Maybe you are going through a difficult time. I just want to talk to God about you and your situation. Let's see what comes forth from this:

Father, thank You so much that I can pray for people right now. There are people that are worried about their children. There are people 'taking care' of making it their responsibility to think of how they are going to make their businesses work, how they are going to get everything to work. I thank You, Father, that I can lift them up to You. Thank You that You give them a sound mind, a mind that understands the dimension of Your love and understanding that can see how high, how wide, how deep, and how long Your unending robust love is towards them. I thank You, Father, that You bring peace to their hearts through the Holy Spirit and that their minds are enlightened knowing what is the hope of the calling, Your riches towards them and the power that brings that forth. I thank You that would be the case for them, in Jesus' mighty name.

Right there where you are, you can just say from the depth of your heart as you feel this, speak your heart to the Father. Say, "Father, I'm afraid. I've taken care. I've tried to take care of my situation because my mind was not so much on how You care for me. But, thank You that You have shown in the Resurrection, that You took care of Jesus. Although everything looked like you weren't taking care of Him. You were taking the best care of Him for where He is now, He can never die. He's above all temptation, living forever, the fullness of the Godhead bodily!" Just say that to God. See the Resurrected Christ. See what the Father has done. He is God's declaration over you. He is the Apocalypse, the revealing of what God has in mind for you and how things will be in the end. Glory to God!

Thank You, Father. You are my Father. You are the Father of Bertie Brits, Helena Brits, my children. You're the Father of this ministry. You're the Father of my friends and You are the One that gives life. Thank You that we can rest in that. Amen and amen! Glory to God!

TODAY'S MESSAGE

I want to preach on Romans 9. I have already preached up to about verse 14. I am just going to go quickly through that and explain what is going on in Romans 9. When it comes to Pharaoh, we think that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh for the purpose of showing His power. So, here is like this egocentric God who goes to Pharaoh and tells him, "Let My people go!" But the Pharaoh is not going to let the people go because God has 'magically' hardened his heart and now he cannot let the people go. Now He is going to bring all these plagues to Pharaoh to show His power so that the children of Israel can have something to remember when they are in the days of going through difficult times. Now that sounds as if there is something a little bit wrong with God.

If we believe in our heart and confess with our mouth, we shall be saved. Hallelujah! For righteousness is not by the law but by faith. Glory to God! And we still sit with Romans 9 in the back of our minds here, chewing back, chewing on our conscience there and saying "But what does that mean? What does that mean?"

I must say that I have walked with this passage for a long time in my heart and the Lord has shown me never to throw any passages away but it's like a puzzle, You don't know where it fits. Don't throw it away. Just put it aside and as you build the others, you will find its place. I think, to a certain degree, I found the place where this fits and I am going to share it with you. It's going to be a bit technical. It's going to be a bit theological. It is going to, maybe, be not easy. It can be boring for some and very exciting for others.

Romans 9:

1 I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,

2 That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.

3 For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:

I just want to say something here. Here we find Paul, as pertaining to the Jews, having continual sorrow. That means that Paul wasn't always full of smiles, everything always going right. There were times when he just had continual sorrow for his kinsmen. That doesn't mean that he was sorrowful from morning until evening, never smiling. He talks about the Jews and his own kinsmen. When he would think of them, there was something sorry about that in his heart. He was carrying sorrow.

Romans 9:

4 Who are Israelites; to whom pertain the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises;

5 Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

6 Not as though the word of God has taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:

Verse 6 is such a radical passage that I think you maybe just write it and send it and see what happens because if you would say that in public to the Jews I tell you that you can be killed. What he was saying there is, "I am in continual sorrow for my kinsmen. If you read in chapter 10, he is basically says that they are not saved for they are not using the righteousness of God but they stand in front of God working up their own righteousness by the law. God has loved them. He has given everything to them. They were basically supposed to be a light to the Gentiles but they were not. They misunderstood the whole thing and they all became self-centered.

If you read on, I'm just going to throw this in right now, he starts to liken them to Egypt where the Egyptians were supposed to be the people blessed by God, through Joseph, for the purpose of providing grain also for Jacob and his children, or for Israel. Then, in the same way, they, Egypt, was saved from the drought as well as many other people. Through Joseph, they came to place where they started to enslave the Gentiles. They saw themselves as bigger than the Gentiles.

They saw themselves as the rulers over the Gentiles just as what the Pharaoh forgot about Joseph, forgot about how mercy is for everybody and not just them. Not being a light to the Gentiles, now enslaving these people, calling them dogs, calling them not good, and basically seeing them as cursed, the very same thing that was happening to the Pharaoh.

Starting with that, Paul is going to that direction and what he is basically saying is that these Jews, or the Israelites, messed up. But that doesn't mean that what God had promised is not taking place because the actual truth is this: Not all that are of Israel are Israelites. By that he was saying, "You are not an Israelite because you are a Jew." Now, even in today's day, and as I am saying this, some people might think, "Bertie, are you anti-Semitic? Are you anti the Jewish people? You must be careful! This kind of talk is "Hitler" talk! It's not sick talk. You don't talk like that about the Jews because look at the harm that came through talk like that!"

Well, let me put it this way: I think there are people that will take the scriptures and they will abuse them. But, if we look at these scriptures, it doesn't matter how you look at it, this is what the Apostle Paul said. The Apostle Paul said that the Jews are not saved because they are Jews. The Israelites is the right word. They are not the people of God. The Israelites, talking about the group of people, because they are Israelites, they are not the people of God. From amongst the Israelites there will be people of God but the nation is not God's people. They are not God's children as a nation. Now, you might say, "Bertie, you're crazy! Why are you saying these things?"

Like I said, "Today's teaching might be a little technical and we are just going verse by verse. I'm going to ask you to stick it out and you can understand what's going on here. Let us read it: **Romans 9:**

6 Not as though the word of God has taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel

7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall your seed be called.

So, what is he saying? He is says that because they are children of Abraham that does not mean that they are the children of God. So, what he is actually saying is that the children of God are not the physical descendants of Abraham. The children of God is defined in a different way. What he is saying here is that the seed are called in Isaac. That means that Isaac was promised. God promised Abraham a child and the promise was Isaac. That means that to be a child of God is found in God's promise believed. Who are the children? The children are those who are children of the promise. Those who, basically, believe in the promise would be the children of God.

Romans 9:8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

As I started out in verse 5, one might have thought, "Bertie, you are crazy!" But if you read on, you see this is exactly what the Apostle Paul is saying. He is basically starting to really hammer down on the Jews here. He is saying that these Jews are not the children of God. He says, "My heart is for them for they think that they are the children of God because they are of the physical descendants of Abraham. But they are not for God does not count "who His children are" based on ethnicity or what group of people you are of but it is found in God showing mercy and those who want to receive it by mercy for free. These are the children of God. These are those who have their lives born from God. Paul is setting this up and is going on in chapter 10 but if you go into chapter 11, he is basically turning on to the Gentiles and saying to them the very same thing. Remember, now that you are Gentiles, don't think that you are the special people of God. It is not about Jew or Gentile. It's about God who wants to show mercy. Those who believe that, they are then the recipients of this mercy and by mercy they are born and shaped into that which God has dreamt from the beginning and so are they the children of God.

This knife cuts both ways. That means there will be some of God's people among the Jews and some of God's people among the Gentiles. These people of God are not defined by God supernaturally picking people. God has chosen a method and whosoever falls into that method are the people of God or not the people of God. The method that God has chosen is that it is going to be by mercy. It is going to be for free. It is going to be by God fulfilling His promise. It's not going to be by anything you do. It's going to be as a love gift and that's what God has chosen. That is what God has chosen and those who believe that, are born of that promise, are called the children of God.

So, Paul comes and he redefines genealogy, how you say that you are a descendant of Abraham. He is basically saying it is through faith. You can read that in the third chapter of Galatians.

He goes on and says that Isaac was by promise but it didn't stop at Isaac and from Isaac now it's physical descendants. It says it even goes on with Rebekah. She had two sons, Jacob and Esau. While they were in the womb, before they had done anything good or bad, God had said that the elder will serve the younger, so, that it would not be by anything you do but by God who chooses.

So, God has chosen that those who rely upon Him will receive mercy. God has chosen that it will be by mercy and not by works. So, if people decide that it is not by mercy but by my works, they have immediately excluded them from having it by mercy. That is what he is basically saying there.

Romans 9:10 So then it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy.

So, what has God chosen? God has chosen that the only way we can have eternal life, all the fruit of the Spirit, is by God that shows mercy. That is what He has chosen. God has chosen that it will be by Him that shows mercy.

We can go to passages like **Exodus 33:19, Exodus 34:7** and we can see what God has said to Moses back then. He showed Moses. He said, "Moses, I will show you My glory. This is who I am. But this glory that I show you is this: I am gracious, compassionate. I am merciful, longsuffering, abundance in goodness and truth. Remember that this is for whosoever I decide to be merciful to. Moses, it is not just for you. I keep this mercy for thousands. It's for Jew, Gentile, for anybody, whosoever wants to come, whosoever is thirsty and wants to come and drink. It is for them! Never make this your own thing. Always know that this mercy is for everybody."

Moses then made haste in verse eight and said, "Come and live among us, stiffnecked people." And what God did was He came and put up tabernacle with them but He still did not change His mind. He never thought that He is now only going to be merciful to the Jews. He basically said, "I'll be merciful to the Jews. I'll come and live among them but the purpose is that these Jews would then be a light to the Gentiles. In them I will make My power known and so enlighten the whole world. "

But, what did the Jews do? They took the whole gospel for themselves. They didn't share it with others neither did they understand the gospel. They simply said that it is going to be by our flesh and by our doing.

Now we come to the verse where he is likening the Pharaoh with Israel.

:17 For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.

:18 Therefore he has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardens. You might say, "You see, right there it is just as if God decided to harden people.

:19 You will say then unto me, Why does God find fault? For who has resisted his will?

:20 No, O man, who are you to reply against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why have you made me thus?

:21 Has not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?

I paraphrase that verse this way: Does not God have the power to have mercy even if some will reject it? So, God had of one lump... mankind. He made people of honor and dishonor. How? By deciding it is only going to be by mercy. So, If God decides it's only going to be by mercy and some reject that and they are now vessels of dishonor. And God, in such a way, formed the vessels of dishonor by choosing a method whereby things are going to happen, is that unrighteous for God?

If I have three boys and I say, "Listen. The only way that you guys are going to have vehicles is by me buying it for you freely. That's the only way you can get it from me. And if some of them say, "No. I will not receive anything for free from you!" I am now displeased with him, am I in the fault because I have chosen that it is by mercy and mercy alone? And now since they don't accept that, indirectly I have a group of people that are now against me. And if I now continue to say that it is by mercy and show my life and my power by that, am I now wrong? That is what he is basically saying there.

So, we find that God has decided that it is going to be by mercy and that He will show mercy to whosoever He wants to show mercy. He's going to say that it's going to be to every group of people. If you are not for that, you will be hardened.

Let me explain the hardening of the heart there. The hardening of the heart needs to be explained inside the original understanding when it comes to Pharaoh. What would Pharaoh's people have understood under the hardening of the heart? We find this recorded in Exodus in several places... from Exodus 1, 4, and so forth. Pharaoh's heart was hardened by God. How did this take place? What did they understand when this was written? Let's say Moses wrote Exodus. The people at the time he wrote this to, what would they have understood under the hardening of the heart?

I believe that this points to an old Egyptian ritual that took place in the burial of important people. This was basically taken from a book called, *The Book of the Dead*, which is the papyrus of Ani. Ani was a scribe of that time. Before he died, he had people, according to certain rituals and certain beliefs, had a scroll written which was then placed in his coffin which would help him in the afterlife to answer certain questions when he would be judged. His heart would be weighed on a scale to see if he qualifies for eternal life. It would help him so that he can enter eternal life.

The people of that time believed that when you die and after you've been mummified, you would leave your body. Then you would go into, what was called, the Maat which was the court or the Judgment Room of Two Truths. What they believed would happen is that you would appear before forty-two judges. You would have to call their names and where they are from. They would ask you questions. Every judge had one question.

Some of the questions would be, "Have you ever murdered anybody? Have you ever lied? Have you stolen any money? Have you lusted after another man's wife? Have you slept with a woman you are not supposed to sleep with? Have you laid with a man?" There were so many questions... 42 questions that were asked there. And all the Egyptians knew that you cannot answer, "No", to everyone. This part of this Judgement Hall was called, The Hall of Negative Confession wherein you just say, "No." You just straight out lie. You just say, "No, I have never done any of these bad things." But you couldn't get by with that because these Egyptians also believe that the heart couldn't lie. The heart was basically, after you passed through these 42 judges, then Anubis, which was an Egyptian god, would lead you by the hand to the scales where your heart would be weighed.

On the one side of the scale, one goddess, a female goddess, would put in a feather from her cap and she would put this white feather in the one side of the scale which was called the feather of truth. Then your heart was taken from the corpse. Then they believed it was physically taken by the gods and then put on the other side of the scale. Then your heart, which cannot lie, will now testify against what you have said to these 42 gods. If you've sinned, your heart would become heavier and heavier and then showed that you have lied. If your heart was heavier than the feather, your heart would be given to a monster called Ammit and he would then eat your heart. He would then die a second time and then you would be in oblivion just into nothingness and completely dead and have no afterlife. That would also be called the Second death.

You might ask, "What has this got to do with what you are talking about?" We need to understand that when you talk about a hardening of the heart, it would be talking about your heart becoming heavier... you becoming guilty. You are coming to a place where your heart has to confess that I am a sinner and your heart, basically, condemning you. We are actually saying that there is no life in me and in my own ability and that I am in the wrong and the end of what I am doing is destruction and death. It is simply to say that you are in the wrong.

So, when God would harden Pharaoh's heart, it would not, as we would see it, just being stubborn. It would be to say to bring him to a point where he can say, "I'm guilty. I am wrong." What these people also did and this is very interesting and will help us to understand Ezekiel 36. They would then have an amulet which is a stone that would be engraved with what was called a chant or a spell that was in the form of a beetle or a heart. They would take this and put it in the coffin when this person was buried. Sometimes the physical heart was taken out and then that heart of stone was put in there. Then when they came and took this heart of stone, which was already heavy because there was a spell on it, it would not tell on the person and then be light in the scale and then allow the person to have eternal life.

So, it was basically a spell from man's power because they know that they cannot do it by myself. They would have the spell to kind of trick the system to get people into eternal life, I think that helps a lot in understanding when God says, "I will take the heart of stone out of the midst of you and give you a heart of flesh and cause you to walk in My ways." You know we believe that we cannot walk in the ways of God. All people know that you cannot walk in the ways perfectly. Now we have this heart of stone which was this heart of spells where we just try and justify ourselves. It is called self-justification. God is saying, "I will take that out and I'll give you a heart of flesh but I will make it My responsibility to bring forth, who and what I am, in your life. It is making it God's responsibility to give us eternal life.

I haven't heard someone preach this but this is my understanding: If God comes to Pharaoh and hardens his heart, He simply comes to Pharaoh and tells him, "Listen, you cannot fool Me. You will have to come to a place where you have to confess that you are in the wrong. You are oppressing My people. These people are not your people. They are actually My people and I want you to let them go!"

And as He is telling Pharaoh that he is in the wrong, what Pharaoh then does is he refuses to accept that and humble himself to the truth and he continues in his way. He is basically having the standoff with God and he's saying, "I'm not going to do that and I am keeping these people. I am God!" You must remember the Pharaoh also believes that he was the incarnation of Ra and he was also the incarnation of the god of life which was proven to be wrong with the darkness that came over Egypt as well as the death of the firstborn.

So, if you read on, what Paul is saying here is that Israel is now taking the place of Egypt. What God is coming to do, He says to Israel, "You are wrong!" When did the death take place? The death took place when Jesus came and walked on the earth. In the three years that He walked on the earth, the prophetic was before the time but true manifestation of that when He walked on the earth. He walked in this earth and He did many mighty miracles and they still didn't believe Him. We can find that clearly in the twelfth chapter of Luke, verses 39-40 as well as Matthew 13:14-15.

He comes and He says, "I have basically hardened these people's hearts. I was telling them that they were in the wrong but they then closed their eyes to what I tell them. They refused to listen to Me. Yet, while they are refusing to listen to Me, I show My wrath." That meant that God showed that He is not going to accept their way but I am going to stick with a way of Mercy. Then He did many mighty miracles while He walked on the earth for three years. Then in His death, as what we found the Passover Lamb that was slain, death passed over those who believed upon Him. He gives eternal life, leading people out, giving us the hope of eternal life. In doing that, in His death and His resurrection, He left the old Jewish system dead forever! It's like Pharaoh and his army. They are now gone. If Paul is taking the time when Jesus walked on the earth, the Israelites rejecting Jesus, not willing to believe in Him, it takes a hardening of the heart narrative which was in the time of Israel back then and He is saying, "I rebuke these people. I tell the Jews that they are wrong." We find that in Matthew 23. We find that in the cleansing of the temple. We find that in the story of Matthew 4, John the Baptist, Luke... He is telling them, "Listen! What I am telling you is, and He uses the baptism, being baptized in the baptism of John where John taught, "Don't think you are the children of God because you are of the descendants of Abraham. God can of these stones, raise up children to Abraham!" That is what He is saying.

It is not about physical descent! The ax is at the root. It is chopping out this family tree which you thought was a physical descent. He's chopping it out: Jesus went and healed the Syrophenician woman's daughter. He healed the centurion's servant. He spoke to the woman at the well that was not a "pure Jew." He said, "I have a flock of which you know nothing of." He comes and says, "I am the Messiah of the whole world!" He basically comes and says that I am not the Messiah of the Jew in the sense that I will deliver you from Rome. He says, "I am also the Messiah of the Romans. The enemy is sin and death and I've come to let sin and death captive and deliver people from sin and death." They heard this but they didn't want to be saved by Him for they were hungry for power just like Pharaoh was.

The Bible says in Revelation 11:8 and onwards, that Babylon, or the great city where the prophets' bodies were lying in the streets, spiritually interpreted is Sodom, is Egypt, where our Lord Jesus was crucified, which is Jerusalem. So, can you see that even John says that in Revelation. Paul was saying that now here Matthew. The hardening of the heart was basically saying, "I am telling you Israel that you are not the people of God by your own works. I am a merciful God and I have come to show mercy!" Since God has decided to be mercy on any person whosoever stands opposite to mercy and confines himself in the confines of works, God will then come and harden your heart and actually say, "You are guilty. You are wrong. You are not in the way of life, eternal life. The feather, the whole scale thing, you will not be allowed into eternal life! You are in the wrong!" And He comes and declares a person is wrong if they have to come to a confession of wrong. And then we find that the Jews didn't want to do that.

Now listen to this. This is going to sound very negative. Then we are going to look at Jesus explaining this in Matthew 13.

John 12:

39 Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again,

40 He has blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.

Now, this sounds as if God hardened their hearts, physically made them stubborn, blinded their eyes so that they could not see. The first thing, He blinds their eyes so that they cannot see and that's now and then makes them stubborn in their hearts for the purpose of them not to see. Then he makes them, in their minds, not to understand because He doesn't want them to be converted and He doesn't want to save them. Through one degree we can understand that. I will explain that next time. That is basically God saying, "I shall not bring salvation through the system that you have chosen.

41 These things said Elijah, when he saw his glory, and spoke of him.

The cross-reference to that is **Matthew 13** and we are going to see what Jesus says about this and how He explains this.

14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which says, By hearing you shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you shall see, and shall not perceive:

15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

Here we find Jesus interpreting that passage as, "I've come to preach to them. Then they heard what I said but they didn't want to attend to what I am saying!" That means, "They understand what I am saying but they don't want to hear what I am saying." It would be like in the old apartheid. You could go and say to people who were really racist and tell them, "Listen. You know what? South Africa, as you see it how, is going to come to a fall. A black president is going to take over and they are going to run the country." They would hear what you say but they would decide that, "I'm not going to listen to this for I don't want this to be true for I want my own way!" This is what Jesus is saying here in verse 14. Listen to how Jesus interprets this passage and interprets this passage as he is speaking the truth to them. It is basically contrary to what **they** want to believe and now they close their eyes. **They** make their hearts not sensitive and a blunt to what God wants to say through Jesus. **They** close their ears for **they** don't want to be saved by Him.

Hear this. These are Jesus' words. It's written in red words:

14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which says, By hearing you shall hear, and shall not understand (You will hear but you will not understand); and seeing you shall see, and shall not perceive:

15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed (Who closed their eyes? They have closed!); lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

What they were saying is, "This guy is a carpenter's son. He was born in Bethlehem. Could anything good come from there? Can any good thing come from Nazareth? No, no, no! You want to say that this guy doesn't have a big army? He has these twelve people. He has no army, no political influence. Do you want to say that He is our Savior? We refuse to be saved by such a one!" "Yes, but I am your Savior!" "We refuse to hear that!" And they hardened their own hearts by closing their ears. They heard but they didn't want to be saved by such a person! That is what took place there. How did it happen? Jesus went and He corrected the Jews in the hardening of the heart in the light of the old Egyptian way of thinking which I don't think was spoken of by Jesus here in Matthew. But it was what Paul spoke about in Romans likening them to the Pharaoh, he is telling them, "You are not as innocent as what you think. You, Israel, is as much part of the problem as what the Gentiles are and you need mercy. It's going to be by mercy and not by ethnicity. It's going to be by mercy and not by physical descent." They couldn't handle that! It was too much for them! I hope this is helping you. You can preach four hours on this passage.

There are many verses where he just says this. Isaiah says, "I will call them a people which are not my people and beloved which are not beloved." He is saying that Isaiah already said these things. Then he's got four or five verses which he confirms that through Isaiah and then it says in **Romans 9: 30 What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith.**

31 But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.

32 Why? Because they sought it not by faith (They didn't seek mercy. They didn't seek God fulfilling a promise. They didn't seek it by God fulfilling His promise. They sought it by, "I qualify because I am a Jew), **but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone;**

33 As it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offence: and whosoever believes on him shall not be ashamed.

What he is saying is, "The message of Jesus is a message that anybody can stumble over that does not want it for free as a gift. And let us not stumble over the stumbling stone." So, Jesus called the message of salvation on the one side, it is called the message of grace, is called the love of God, is called the Messiah. And He's equally called a stone of stumbling because out of humanity, you'll find that when God says, "It is only by mercy," some will say, "It is not!" In the very same way, two groups are formed now. And he's saying to the Jews, "Now that you found out that you are of the group who was actually showing forth the wrath of God, you are not the group that shows forth the mercy. You are the group that was actually unto dishonor. See it for what it is and see what God is trying to show through you and how He has been merciful with you all these times. And from you, Come out now from amongst them! Come out from this!" This is actually a call of repentance to the Jews as well and for the Gentiles so that these people who are stubborn that Paul says, "I wish that my fellow men would be saved." Then he goes on to chapter 11 and says, "Has God cast away His people? No! Not at all! For I am a Jew and I have believed. I was hardened. I didn't want to hear about a Messiah. But then I saw and thank God that I could repent and believe upon the truth and also be saved."

Chapter 9 is simply saying to the Jews: "Listen, these Jewish people were as much part of the problem as what the Gentile people were. And God has come to harden the heart or to say, "You are also guilty." We understand that it is not God supernaturally causing people not to believe. It is, should you not want it by grace, you will not even want to listen to that."

I find in the old South Africa, when Nelson Mandela wanted to speak to certain of the leaders, they would just say, "We don't want to speak to you!" We don't want to hear what you have to say." They said, "Let the people go!" And they didn't want to. God is telling the Jews. "Let this whole thing of you being a special nation and it's all about you... Let it go because in that you are keeping other people out! Let it go!" And then they don't want to hear it and that is God then declaring that they are standing guilty before the mercy, the act of mercy, and that they should repent of what they believe.

There is a lot that I said here and I am sure that preaching this, four or five times, will bring it to a point where we can more eloquently and more simplistically explain this. But I am sure that this has helped you to understand a little bit more of Romans chapter 9. We will continue into Romans chapter ten and talk more about the Jews then and also how the salvation plan all fits together.

I want to thank you that I could serve you with this message. I trust that this will be fruitful thought and that it can bring you to a place where you can always see God is not evil. God is only good! **It is evil not to believe that God is only good.** Let us not harden our hearts to the system that says, "It is only by mercy! It is only by God showing grace. It's by God giving it as a gift. It is only by God fulfilling a promise and nothing that we do! Let us believe that! If we not believe that and should we not be open for a message of mercy when we hear mercy preached, we will find that we are closing our own eyes to that. We will not want to listen to that anymore and we will find our hearts just heavy. We will find that we are not in the way of life anymore. So, let us open our hearts to the goodness that God has brought for us in Jesus Christ.

Father, I thank You that I can just worship You, the God of all mercy, the God of all kindness. Thank You for Your love and Your great encouragement that You have towards us in the fact that You raised Jesus from the dead fulfilling Your promise. We believe You, Lord! Amen and amen...