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I had my first sweet corn of the season last Sunday. I am generally not a big eater, but during lunch on Sunday, a huge sandwich and three ears of corn disappeared before I knew I was full. Does it get any better than that? In addition, like so many of you, we have been enjoying the fruit of our garden—sugar snap peas, which are like eating candy; onions, beans, broccoli and now tomatoes and peppers. However, not every seed that is planted produces fruit. I don't know how many green bean seeds Karen and I planted but I am certain quite a few of them never did sprout. Moreover, not all of the plants that sprouted were fruitful in the end.

You can see how gardening relates to Jesus' parable of the soils. The seed on the path never sprouted. The rocky soil sprouted and then died quickly. The seed among the thorns grew quickly but then was choked to death. Only the seed planted in the good soil sprouted, grew and produced fruit. The seed that fell on the path is simple to understand. The gospel was preached to these people but they rejected it outright. The seed of the gospel never took root at all. But you have to admit that the rocky soil and the thorny soil are the most frightening of the four soils. These two classes of people did receive the gospel. The pure gospel message took root in their hearts. They were filled with joy and started to grow. The seed in the rocky soil did not last long. It died out quickly, but the seed on the thorny soil actually shot up. If this plant had been in your garden you would have weeded around it, made sure it had plenty of water and you would have been quite pleased at your progress. When friends dropped by and asked to see your garden, this is one of the plants you would have pointed out to them. "Your garden sure looks great," they would have said. "Especially that plant in the middle."

This is the plant that resembles people sitting in church on Sunday morning who call themselves Christians. This is the plant and the soil that is meant to send shivers down our spine. Jesus told

the story so that we could ask ourselves, “Could I be the plant that is having the life choked out of it?” This is the plant that most resembles this morning’s text in Hebrews. *We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.*

If you were here last week I mentioned that Hebrews is best defined as a sermon of exhortation that has as its theme, The Supremacy of Christ. The author asks us to bear up under his word of exhortation. Furthermore, I told you that this book—this sermon—has five distinct warning passages where the exhortation is particularly strong. In case you couldn’t tell, this section is one of those warning passages. This section is given to us to make us sit up and take notice. This section is very similar to Jesus’ parable of the soils and it’s intended to make us stop and ask, “Could I be the plant that is having the life choked out of it? Is it possible that I could drift away? Is he speaking to me?”

First, let’s define what the author means by “drifting away” because at face value, it could represent different things. For example, if you are in a fishing boat in a small lake with no anchor, you will drift away. But that’s not such a big deal because you can power or row your way back to shore. But if you are in the ocean and you drift away, you can be dragged out to sea and lost forever.

I think our author has the second kind of drifting in mind—the dangerous and fatal kind of drifting. I think this is true because of his question in verse three: *how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?* The author was concerned that some of his readers could drift so far as to be in danger of ignoring the Lord’s salvation. I think all of his warning passages fall into this category and this one is no exception. Remember that this sermon which we call the book of Hebrews was written to Jewish churches. This was not written to a group of Greek pagans warning them to flee from their idol worship and turn to the living God. This was written to those who were gathered in local churches and who regularly worshipped the Lord together and who claimed to be Christians. This sermon was preached to these people. It was the people in these churches who were in danger of drifting away to the point that they literally ignored the salvation of the Lord.

But how does a Christian drift so far? Wouldn’t this mean that such Christians actually lost their salvation? If you were saved and then drifted so far, is there any other interpretation than a loss of salvation? Those who hold the position that a true believer can lose his or her salvation always turn to Hebrews for their defense, particularly chapter six. Because this is the first warning passage in the sermon and since this topic will no doubt be raised again in the future, I want to tackle this question of losing one’s salvation.

First let me make sure you know where I stand on the topic. I unequivocally reject the idea that a genuine believer can lose his or her salvation. If you think differently or have any doubt on the matter, please allow me to try to convince you of my position or make you certain if you have any doubts. The best way to do this is to take a sample of Scripture passages that speak of salvation. I quickly chose seventeen passages to make my point. I certainly could have chosen dozens more but I trust that when seen together, it will make a convincing case. While the entire verse and surrounding verses are all important, I have placed a bold emphasis on the key parts of each verse that I want to emphasize.

John 1:12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become **children of God**.

1 John 3:1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called **children of God!** And that is what we are!

John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son **has eternal life**, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.

John 5:24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and **will not be condemned**; he has **crossed over from death to life**.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been **justified through faith**, we have **peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:1 Therefore, there is now **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus,<sup>2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life **set me free from the law of sin and death**.

2 Corinthians 4:6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," **made his light shine in our hearts** to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin **to be sin for us**, so that in him **we might become the righteousness of God**.

Galatians 3:26-27 You are all **sons of God** through faith in Christ Jesus,<sup>27</sup> for all of you who were **baptized into Christ** have **clothed yourselves with Christ**.

Galatians 4:6-7 Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "*Abba, Father.*"<sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an **heir**.

Ephesians 1:5 In love<sup>5</sup> he predestined us to be **adopted as his sons** through Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1:13-14 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were **marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit**,<sup>14</sup> who is a deposit **guaranteeing our inheritance** until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 2:4-5 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,<sup>5</sup> **made us alive** with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.<sup>6</sup> And God raised us up with Christ and **seated us with him in the heavenly realms** in Christ Jesus,

Philippians 1:6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you **will carry it on to completion** until the day of Christ Jesus.

Colossians 2:12 having been **buried with him in baptism** and **raised with him** through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

1 Peter 1:3-5 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us **new birth** into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,<sup>4</sup> and into an **inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you,**<sup>5</sup> who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Ezekiel 36:26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will **remove from you your heart of stone** and **give you a heart of flesh**.

Isn't this a marvelous collection of salvation truths? Someone who believes that you can lose your salvation would have to reverse *all* of these Biblical truths. It is not as simple as saying you have salvation and then you can lose it because salvation is not just one thing. Salvation is a multi-faceted reality that God does for us. All of these salvation realities would have to be reversed.

- God would disown us as a child of God. (see John 1:12 and 1 John 3:1)
- Our eternal life would be taken away. (see John 3:36)
- We would cross over from life to death. (see John 5:24)
- God's condemnation and wrath would be returned to us. (see John 5:24)
- Our justification would be annulled. God would declare us guilty of all sin once again. (see Romans 5:1)
- We would no longer be at peace with God. (see Romans 5:1)
- We would be again be enslaved to the law of sin and death. (see Romans 8:1)
- God would remove his light from our hearts and replace it with darkness and blindness. (see 2 Cor. 5:6)
- None of our sins would be atoned for and they would all belong to us. (see 2 Cor. 5:21)
- The righteousness of Christ would be retracted. (see 2 Cor. 5:21)
- Our baptism with Christ would be erased. (see Galatians 3:26-27)
- We would no longer be an heir of salvation. (see Galatians 4:6-7)
- Our adoption as sons would cease as we would be kicked out of God's family. (see Eph. 1:5)
- The seal of the Holy Spirit would be stripped from us. (see Eph 1:13-14)
- Our guarantee of inheritance would be revoked. (see Eph 1:13-14)
- We would again be dead in our sins. (see Ephesians 2:4-5)
- We would be banished from the heavenly realms with Christ. (see Ephesians 2:4-5)
- Jesus would not carry our salvation on to completion. (see Philippians 1:6)
- Our inheritance would perish, spoil and fade away. (see 1 Peter 1:3-5)
- God would remove our heart of flesh and replace it with a heart of stone. (see Ezekiel 36:26)

In order for someone to “lose” their salvation, each and every one of the realities of salvation would have to be reversed. Do you have any more doubt about the possibility of losing your salvation? Now that we have established this truth, let’s return to the question about drifting away. If it is not possible to lose one’s salvation, what then does it mean to drift away? There is only one possible answer. Those who drift away were never saved in the first place. They have ignored God’s great salvation. They may have received the seed of the gospel and may have grown into a healthy looking plant, but then were “choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures” (Luke 8:14) as Jesus said would happen.

But how is this possible? How does one go from being what appears to be an active Christian to someone who drifts away and ignores God’s salvation? We have all known people like this. A few weeks ago when I was preaching about false teaching I made the comment that I was not worried about any of you falling into a cult or false religion. After the service was over, I spoke with a man who told me that his son had left the faith and was now practicing Hinduism. A few months ago I told you about Karen’s roommate in college who spent nearly twenty years on the mission field. She was once passionate for Christian ministry and for souls but now her chief passion in life is belly dancing.

We all know people like this but the practical question for us this morning is this: Could the same thing happen to us? Could we drift away to the point that we ignore God’s salvation? Since I have already spent a long time defending the fact that you cannot lose your salvation, obviously I am not now contradicting myself and claiming that it is possible to drift away and lose your salvation. Therefore, the people to whom the author of this sermon was addressing and the people to whom I am challenging this morning would be false converts. It is not possible for true converts to drift away but false converts, by the very definition of the term, *will* drift away. A false convert cannot *not* drift away. It is inevitable that they will drift away.

But we must understand something about this spiritual drift—the vast majority of it happens silently and in the inner recesses of the heart. Let me again use the analogy of the drifting boat. If a boat is drifting out to sea and if there are other people on the shore, they will do whatever they can to alert the drifting boat or go after the drifting boat and tow them back to the safety of calmer waters or the shore itself. But in most cases, other people cannot see the spiritual drift taking place. By the time the drift is visible to others, most of it has already taken place. Take the example of Karen’s college roommate. Do you think she woke up one day and said, “I am leaving the mission field and throwing myself completely into belly dancing”? Do you imagine that it happened all at once like that? There is no way it happened that quickly. I am certain that many years went by where the drift happened very slowly and imperceptibly. The slow drift started in the inner recesses of her heart. The drift may have been so deep in her own heart that she did not realize it was even happening.

Have you ever heard someone describe why their marriage failed and it sound something like this? “I am not sure what happened to Tom and I, but one day we both realized we have drifted apart. We realized we had drifted so far that we no longer had a marriage left and divorce was the logical choice.” Relational drift always happens slowly and imperceptibly.

You see, that's the thing about false converts—even *they* don't know they are a false convert. No one in their right mind would come to church every week and worship the Lord all the while saying to themselves, "I don't believe a word the pastor is saying. I think this Christianity thing is all a farce. I know I am not saved, but I want everyone else to think that I am." That's not how it works. A false convert believes they are converted. They may or may not fully understand the gospel message, but they firmly believe that they are a Christian.

Did you know that *I* was a false convert until I was sixteen years old? My parents took us to church so I knew all of the Bible stories. I didn't know the verse was found in the gospel of John, the third chapter and sixteenth verse, but I knew that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son and whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. I remember this girl witnessing to me in high school and I told her that I believed that Jesus died for my sins. I was convinced that I was already a Christian so I thought she was wasting her breath. I was a false convert until August of 1980 when God radically saved me from my sins. What made the difference? I had believed that Jesus died for my sins. Is that not the essence of the gospel? Why was I still a false convert? My story is a little different because I was only sixteen years old. It wasn't like I was turning to God from a life of sex, drugs and rock and roll, because in his great mercy, God had protected me from most of the so called "big sins" that trip up teenagers. The best way I can describe it is that there was an awakening in my heart. On the day I was converted, I finally knew that I was a sinner and I knew that what I needed was God's grace alone. I think I only had an intellectual belief before and not a full trust in God's provision of grace.

But Rich are you saying that there are false converts in our church? This is precisely what I am saying because this is what the author of Hebrews believed about the people to whom he wrote. Had he not believed it was possible for them to drift away to the point of ignoring God's salvation, then he would never would have said so. Moreover, Jesus taught many parables about false converts. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 7:21). Do you remember the parable of the wheat and the tares? The enemy sowed false converts in among the true converts and the servant asked the master, '*Do you want us to go and pull them up?*'<sup>29</sup> "*No,*' he answered, '*because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them.*'<sup>30</sup> *Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn*'" (Matt 13:28-30). While they were still growing, the wheat and the weeds were indistinguishable. So it is with false converts—even to the point that the false convert doesn't know what they are.

Please noet that I am *not* trying to get you to doubt your salvation. I don't want to discourage you but rather to exhort you to making certain your salvation. This is what the apostle Paul did when he wrote, *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?* (2 Cor. 13:5). Paul didn't *want* them to fail the test. He wanted them to examine themselves to make sure that their faith was firmly planted in Christ alone. Not everyone in the church in Corinth was a true convert and not everyone in Grace Church is a true convert.

But how do you know? If you had looked at the life of Karen's roommate, she would have left little doubt that she was a believer. It is possible that she is saved and is just severely backslidden at the moment. It is also possible that she was never a true convert. But the remedy to this age old question always has the same answer—repentance and faith. This is the author's message. *For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment,*<sup>3</sup> *how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?* This is a rhetorical question and the answer is that if you drift away and ignore his salvation, you will **not** escape.

But there is a way of escape. The author of Hebrews also presented the way of escape. *This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.*<sup>4</sup> *God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.* The gospel was spoken by the prophets and many times and in various ways. The gospel was announced by the Lord Jesus when immediately after his baptism he began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt 4:17). Repent and believe the gospel which was testified to by signs, wonders, miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Jesus and his apostles after him did countless miracles and healings as signs of the truth of the gospel.

Is it possible that you are a false convert? Is it possible that you are not genuinely converted by Christ even though you thought you were a Christian? This is a very hard question to ask yourself. I can't tell you the answer and you may not be able to answer the question. Only the Holy Spirit can tell you this truth.

If you are not a false convert, then you can still drift—not to the point of losing your salvation, but definitely to the point of losing your first love. Like the old hymn Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing says, "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. Do not drift away."

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