

HARD HEARTS

Mark 6:52 ... “For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.”

The Bible uses the term “hard hearts” or “hardened hearts” for severe cases of people who ignore the obvious, cannot accept reality, or simply refuse to believe what they see and hear. Today’s verse follows two amazing and miraculous events: Jesus feeding more than five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two small fish, followed by Jesus walking on the surface of the Sea of Galilee. His disciples, after seeing these miracles first-hand, still could not fully comprehend that Jesus was their Messiah. They were loyal to him and traveled with him – perhaps out of curiosity – but their hearts were hardened.

In Psalm 95:8, we are warned not to develop hard hearts toward God, which can happen when we see him work but still do not believe. However, there is another situation in which God purposely hardens people’s hearts. When God anointed Moses to go to Egypt and escort the Israelites out of slavery, God told Moses that he would first harden Pharaoh’s heart. The book of Exodus records the deadly plagues that God delivered to Pharaoh and his kingdom before Pharaoh relented and let the Jews leave. But, even then, Pharaoh regretted his decision and sent his army to recapture the fleeing Jews, only to have his army destroyed in the Red Sea. It appears that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart to make the escape of the Jews even more dramatic and, perhaps, to turn the hearts of the Egyptian people to God despite the arrogance of their Pharaoh.

In reference to today’s verse, it is probable that God hardened the disciples’ hearts intentionally to prevent them from blurting out to everyone they saw, that Jesus was the promised Messiah. It was necessary for Jesus to earn people’s attention and trust, not as a celebrity, but because he spoke truth that the average Jew had never heard before.

In Isaiah chapter six, where Christ’s coming is prophesized, we read that God “blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts.” He is speaking of the Jews who killed him on the cross. If the Jews had accepted Jesus and made him King, the sacrifice he paid for our sins would not have happened. By hardening their hearts, God ensured that Christ would be sacrificed as planned.

God still hardens the hearts of some people today. We see this in those who have time and time again rejected Christ, or those who mock and denounce Christ as a fraud, or those who curse him hatefully. Just as we realize that some people need to hit rock-bottom before they will accept help for their drug or alcohol addictions, God allows some people to dig themselves into a deep pit before their sinful ways become too much to bear. It is not enjoyable to see someone – especially a friend or loved one – suffer from their mistakes or sins. But sometimes it is necessary for them to suffer before they will acknowledge their mistakes and turn to God for help.

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