

Title: THE ROOT OF BITTERNESS

Text: Hebrews 12:1-17 (key: v.15)

Intro: In our text we find a valuable admonition on the subject of bitterness. Surely, each one of us has personally experienced the destructive fruit of a bitter heart. Bitterness is a negative emotion. There are some lessons we can learn from this verse.

I. THE CAUSE OF BITTERNESS

A. "Bitterness" comes from a Greek word which means "*to wound by piercing.*" Life has many privileges and blessings; but then there are bitter experiences that wound our hearts. There are persecutions, people's unfaithfulness, heartaches, and tears that come to those who try to love and serve God.

B. Without the work of God's grace, we can easily become victims of this terrible plague. Bitterness takes root in a heart that refuses to forgive, tolerates pride, and wallow in self-pity. Such attitude fails God's grace to work in us. (see **Job 10:1**)

II. THE CHARACTER OF BITTERNESS

A. God's word likens bitterness to a "**root**" that is hidden under the surface then suddenly grows to show its ugliness! This is the nature of bitterness. It grows quietly in the wounded heart undetected.

B. Like the bitter waters which the Israelites drank in Marah (**Exo. 15:23**), its true nature is unknown until someone tastes its very bad quality.

C. Bitterness is a choice, a decision not to respond to a situation through God's grace. You go to church and smile, but deep in your heart you have a root of bitterness that drains your spiritual strength and hardens your heart. (**Prov. 14:10a**)

III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF BITTERNESS

A. It Troubles You. Bitterness brings sorrow, depression and anger into a person's life. In the case of Esau it drove him into a life of sin and immorality (**Heb. 12:16**). Bitter people are some of the saddest and miserable people on earth. Their bitterness becomes their main focus and occupation in life.

B. It Troubles Others. Bitterness is contagious and spreads like an epidemic. We often think that we can live our own life without affecting others. This is not the case. Bitter people also

affect the people around them – their family, friends, fellow employees, and those who look up to them and follow them.

C. Absalom's bitterness towards his father David spread throughout all Israel to the point where David had to flee for his life. The Bible seriously reminds us of the fact that Achan "**perished not alone in his iniquity**" (**Josh. 22:20**). To this day we suffer the consequences of Adam and Eve's rebellion against God. The sin of bitterness afflicts and destroys others.

IV. THE CURE FOR BITTERNESS

If you are bitter today, there is hope waiting for you. Our text shows there are two parts to the cure for a bitter heart.

A. Your Part is — "looking diligently." We cannot control bitter experiences but we can monitor our hearts condition and humbly recognize bitterness that has taken root. It is also interesting to note that this verse uses the word "any man" which tells us we need to not only be diligent concerning the condition of our own hearts but also the condition of our brothers and sisters in Christ lest they fall prey to the snare of bitterness. (see **Prov. 4:23**)

B. God's Part is — "the grace of God." If hindering God's grace is the cause of bitterness, then allowing God's grace is the cure for bitterness. We truly need the inward working of the grace of God, not just to save us from Hell, but to influence our lives so that we bring glory and honor to God.

C. To be cured from bitterness, you must do your part by admitting that you have it, and taking it to God in prayer.

Conclusion: Consider our Lord & Saviour Jesus Christ and the bitterness of the Cross. See the bitter stripes across His back (remember bitterness means to wound); see the bitter nails pierce His hands and feet; see the bitter thorns driven in His head. Hear the bitter words of people wound His loving heart.

Yet in spite of all this bitterness, hear Him say, *"...Father forgive them for they know not what they do..."* (**Luke 23:34**) That's grace! God can give us power to forgive what would be humanly impossible to forgive. That is why our text begins with a great exhortation to look unto Jesus – the author and finisher of our faith (**Heb. 12:2**). Without Jesus, bitterness will surely overtake us and disqualify us from the race!