

A Father's Love  
Hebrews 12:3-11

James 1:1-25

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Responsive: 2 Timothy 4:1-8

Let us start this morning by reading our passage, Hebrews 12:1- As we continue on here today we see again this exhortation, this encouragement written by the Author, for as we have seen before he is concerned that these Hebrews he has been writing to are in danger of falling away. As we talked about the first 2 verses last week where we get this idea that the Christian life is like running a race, it is something that we run for, we strive for, we continue in so as to win the prize at the end. We are to keep our eye upon Christ who is the prize, and this is everything for the Christian. Throughout scripture we are implored to endure, to strive for the mark, to continue in the way, to be patient, and faithful.

For as we know the Just, those who are redeemed by Christ, shall live by faith. It is our faith that defines the believer, it is our faith and trust in God that ultimately matters. And it is because of this faith, which has been given to us, by him that we can endure, for without it we are lost in our hopelessness and in our sin and rebellion. And this is why endurance, and perseverance is so important, for one whose faith is not grounded in Christ, one whose faith is of their own making, of their own will and desire, when things get rough, will cry out to God in anger not understanding why they must suffer if God loves them. Much of this understanding of faith is cultivated by a false understanding of faith, and false teachings on faith and the new birth. If you believe that your belief in God is some how hinged on your own ability, that the faith that you have comes from your own power, then I am sorry to inform you that you are resting in a faith that will always fall short.

For we know that scripture says, that there is none that seek God, no, not one single person. The reality is that God is of the business of going out and drawing to himself his people, those whom he foreknow, those whom he has loved before the earth was. So the faith that you have, is not truly yours, but instead was given, it is a gift from God. And this is where the endurance comes in, this is where the running the race applies. For a believer who has been given faith, will not fail to run, will not fail to endure for it is God supernaturally working in each and every one of his children to endure, to persevere. For God says that he will not lose one of his children, there are none who will be taken from his hand. Yet we see many who have confessions of faith, yet later in life reject it, or we see many whose life does not reflect the faith that they claim.

So how can one endure such trials of the faith, if the faith they claim is not truly from God, but is rather a mental ascent, or born out of tradition, or expectation. The short answer, is they can't, the road to heaven is littered with the corpses of many who fall by the wayside, of many who could not make the journey but have faltered, failed, and withered away. Christ talks of this very thing in the book of Matthew, chapter 24, talking about the trials of faith, and the persecution of the last days, he says, "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, saying, I am the Christ, and will deceive many." Let me ask you this, will the children of Christ be deceived into following a false Christ? I hope you say that the answer is No, for if a child of God can be deceived in such a way then that would mean that God has lost that one, and as I had just stated, we know and have God's promise that he will not lose a single one of his children. So this must mean something else, this must be those whose faith is not true, they are another causality along the road to heaven.

Continueing on verse 6, “ for you will hear of wars, and rumors of war, see that you are not troubled, for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For Nation will rise against Nation, and Kingdom against Kingdom, and there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.” So again, these signs, these tribulations and trials that he lists here.. are nothing new are they, these could pretty much describe the life of any generation. But as we see it gets worse, verse 8. “all of these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, you will be hated by all nations for my name sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many, and because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.”

Wow, sounds like this is describing today doesn't it, many false prophets arise, false teachers leading people astray, we can easily see this today in what passes as Christianity can we not? Some of the best selling books under the Christian label are written by such heretics and false prophets, and these are best selling books...leading 100's of thousands if not millions astray, teaching false doctrines, cultivating false beliefs, deceiving, and leading them on what appears to be a bright path, but it is a trick, for it leads to death.

And since the rise of these false teachers, false prophets have such a vast sway and power over that which calls itself Christian, it creates multitudes of Christian Zombies....people who appear alive, but in reality are dead. And because the Christian faith, becomes identified by these empty Christian Zombies, who do not really have the Love of God operating in them, they do what zombies do, they bite, they devour, they feed on everything around them. They are without Christ's love in them, therefore the love that the show forth even is temporary, and will inevitably grow cold. But look at verse 13 here in Matthew 24.. “But he who endures to the end shall be saved.”

So then, if those who are Christs, those who are the adopted children of God will not be lost, ever, there is no power, not even a threat that they will be snatched from his hand, yet we see many who from our perspective fall away, then this gives us the answer to the question. “If God is a loving God, and wants the best for his people, then why does he allow his people to suffer.” The answer is because endurance through suffering proves the validity of an individuals faith. In other words, God's people will endure, look what the Author wrote about in chapter 11 all of these whose faith endured through trials of mockings, scourgings, chains and imprisonment, but not only that, they were stoned, cut in 2, tempted, slain by the sword, homeless wanderers being destitute, afflicted, and tormented...yet of these, the world was not worthy.

These trials of faith are culling events, they are tests which prove out our faith. They are what sets apart the living, from the dead. And the beautiful thing is, that if our faith is from God, we will persevere, we will endure without question. And honestly, there can be no greater encouragement then this. For instead of fretting about our faith, we can rest in God knowing that we are secure in him, and that all that he would have us endure in this life is not outside of his will or desire for us, but not only that it serves a purpose, which brings us to our passage today for we see what this purpose is.

For such things serves to draw us to him, when everything is stripped away from us, and we are left nakid, and destitute, powerless and without hope, we are then driven to the only hope that we have which is our Father. The true Christian will cry out to God for strength to endure, while one whose faith which is not true will likely blame God. But the reality is, through such events we are taught more and more to rely upon him, to trust him, and to lean on him more. I think this is the effect of the work of sanctification, for as life goes on it seems to get harder, we seem to be faced with more and more trials, and as our body weakens we learn even more how much we need God.

But we have a God who has not asked us to endure that which he has not himself, for he became flesh and endured every trial, and temptation yet remained sinless and without blame, becoming the perfect mediator, the perfect sacrifice, and the perfect high priest for all those who believe. As verse 3 says, "Consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls." If Christ, being God incarnate, himself, endured and suffered such it only stands to reason that such suffering will be a part of our journey as well. We are not saved to the salvation of peace and joy on this this life, but to the peace of joy of our souls and to that life which is everlasting.

Infact as we see even here in our passage today, that the struggles and difficulty in this life can often be punishment or chastisement for our sins. But even in this we have hope do we not? For such chastisement again stands as a proof of our being the children of the most high God. For as it says here in verse 5 and 6, "MY son, od not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by him. For whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives."

It seems counter intuitive today, that a father who loves his children would chasten them. It would seem that the examples we have has fathers and parents today often times lack discipline in their children. Yet, scripture says, those whom he loves he chastens, the opposite of that is if you are not chastened you are not loved. A father who cares for his children seeks to raise them up in a way that they learn and grow to become thoughtful, mature adults. This can not be achieved without discipline, and it operates in the spiritual in the same way as the physical.

As we know, and as all of scripture attests, God is himself, love, but love also includes justice, God can not abide sin and rebellion, if he was to overlook our sin without some payment he would not be just, yet out of love he sent his son, to endure the wrath of God toward sin in our stead. This should put the chastisement of the Lord on our sins into a different perspective. Yes, my fellow Christian, the Lord will chastise you in this life, there are many ways in which in the body you suffer for your sins, as the old saying goes, actions have consequences, but....it is not a chastisement unto death, that is spiritual death, Christ has already endured that for you. This passage here begs the question that must be answered by each and every person who makes of claim of faith.

Has God chastised you? I think that this maybe a difficult question to answer for the chastisement of God although present may not be apparent that it is from him. By that I mean, quite simply the cause and effect of actions, or thoughts that you may have may just seem to be the natural progression of events, you did x, and y happened. But that is the nature of sin is it not? Sin has a staining effect, and always produces an outcome, even if that outcome is a sort of mental suffering, being driven to despair, and tasting hopelessness. It is a time of separation, we walk away from God, we rebel, we harbor a thought, we justify an action,, yes, we have all done this, and yes we should all be able to attest to the conviction that was in our souls, a suffering which cries out to God for forgiveness for these moments of sin an rebellion.

This is Satan ploy, as we know if we are Christs, our life, our souls are secure in him..Satan can not snatch us out of his hand...but Satan can cause us to doubt, to despair, in an attempt to drive a wedge of separation between us and our father. But we have a loving father who will not allow this to continue, for he will rebuke, and chastise our sins, and cause us to cry out to him for forgiveness. As verse 8 says, that if you are without this chastening, you are illegitimate and not sons. That is why this is an important question to reflect upon as believers, have you been chastised by God?

If you haven't, then he is not your loving father, and instead of your Father, he will be your righteous judge. This is quite a scary prospect, for when God judges, his judgments are final and carry with it the full judgment of sin. What an absolute scary place to be, to stand before the mighty creator, in judgment. It is better to suffer chastening now from a loving father, than to stand before the righteous judge. And It is for this reason that we can rejoice, that we can endure, and that we can even have peace through our suffering here in this life, knowing that we have this loving father who cares enough to not let us abide in sin, who loves enough to drive us away from such rebellion and draw us closer to him. As verse 9-10 says, "We have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect, Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?" For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but he for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness."

He chastens and chastises us for our profit. There is something to gain in it, and that is holiness. It drives us closer to him, it drives us closer to what we are to be. It keeps us on the straight and narrow road, and it is only this path that leads to the promised land. The path to the promised land, is littered with the bodies of the dead. That is those who stray, who are not chastised and brought back die in their rebellion and sin not remaining on the narrow way but rather seeking their own and trodding the path toward destruction. As Jesus said in the book of Matthew, "Enter by the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Do not despise the chastening of the Lord, for it is the very thing that draws you to him, and keeps you on the narrow path. AS verse 11 says, " No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful. Yet, nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. It much the same way when you were a child being scolded by your parents, it was painful, and even probably caused anger...but now, as an adult, having grown, having learned and maybe having children of your own you have a greater understanding and you see the wisdom of your parents. Though flawed as they may be, were doing so because of their love for you so that you would become who you are today. So to it is with God, painful is the chastisement for our sin and rebellion against him, but out of it brings forth righteousness, drives us to holiness, so that we may enter that narrow gate.

Do not despise the day of suffering, but instead recognize it for what it is, an opportunity to grow in faith, to rely and trust in your savior more, to grow in love, and to give opportunity for God's mercy and grace to shine forth. Often times I struggle in this reality, and I know I am not unique in this, but rather it is the human experience. We can be short sited, we see that which is in front of our face, we complain, we whine, stomp our feet like a child throwing a tantrum....but God is patient, he is loving, and he is righteous. And for a time we may need to endure chastening, but the reward at the end is far greater then the suffering of today. And that is what this faith is all about is it not? Enduring, persevering, striving toward the Goal, keeping our eyes on Christ, who is the prize.

In this race we will stumble, we will fall, and God allows this, so that he may pick us up that we maybe stronger, that we may learn from our mistakes, and it makes the prize all the more precious. Knowing that we are sinners, saved by grace alone, through faith alone and not of our selves but it is a gift of God. He who has chose you, who has gifted you this faith will not, can not let it fail. So let us endure, let us look to him, and rejoice in his love, and rest in this hope. That we have a God who loves us, and is involved in our lives. Who has not just birthed us and left us to our own devices, but rather is there to rebuke our sin, and in love is there guarding and protecting us so that we remain, and endure in his grace.

