

Bibles???

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

Turn your bibles with me to Hebrews 12

We are continuing our verse-by-verse study through the book of Hebrews – a letter that was written to a group of Jewish believers that were seriously contemplating going back to Judaism.

This group of Jewish believers were facing very hard and difficult times in their newfound faith.

The joy and excitement that they found early on turned out to be some of the hardest times they ever faced in their lives.

And the same can be said about you and me.

We were born again, and in our newfound faith, we have been delivered from our past, and then we see new challenges that come into our lives (through trials and spiritual warfare), and we begin to get this feeling of being overwhelmed.

We want it to stop – so we get back to the things that we were doing before.

For these Jewish believers, it meant going back to religion.

Going back to following a list of do's and don'ts

But all these things that they were going back were already pointing to Jesus.

So they were being tempted to drift away

So the writer of Hebrews has been encouraging this group of Jewish believers, not to give up and go back – but to endure, and the way they were going to endure is by faith.

Let's pray...

Read text

The writer of Hebrews has provided for us, this illustration of our walk in Christ as being a long foot race.

And as we are running the race, we are enduring – we are moving forward to the finish line.

Jesus is the starting line – Jesus is the finish line

We are to running with our eyes fixed on Jesus

We are to running the race that God set specifically for us to run.

And as we hit the wall, we are considering – we are weighing the pain that we are going through and what Jesus endured for us and it moves us to move one foot forward and then the next one –

We continue running as we experience and endure the discipline of God – (we covered that last Wed night.)

As He molds us and shapes us so that we can be more Christlike

So as we are still running the race

We are hurt.

We are weary

We are tired of running.

BTW – if this is us, we should be encouraged by this because even Paul found himself hurt and tired as well in the race that God set for him.

[Phi 3:14 NKJV] 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

So now, the writer of Hebrews provides for us a pep talk – in the same way that a football coach would give one to his team at half time – to get them through the final two quarters.

Let's look at the text

[Heb 12:12-17 NKJV] 12 Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,

In order to understand this verse – once again, we look at everything in context.

The writer of Hebrews is using the illustration of running the race.

So when we come to verse 12, we need to understand that he is speaking symbolically and not literally.

He's talking about those whose faith is weak.

Those who are struggling to continue the race

And as we look to the Old Testament for help – it will give us insight on what the writer of Hebrews is saying.

Turn with me to Isaiah 35

I want you to notice the similarities in the language that we find in Isaiah and Hebrews

[Isa 35:3-4 NKJV] 3 Strengthen the weak hands, And make firm the feeble knees.

4 Say to those [who are] fearful-hearted, "Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come [with] vengeance, [With] the recompense of God; He will come and save you."

So, when we look at the passage in Isaiah, we understand what the writer of Hebrews is saying to his audience when he tells them to strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,

He is telling them to stay strong.

He is telling us not to be anxious or like those who are fearful-hearted.

He is reminding them and us that -

God will save us.

God will see us through.

So, we put our faith in God.

Not only do we do it in our own lives –

We do it in the lives of our fellow brothers and sisters.

Yes, we are running our race –

But this is a race where we want others to finish with us as well.

So, when we see our brother or our sister in Christ who are spiritually weary – we come alongside them and strengthen them and encourage them to continue to press on.

Even during times where we may be weary as well.

Because what happens when we become weary is that we may be tempted not to care about anybody but ourselves.

But - If we, as the church are watching out for one another, then we will be strengthening one another.

13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

In the evening, when I go on my walk – all I have to really watch out for is people who don't clean up after their own dogs.

That wasn't the case in biblical times – they didn't have nice concrete trails that were void of any tripping hazards.

They had dirt trails to walk through

And these dirt trails were hard enough for a healthy person to walk through – they were much harder for someone with a disability or someone who already had an injury.

The writer of Hebrews is saying we are to make a straight path for our feet.

The writer of Hebrews is referring to the things that trip us up and cause us to fall into sin.

And we all have those areas.

We all have areas of weakness.

My weakness may be different than your weakness.

The question we need to ask ourselves is – do we know what our weakness(s) are?

Do we know what the stumbling blocks are on our path?

And a better question yet, is – do we know how to avoid them?

This is what the writer of Hebrews is referring to when he says, make a level path for our feet – so that we don't stumble.

And what this means for us – is to make sure that those areas that are a personal weakness to us are not going to hinder or prevent us from running our race.

[Rom 13:14 NKJV] 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to [fulfill its] lusts.

Paul is saying the exact same thing –

Our flesh comes with built in weaknesses.

And when we encounter issues that tempt our flesh – it become a potential disaster.

Paul is saying clear the roadway – make no provisions for the flesh – don't make it easy for those things to become a hindrance to our walk.

Now, someone might say –

That is easier said than done – you don't know my path.

It is full of pitfalls.

That may be so –

But there is an interesting promise of God – that many of us know.

It is a popular scripture.

Many of us may even have it highlighted in our bibles.

We may have even memorized it – but we often overlook what it means.

[Proverbs 3:5-6 NKJV] 5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, (and what will He do?) And He shall direct your paths.

What does it mean?

It means that He will take things out of the way / those things that are going to cause us to stumble as we trust in Him –

leaning not on our own understanding –

acknowledging Him in all of our ways, meaning the path that He has set for us to run the race.

That is His promise, so we need to allow Him to do what He has promised to do for us.

14 Pursue peace with all [people], and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:

Pursue peace with all

The word all in the Greek is the word all.

So what the writer of Hebrews means when he says, pursue peace with all – he is saying, don't get caught up in drama.

Avoid drama at all cost with everyone – because drama is one of those things that can become a stumbling block in our path.

I am pretty sure we all know of individuals who have stopped fellowshiping because of some drama they experienced with someone at church.

And the interesting thing about drama is that it takes two people to have it.

Kind of like an argument –

As soon as one person stops arguing – the argument stops.

Why?

Because It is hard to argue by yourself

Same goes for drama.

[Rom 12:18-19, 21 NKJV] 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but [rather] give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance [is] Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. ... 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Paul is making the point that we can't change the other person who wants to have drama with us – but we can change our response by not responding.

Turn to Proverbs 6

[Pro 6:16-19 NKJV] 16 These six [things] the LORD hates, Yes, seven [are] an abomination to Him: 17 A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, 18 A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, 19 A false witness [who] speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren.

Each of these things, in one way or another, is a fundamental violation of the command that the writer of Hebrews gives us to pursue peace with all.

You see church,

Peace is a fundamental part of the legacy of God's Children – it's one of the primary things that Jesus dies to secure for us.

And therefore, it must rank as one of the chief treasures we both enjoy and guard.

So, not only do we pursue peace – we pursue holiness.

Do you remember last week in our study – about how God disciplines us?

Does anyone remember why?

Go back to verse 10

[Heb 12:10 NKJV] 10 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.

Now, there are a few misconceptions of what the word holiness means.

Holiness doesn't mean, better than everyone else.

Holiness doesn't mean perfect in our conduct.

Holiness simply means set apart from sin and set apart toward God.

And because of the life of Jesus

And the love of Jesus

And the presence of Jesus in my heart, we get to say no to sin and yes, to grace, to mercy, to patience, to kindness, and to peace

So what the writer of Hebrews is saying here regarding pursuing holiness is that we get to run hard after "what it means to know and what it means to love the Lord"

So, if we are running toward Jesus – we have to be running away from sin.

We have to understand that holiness is not because we keep a list of do's and don'ts

It is not simply refraining from doing the bad things we once did.

It is allowing the presence of the Holy Spirit in our life – reproducing the character of Christ in us.

It is not me saying, "I have decided to give that up"

It is me saying, "I have decided to love everything that Jesus loved"

15 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

Here in verse 15 – the writer of Hebrews is giving a warning

And really, the warning is for those who choose not to pursue peace or choose not to pursue holiness.

There is a danger where these individuals may fall short of the grace of God

Now, remember – grace is receiving something we don't deserve.

And grace gives us the opportunity to be saved from sin.

Grace gives us the opportunity to be saved from the condemnation and the punishment that we deserve because of our sin.

“It is by grace through faith...”

As a believer, when we are born again by the power of the Holy Spirit, when we have experienced the love of God and the grace of God and the mercy of God and the presence of God in our lives – the bible says that His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, (2 Peter 1:3)

So this warning goes out to those who don't avail His grace.

Those who don't take advantage of His grace

Those who reject or neglect His grace.

So instead of pursuing peace and pursuing holiness – the person who falls short of salvation – produce bitterness.

Bitterness directed at Jesus, bitterness directed at the gospel, bitterness directed toward the church.

And like a seed that is planted in the soil, the bitterness takes root and then it begins to spread and eventually it takes control of one's heart.

God's desire is that we pursue peace and be filled with peace, that we pursue holiness – not bitterness.

16 lest there [be] any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. 17 For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

In context – the writer of Hebrews is going to provide for us an example of what he has been talking about.

The word fornicator refers to sexual immorality

The word profane comes from the Greek word meaning “outside the temple” and refers to any and everything that is ungodly.

So the writer is saying – those who don't pursue peace, who don't pursue holiness, and the person embraces bitterness – that individual is headed down the path of immorality and ungodliness.

And the writer gives the example of Esau.

We are pretty familiar with the events that happened when Esau sold his birthright.

As the firstborn, the Abrahamic Covenant belonged to Esau – all the promises God made to Abraham passed to Isaac and then to him – but he cared nothing for them!

One day, returning from hunting and hungry, he came into the camp and approached his brother Jacob who envied his brother's position as the firstborn.

Jacob was making a pot of stew and Esau demanded a bowl – but Jacob refused.

Esau pleaded and Jacob suggested he turn over the birthright in exchange for a bowl of stew.

Esau agreed!

Then later on – Isaac wanted to give the blessing to Esau but Rebekah and Jacob trick Isaac into giving the blessing to Jacob

When Esau came to realize that he'd traded in his inheritance for a bowl of stew and that the blessing that ought to have been his had been given to his brother, he broke down and wept.

But they weren't sincere tears of repentance – he was only sorry for what he had lost, not for the shallowness of his own soul that had led to his loss.

What Esau wanted was all the benefits of his birthright and all the benefits of the blessing without the responsibility – to pursue peace, to pursue holiness, faith and trust in the Lord.

There is a profound difference between remorse and repentance

Judas was sorry that he betrayed Jesus but he wasn't repentant and then he went and killed himself

Herod was sorry that he offered to give his daughter in law – half of his kingdom and she said, give me John the Baptist' head on a platter – and the bible says that he was sorry, he made the deal (mark 6)

Sorrow that leads to the death of someone else is not repentance

Esau was sorry that he didn't get the blessing – but, he never experienced a change of mind, or a change of heart and a change of life.

That is what the writer of Hebrews is saying –

If you refuse to pursue peace and holiness, you run the risk of embracing bitterness and bitterness in the end, will darken your heart and darken your soul and distance you from grace.

So what is the solution to bitterness?

Pursue peace and holiness and continue to focus our eyes on Jesus

Let's pray...

To Receive Christ do the following:

Admit, "I am a sinner."

Confess and be willing to turn from your sin.

Believe, by faith that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross.

Receive, through prayer, Jesus Christ into your heart and receive eternal life.

Dear Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died on the

cross for my sins. Please forgive me for my sins and cleanse me by Your blood. I

accept You by faith as my personal Lord and Savior. Give me a thirst for Your Word

and Help me to follow You all of my days. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

[Num 6:24-26 NLT] 24 '

May the LORD bless you and protect you.

May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you.

May the LORD show you his favor and give you his peace.'

