

Transcription of 19GS1072

Hebrews 12:12-17

"The Hard Side of Holiness"

March 6, 2019

Good evening. As you know, or should know already, Pastor Jack and several of our folks from the body are in Israel. They made it safely over there, and they're havin' fun. So keep them in your prayers as they continue to travel the Holy Land. Maybe, hopefully, one day if you haven't been there, you'll get to go. I highly recommend it. It's really awesome to be able to just see the Bible come to life after you've traveled to all the different areas where the Bible pretty much happened. And so keep them in your prayers, like I said. They'll be back in a couple weeks. So, next Wednesday we'll have a guest speaker; this Sunday we'll have a guest speaker - Dan Finfrock; but then the following Sunday after that, Pastor Jack will be right back into the pulpit. So, let's go ahead and get started.

First off, I'm Pastor Jason Witt. I don't know if you know me; I'm sure most of you do. If you don't, I'm the Administrative Pastor here, so I handle a lot of the business-y type stuff, but I also do the Married Couples ministry. I inherited the New Believers ministry from Pastor Lyle, and I'm really enjoying that. I do some other various things as well. But if you haven't met me, I actually do more than just the announcements. (Laughing) So, there you have it. Yes.

All right. So, I want you guys to go ahead and turn in your Bibles to Hebrews 12:12. We're going to start off by reading the text. (Pastor Jason realizes he forgot to do the announcements, which he then proceeds to do.) It reads (all the way down to 17), "Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: 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; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. 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." Pastor Jack has a little bit of a joking nickname for me; he likes to call me "the hammer." He calls me "the hammer" because I tend to pick passages that are kind of very much like a hammer - they hit you, and they're hard, and they call us to do things. And I don't know why I pick passages like that. I just have to trust that the Lord leads me to them. But here

we are. This is kind of a "hammer" of a message, so put your seatbelts on - it'll be a ride.

But I do want to tell you a little bit of back story in this study. I had to pick a title; we always have to pick a title when we do studies in the main sanctuary because they go in the bulletin and whatnot. So it was the last day that I had to pick a title for my study, and so it was kind of forged out of two fires, I guess, this title. One was the fact that it was the day that I had to submit it in to Pastor Sean so that it could go into the bulletin and get proofed. That was one fire - time. The other one was this - the day that I had to submit my title for this passage wasn't so good of a morning for me. It was a morning that an argument happened, and it wasn't a good argument, and I came to work really, really upset. Yeah, a Pastor coming to work upset. God forbid! Anyways, I come to work upset. I don't even know if I said 'hi' to anybody. I went into my office, and I shut my door, and then I get the, "Hey, I really need your title for the Scripture study that you're going to be teaching." And so I read the passage so I can refresh my memory on what I'm teaching, and I'm just like.....I read these verses, and I'm fuming mad, mind you. And so I'm reading these verses, and I come to this place where I'm like, "Oh, man!" Like, I'm mad! "And You're telling me to pursue peace with all people" (Laughing) "pursue holiness," and it just was like swallowing a brick for me. Because here I am trying to come up with some clever title for me to teach you guys about the Word of God, and here I am fuming mad, not doing the very thing I'm going to teach. And it totally wrecked me, and I came to the decision where I was like, "Okay. I either choose to obey what the Scripture says right now, or I don't." There's no gray area in this. I was wishing and hoping that this wasn't a black or white issue, that there was some sliver of gray that I could go, "Aha! I don't have to deal with this right now." But I didn't. I was called to do the very thing that we're going to share tonight, and I had to swallow my pride. I had to then go to the Lord and say, "Soften my heart because I don't want to budge right now. I'm mad at this person, I feel justified in the way that I'm thinking, and I don't want to show them grace. No. I don't want to show them grace." But the Scriptures tell me I have to. They tell me I have to. So what do I do? Do I believe the Word of God, or do I not believe the Word of God? Do I follow what it says, or do I not follow what it says? You see, I believe the inerrancy of God's Word. I believe that it is sufficient for all things. Without a doubt, I can hold this Bible up and say to you - with full conviction - it is all true, and it is all right. However, it is a whole 'nother thing to live under the authority of Scripture because there is a difference between intellectually agreeing with

God's Word and then actually doing it. A whole 'nother thing. Everyone's nodding their heads right now because you know exactly what I'm talking about. I have plenty of friends - old friends, mind you - who believe that Jesus Christ is the Lord. They believe that He's God; they believe that the Word of God is true. However, those same very friends do not live under the lordship of Jesus Christ; they only acknowledge Him intellectually, but it means nothing to them in terms of practicing and doing and being a Christian. It's just something that's of head knowledge to them.

Now, much of Scripture - as you'll read it (and much of you have already read a lot of it or all of it) - contains what we call doctrine. Doctrine is biblical truth. It's just facts provided to us that God wants us to know about any number of things. They're facts, they're truths. All right. Well, the Bible also has what we call (or contains) exhortations. Exhortations are challenges. They're encouragements to obey and live out what the Scripture teaches, and that's exactly what this passage is tonight and exactly what led me to do the right thing as I was giving my title study for this. Even though it was extremely difficult, I was exhorted by the writer of this book to do the right thing. Hence the title I created for this was "The Hard Side of Holiness." When it goes from knowing to obeying to doing and both are absolutely necessary to walk with God. Doctrine should always lead to something. It should always make a difference or a change in our lives. And that's exactly what the author of Hebrews makes very clear when you read this book.

Now, we do not know who the author is. I have my opinion, but that's all it is, is an opinion. But ultimately we know it was God who wrote it, and God didn't care to make the author known for this epistle probably because He didn't want to distract from the purpose of this letter. And this letter was to accomplish two main things: one - to exalt Jesus as superior to anyone or anything, that He is the One to whom you need to look to for salvation, for life, for everything; and number two - to challenge these Jewish Christians, to whom the book is written, to remain steadfast in the faith despite any hardships or persecution that comes with following Jesus. Now I'm going to be totally frank with you. This letter was not gentle, at least not in my opinion. I read it many times over before this study. It wasn't the seeker-friendly type of message that we hear in today's churches where you always walk out believing that God's always pleased with you no matter what choices you've made or sinful life that you choose to live. The author provides no such coddling. He's very matter of fact about who Jesus is, and he spends the first ten chapters explaining why He's superior than the angels and the Torah and

Moses and the tabernacle and the priesthood and the sacrificial system. He makes all these comparisons and contrasts between the Old Testament means for us to know God and then to Jesus, who is the brightness of God's glory and the express image of God's Person (Hebrews 1:3). He makes very clear in all these contrasts that Jesus is the means to God, and Jesus is the way to salvation. Why? Because Jesus is the living, breathing Word of God versus the two tablets of stone that condemned people. Because Jesus is the greater Leader, where Moses failed to deliver the Israelites into the Promised Land. Jesus, our great High Priest, leads us into God's rest and the means by which we can come boldly to the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16). All right.

But the author, while he keeps making these contrasts of why Jesus is greater, couples it with very, very stern warnings - warnings that make you feel uncomfortable. And that is exactly what the author is trying to do with these warnings. You see, many of these so-called Jewish Christians were turning away. The hardships and the persecutions of following Christ just weren't worth it to them. There were also some that were trying to play the middle ground. You know, "Let's be Christian enough to fit in with the church but also Jewish enough to fit in with society." They were doing that to alleviate that persecution and the hardships that came with identifying with Jesus. But guess what? The Holy Spirit was not cool with that. Your faith is in Jesus or it isn't. If your faith is in Jesus, you'll endure the hardships and the persecution. You won't water it down so that following Jesus is more comfortable or accommodating to your lifestyle. Because whatever sacrifice you make now for the reward of Jesus and sharing in His glory later is so much more worth it. But that's not how a lot of Jewish Christians were viewing this.

It's not how a lot of believers, today, view Jesus. We want the easy life. We want what brings us comfort, what brings us the least amount of difficulties. All while expecting God's blessing to pour out on us and then, at a ripe old age, with little to no sacrifice in our life, "Here's eternal life. Here you go." I think of it like this: I picture some parents who sacrifice everything to get their kid into Harvard University, one of the most prestigious schools on the face of the earth, the kind of school that will almost guarantee you a stellar job and a promising future. These parents work their fingers to the bone. They give up their own comfort and their luxuries and time and energy so that their child can have this amazing opportunity. So what these parents do is they work to the bone, and they get all the money necessary to get him into Harvard. They pay for all four years of it. No refunds.

They want it all up-front for him. And then they present it to him as a gift. And, as they present this gift to their child, he's like, "Thanks. But, you know, I'd rather go to Fullerton Junior College. My friends are going there. It's not as demanding on me and my time. I'll have more time to do the things that I like to do like video games and stuff." So this kid completely disregards the sacrifice his parents made to give him the best education possible. He just disregards it. And then he goes to Fullerton J.D. I'm not knocking Fullerton J.C. (Laughing) I took classes there myself. But anyways, he goes to Fullerton J.C. He barely graduates. And now it's time to get a job. And guess what? In his mind, this kid is fully expecting to get the same reward or opportunity as if he had gotten a degree from Harvard University. That's what it looks like for Christians who want the blessings of God while at the same time pay no respect to the sacrifice Jesus made and that they are unwilling to make any sacrifices on their own.

And this letter is to say there is a sacrifice to be made on your part, on our part. There is hardship you must face in following Jesus. And the many warnings of this letter caution you against turning away and going back to your old way of doing things and treating Jesus' sacrifice for you as something insignificant; or the writer would say as something just common. All that to say if Jesus is who He claims to be and has shown Himself to be, our faith in Him should be of the utmost importance. No comfort, no luxury of this world, is worth the promise of life we have in Christ by placing our faith in His perfect sacrifice. But that faith is more than mere lip service. It's a faith that acts in the present for the hope of a future glory or reward.

And that's the point of the next chapter, in chapter 11. It's the hall of faith, we like to call it: a number of Old Testament Bible heroes who lived a life of faith despite the adversity they faced as a result of their faith in a future promise. The author provides all these examples with the intent, then, to challenge and encourage both you and me and these Jewish Christians in following their example. If you look in Hebrews 12:1, it says, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us..." You see, this "cloud of witnesses" is that whole list of people that went before us in chapter 11 that were looking to the promises by faith, and they lived their lives according to that promise. They weren't half-in; they weren't casual onlookers of the race. They were in the race and looking to win it because the reward of the future promises was worth everything to them. Then, he challenges us - the

author challenges us - to look to Jesus, look to His example, who endured by far more than we ever could. He says, "Consider what He did to win the race, what Jesus did to win the race, before you give up your own race, before you get discouraged and want to call it quits or slow down" because being sold out for Christ brings too many challenges or burdens or doesn't get you what you want in this life. You see, Christ suffered in every possible way - emotionally, spiritually and physically - and He did it sinless. Yet, when we face suffering, we're running a race as sinners who can easily get tripped up, get sidetracked, fall on our faces or just slow down because we lose sight. But Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith (according to chapter 12:2), and He wants us to run well. So there is some necessary maturing that needs to take place, and that maturing, more times than not, comes in the form of discipline. Discipline, chastisement. And just as a parent disciplines and instructs their children in order for them to grow up and be well-trained for the life that is ahead of him or her, so God treats us as the sons and daughters whom He disciplines or chastises in order for us to grow into that man or woman of God. And then the author ends this section, in verse 11, saying this, "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." Suffering isn't fun, it's not enjoyable, but rather exposes us where we are weak, the areas where God needs to work on us in order for us to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ and be partakers of His holiness. That's where God wants to take us on this race we are running. There is a purpose for this temporary suffering because we have a Father who loves us and wants us to do well. He wants us to finish the race well.

So, "Therefore," verse 12, "strengthen the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees." So the author moves to action now, exhortation. You got the doctrine, you got the reasoning, you got the truth behind the motivation; now it's time for action. I know you feel beat up running the race. I know it's not easy. But now, here you are, faced with a decision. Do you believe what the Bible has to say? Do you believe in the future promises? If you do, then here's what you're called to do. This is what you have to do. First, strengthen your hands and knees. The command "strengthen" comes from the word from which we derive our English word "orthopedic." The idea is to make upright or straight; just like those insoles, those orthopedics you put in to get you aligned right. All right? When you're running - like physically running - and you get fatigued, guess what starts to go first? Your hands start dropping as you're running, and then you start to feel it in your knees. I know I do; I got bad knees. And these are the first things to go as you start to

feel the weight of what's taking place, of the physical demand on your body. And, as a result, your form gets off, you lose your stride, and you start slowing down. And so, like any good coach will do, the author encourages us to get those elbows in, get those hands up, get those knees moving! Don't slow down! Stay on the path! And run hard, push through! All right. That's what a good coach would do, and that's what our author here does for us. But don't let this illustration confuse you with the mentality of, "Oh, I've gotta pull myself up by the bootstraps because it's all on me to push through this and finish this race on top." That's not what the author is saying. Once again, who is the author and finisher of our faith? Jesus! All right? This command is a call to trust God, and let His perfect work take place in your life; to allow yourself to be pruned by Him as He puts you through the fire, knowing that it's for your benefit, instead of just complaining and groaning and wanting to throw in the towel because it hurts or it's hard or it's unfair.

The author then exhorts us, in verse 13, saying, "and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed." I want to read you Proverbs 4:25-27. It says, "Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil." We have a responsibility as God's kids to stay the path, to keep our eyes fixated on Jesus because when we take our eyes off the prize, what happens? We start to veer. We start to veer off. You ever try driving your car straight while trying to grab something on the floor of the passenger side of the car? It's difficult! During this whole bit, guess what happens? If you're lucky, you start to veer off, and you start hearing the bump, bump, bump, bump.....you hit those little plastic bumpy things to remind you, "Hey, you're driving badly right now....." to get you back on track. And so when the trials hit us hard, when God's pruning us or disciplining us, or the enemy just wants to distract us, we can get our eyes off Jesus real easy. Hence the author, earlier in the chapter, said, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us" (Hebrews 12:1). It draws us in. It takes our focus and attention, and we start heading down a path that starts to take us off that track. Whether it's maybe something harmless - endless hours of Netflix, being glued to our iPhones or tablets (swipe, swipe, swipe....swipe, swipe, swipe).....it's gettin' easier. Your kid's nonstop sports schedule. Your job that you've just got to push through another few more years to make your name. Or the pursuit of the golden years of retirement. Maybe something more serious like pornography. All sorts of things trip us up. And as it happens, we start hitting these spiritual little bumps - designed to wake you up, exactly what this passage

and many other passages of the Scriptures are intended to do. Are you listening to these spiritual road bumps when you come across them in the Word? With your life ... are you veering off the straight path, even further and further, as you ignore those little bumps that are meant and designed to wake you up, get you back in that lane?

Let me tell you what the danger is of continuing down that path because it not only hurts you, it hurts others. The word used here for "path," in verse 13, refers to the tracks left by wheels of a cart or a chariot which, then, travelers behind them would then follow; meaning if you get off course, you're more than likely going to take others with you. Christianity is a team sport, and we have a responsibility to each other; even more so to those that are new believers or weak believers or even those that are within the church that are still undecided about this whole Jesus thing. The author says, in verse 13, "so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed." I understand that the language here isn't exactly politically correct, but once again, it's a race analogy. He's using terms that would make sense to running. So he's referring to those that are weak, those that are indifferent and those that easily get tripped up. So we must run straight in order to carve a path that makes it easier for those that are weaker in the faith to follow.

To run straight, then, means we must live right. To run straight, we must live right. So how do we live right? Verse 14, "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord." Before I get into explaining this exhortation to pursue peace and holiness, I feel led to first share why we should pursue these things. I want to give you the why first so that you don't interpret this pursuit as some works-based righteousness. When the author tells us to pursue peace and holiness, we must first understand that we can only pursue it because of the finished work of Jesus Christ and that because of Jesus, we stand at peace with God - positionally, right now; for those that have put their faith in Jesus are reconciled to God and stand before Him, holy and blameless. Positionally, we are justified. This was not earned. It is a gift that was purchased at the cross and then us putting our faith in that finished work.

Now, as children of God, we go out walking in this peace and righteousness. We must be diligent, then, to put into practice what has already been freely given to us according to God's grace. We become the image bearers of Jesus. More times than not, we are the means by which people see God. They see His peace, they see His holiness through us, His church, because God designed the church to be the

vehicle in which to evangelize to the world. So that means our conduct is to line up with our message. Therefore, we "pursue peace with all people, and holiness." The word "pursue" here is an aggressive pursuit; it means to chase it down. Now I hear the excuse a lot from Christians when conflict arises between them and someone else that they aren't ready to forgive and to seek peace. Or, "I'm just waiting for the right time. Just waiting for that right time for that to happen." All that means is, "I don't want to do it!" That's all it means. It means, "I don't want to do it because I'm either hurt, mad, frustrated at this person, and I just don't feel like forgiving them right now because I don't even want to see their face." Or it means that this other person is hurt, mad, frustrated with you, and you're just afraid to pursue that peace with them. Am I right? Thank you. But here, we're told to aggressively seek peace. We aren't waiting for the perfect timing. We take care of business. We deal with it because we are to love as we have been loved. How terrible would it be when we mess up as Christians, as children of God, and we mess up, and we go to God for comfort and forgiveness, and He says, "Pffft! Nope! I'm not ready yet." (Laughing) "You really blew it, and I'm not done being mad at you." That's not the nature or character of God. Therefore, as Paul said in Romans 12:18, "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."

Now, peace is a two-way street, but we are only responsible for our side of the peace process. We show love, we show mercy, we show grace and forgiveness despite the response of whoever it is we have a problem with. So, who are we to aggressively pursue peace with? Read it. "All people." So does that mean when I go on Facebook I shouldn't slam or shame the opposing political party for their views which I don't agree with? Probably lost some friends right there. (Laughing) Does that mean I have to pursue peace with my spouse, even when they're in the wrong and offended me? Does that mean I have to pursue peace with the co-worker who is constantly gossiping about me? Yep. "All people" means all people! Believers, unbelievers, enemies, in-laws, bosses. All people. We are to love all people, and we're called to "overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). Why? So people see the Lord. So people see Jesus and they see their need for a Savior. If you just act like everyone else - respond in the flesh, get mad, hold grudges, cuss em' out, make them feel stupid, etc., etc., etc. - then you pass on the opportunity to help them see Jesus, to see Jesus through your life, as you are the image bearer of Christ. So pursuing peace with all people, it speaks of our love for people.

Now, we're pursuing holiness, that speaks of our love for God. To pursue holiness is being set apart for God's glory. And to be set apart for God's glory means a life of

obedience to God's Word. Jesus said what? "If you love Me, you'll keep My commandments" (John 14:15). What were Jesus' commandments? Love God, love people (Mark 12:30-31). Peace and holiness are interlinked; they are inseparable. And, as we pursue them both, not only will we see God as Jesus promises us (in Matthew 5), but people will be drawn to God as they see Him in us. And this is "the hard side of holiness" because these opportunities to shine are usually forged out of the fire, where the last thing you want to do is show grace, mercy, forgiveness and love; the things that would bring peace into the situation.

A few years back, me and my wife went to the Regal over here to see *The 13th Hour*." I really wanted to see it. She just finally said okay. It's the movie about Benghazi. And we get there on time - there's maybe five minutes before the lights are supposed to go out, whatnot - and there weren't a lot of seats left. And I get up there, and I notice there's this area where I typically like to sit, and there's this couple that had seats on each side of them but no doubles. So I just simply asked, "Hey, ma'am, could you please move over one seat so that me and my wife can watch the movie?" And, honestly, I don't remember her exact words, but she mumbled something about the temperature, blah, blah, blah, and moving, and she sat there like this (Pastor Jason has his arms crossed). And so I took the opportunity to love on her. "It's okay, ma'am. That's all right. I'll find something else. God bless you." That's not actually what I did! (Laughing) She looked there, all smug, and I just went, "Huh?!!!" (Laughing) "Ma'am, I paid the same amount of money you paid! Can you please scoot over one seat, one seat, so that me and my wife can watch the movie like you?" She gets up, she moves over one seat, smugly goes down, and I sit my little "tuckus" down, all confident (I did it). And as I sit down, guess who's no longer there? My wife. (Laughing) I made a scene. I embarrassed her. And I sat in the chair for maybe thirty seconds, just going, "Ohhhh" next to the person I just made a scene over, like touching elbows. All right? I got up, stormed out of the theater. Let's just say we didn't watch the Benghazi movie until it came out on Netflix. (Laughing)

But that's the kind of thing I'm talking about. That's "the hard side of holiness." I felt justified in the way I responded to her. I paid the same amount of money she did! I'm sure many of you are like, "Yeah, you're in the right." But is that what I'm here for? Is that what I'm here for? No. I'm here to show the love of God. And a lot of those opportunities that we have are forged from the fire, where the temptation is to go, "Ah ah" and instead we're supposed to draw back, show grace, love and mercy, and pursue that peace. That is how peace is pursued, by showing

those attributes of God. Because no one else in the world is showing those attributes, and that's how Christianity - that's how Jesus gets glorified in His church by when we are obedient to His very Word. Obedient to do the hard things, "the hard side of holiness."

Anyways, verse 15, continuing on. The author continues the exhortation but this time concerning things to guard against or avoid. It reads, "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." He says, "Look carefully," or, "See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God." All right. Let me tell you what this isn't saying. It is not saying that someone can sin so badly that God's grace cannot cover it. Romans 5:20 says, "But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more." You can't sin so badly that God goes, "Sorry, buddy. I'm all tapped out. No grace for you." No. Falling short of God's grace is referring to those that aren't standing or walking in God's abundant grace that continues to grow them and strengthen them as a believer. It's a child of God falling behind and missing out on the grace that is available to them, right there. Think about trying to live a Christian life without God's grace. How miserable, how hard, how difficult, and how depressing would it be to live this Christian life without God's abundant grace?

All right. These Jewish Christians were starting to make that mistake. They were more and more pulling away from the grace that was provided to them through Christ and going back to the old religious system of the Old Testament. They were putting themselves back into bondage, a bondage that couldn't save them. But it is by grace that we are saved. It is by grace that we are saved, and that never changes. Every day you wake up, you are saved by grace. We are to walk in this abundance of grace every day. But let us not be naïve to believe that we can't fall into that trap, that we can't be lured into the lies of the world and its ways. Hence the author says, "look carefully" or "see to it that no one falls short." The Greek word for "look carefully" is closely related to the word "*episkopos*," where "*episkopos*" is the title of an overseer or an elder. Meaning this - we, as Christian brothers and sisters, are all accountable to one another. We're all to look out for one another. I mentioned earlier - Christianity is a team sport. We're not to judge and condemn. Not to say that we don't ever point out sin, but we're not to do it in a way that's just to be a jerk. No. We're not to do that. We're to aid and to help, to step in and provide support, encouragement. Get them back on that straight path that we were talking about earlier. Get them back to that place where they can come boldly to the throne of grace and walk in it.

He continues the verse, saying, "lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled." This "root of bitterness" is a reference to apostasy within the church, those that identify themselves with the church, but they spread false doctrines, false gods, a false gospel. Moses, in Deuteronomy 29, as he prepares the people of God to enter into the Promised Land without him, warns them in verse 18, saying, "may there not be among you man or woman or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations, and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood." The author, in his exhortation to believers, is to finish well. He says to be on the lookout, be vigilant. Don't take this lightly. Don't be foolish and ignore it. Look out for it. Stop it in its tracks. Because, when you do take it lightly, this bitter root springs forth poisonous fruit. And what does the author say from this? "Many become defiled" as a result.

Lastly, verses 16 through 17, the author concludes his exhortation here with the example of Esau and something to, once again, look out for - to be vigilant, to protect yourself and the body of Christ from. It says this, "lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. 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." Heavy language. Esau is the prime example of the man who lives for himself. He couldn't have been any closer to the promises of God in that he was part of the very family that God would choose to bring forth the Savior of the world. But he was all about himself. He was all about gratifying the lust of the flesh and whatever this world could give to him. Esau served the god of his belly (Philippians 3:19). He lived carelessly and selfishly. So carelessly that he sold his birthright for a bowl of stew! This isn't a joke. A bowl of soup! Not even good soup, mind you. (Stew's terrible). However, when the consequences of this took place - when he realized he's not getting the blessing, he's not inheriting the blessing - he cried, he complained, he wept. Not because he wanted to be right with God but because he wanted the physical things that his birthright would have brought him. There is a difference between godly sorrow that brings about true repentance and a sorrow of the world, that you're just sorry because you didn't get what you wanted or it didn't go the way that you planned. He's the example that we have to look at and say, "Is the world that much worth it? Is everything this world has to offer that much worth it? Is life all about living for whatever appetite that you have, whatever craving that you desire?" I like what Paul has to say in Philippians 3:17-21. He says, "Brethren, join in following my example, and note

those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame - who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."

Tonight we are presented with an exhortation, a challenge, a call to run the race well. Faith is not mere lip service. Faith is living and making choices today that will cost us in the present but reward us in the future. Look at what the author says in Hebrews 11 about the faith of Moses. It says this about him, verse 24, "By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward." Man, does that pack a punch! How much time do you, do I, spend just planning our life to make it good, to make it better, to make it comfortable, to make it peaceful for ourselves, and absolutely just go headlong into the things of the world and ignore everything that Christ wants us to live for? And that's the challenge. That's the challenge to these Hebrew Christians who are actually facing persecution. And mind you, we might not face the persecution that they may have received back then. Ours is rather light. It's rather light. But it's not gonna stay that way. It's not gonna stay that way. There's going to be a day, I think in my lifetime - if the Lord tarries, that what I'm preaching from the pulpit will put me into prison because it's going to be considered hate speech. And hate speech is getting more and more popular. The minute you become intolerant of some of the world's agenda, you are a hater of it and violating some law by which you can now be imprisoned. We're going to face that if the Lord tarries, I bet you, in my lifetime. It may be in your lifetime, depending on your age. (Laughing)

So that's the reality. Whose side? Where do you pick? Where do you pick to live? Where do you choose to live? How do you choose to live? What's more important to you? I have to ask those questions to myself because this world does have alluring things. You know, sin is pleasurable for the moment. But is it worth giving up? And is it worth giving up the opportunity that we have for people to get saved? I mean, I think that's the real message I want to communicate to you - that I think that the message that the author wants to communicate to you is do you want

people to see Jesus? Do you want people to see the love of God? Do you want to see heaven filled with fruit that has come as a result of your own suffering? I guarantee you, you're going to want to end up in heaven blessed and rewarded, seeing the lives that you touched versus making sure you fit in all twelve episodes of Season 1 of some ridiculous program. Guarantee it! Is it wrong to watch TV? No. If it is, man, I'm in trouble. (Laughing) But it really should challenge us. We should be challenged by this text as these Hebrew Christians were challenged by it. Think about it. And get godly perspective. God is chastising us to mature us, to grow us, to develop us to be instruments in His hand so that people will see His holiness, people will see His peace, and that it will be infectious. If we don't do any of those things, if we don't look at the opportunities we have in front of us every single day, then we miss the boat on that.

So, let us work together as the body of Christ, strengthening each other, picking up our hands, picking up our knees, and looking out for one another lest we be deceived by the deceitfulness of sin. And shall we pursue, with great tenacity, the hard work of pursuing peace and holiness. With who? All people. And the holiness of God so that the others may see Jesus in our lives and come to a saving knowledge of Him so that they, too, can enjoy the future eternal reward of sharing in Christ's glory. Amen? Amen.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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