

Sermon-February 24th 2019

Grace Street Fellowship, Dr. Jim Burgin, pastor

SERIES: A Faith worth Holding
3 "Slip-Sliding Away"

Scriptures – Hebrews 2: 1-4

Opening

On January 20, Carren Stratford stepped onto elevator #29, one of 3 purple elevators in the John Peter Smith tower. Stratford is a nurse in her mid-50s who had been with JPS for about 2.5 years. Stratford stepped onto the elevator, but it did not stop moving up. She lost her balance as the elevator continued to rise, being caught in the machinery between the 10th and 11th floor, suffering severe brain damage, internal injuries and more. The lawyers involved correctly claim, "Elevators don't just malfunction suddenly." "There is usually a history of poor maintenance."

Transition

"When you're up against a struggle that shatters all your dreams
And your hopes have been cruelly crushed by Satan's manifested schemes
And you feel the urge within you to submit to earthly fears
Don't let the faith you're standing in seem to disappear"
From the Imperials, "Praise the Lord."

1. Hebrews was written to first century Hebrews, thus the name;
2. They were Jewish believers facing enormous persecution from all sides, and they were tempted to leave Christianity to return to their old religion of Judaism.
3. The writer of Hebrews loves them, and encourages them with this note to stay faithful.

Isaac Watts classic:

Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or wash away the stain.

But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,
Takes all our sins away
A sacrifice of nobler name
and richer blood than they.

Look to Jesus

1. The prophets had small pieces of the puzzle, but now we have the whole picture (vss. 1-2). Illustrations: a) cooking – had the ingredients before, but now, we have the pie; b) had the puzzle pieces before, but now we can see the whole picture; c) we had the individual instruments, but now we have the music of the orchestra.
2. Jesus is God
 - a. He speaks with God's Voice – "in these last days, God has spoken to us by His son (vs. 1): authoritative, certain, wise – "no one ever spoke like this before." He represents God, and He is God;
 - b. He has the heart and character of God – the Son is the radiance of God's glory, and the exact representation of His being (vs. 3). The Father and the Son are one. Jesus is God, and is himself holy and all powerful. When you have seen Jesus you have seen the Father.
 - c. He has God's power – Jesus created (verse 2) and sustains (verse 3) the Universe with His Word. "Let there be light." Remember, in Matthew 8, when Jesus calmed the storm? Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves;

- d. He loves unconditionally – he provided purification for sins (verse 3). How did he do that? By leaving heaven, sharing in our humanity (2:14) (becoming human in every way (2:17) and by suffering death on a cross (2:10), so that the devil would be defeated (2:14), and the power of death broken (2:14) to free us from slavery (2:14) in order to adopt us into His family as children (2:11-12).
 - e. He is Just – (1:8-9) a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. No corrupt judges in the kingdom.
 - f. He is full of Joy – anointed with the oil of Joy.
 - g. His Kingdom never ends – the earth will perish, wear out like a garment, roll up like a robe (1:10-12) but Jesus Christ remains the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8).
3. If we have Jesus, why would we go back to the prophets? If we were joint heirs with Christ, members of his family, why would we go back to being enslaved by the dog-eat-dog world of this life? If we have relationship with him, why would we go back to rituals and ceremonies? If we were saved by Grace, who among us would want to climb the ladder of religious rituals and superimposed fabricated morality, attempting an impossible task of earning our salvation.
 4. In chapter 12, the writer makes the comparison between a “mountain of fear” and the “mountain of joy.” Listen to this comparison, please:

¹⁸You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom, and storm; ¹⁹to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, ²⁰because they could not bear what was commanded: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death.” ²¹The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, “I am trembling with fear.”

²²But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to ²⁴Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

²⁸Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, ²⁹for our “God is a consuming fire.”

5. All the fullness of God is in Jesus (Colossians 2:9). All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in Jesus (Colossians 2:3). Jesus is the final word of God. He is the Creator, Sustainer, Owner, Ruler, and Redeemer of the Universe.
6. Don’t look back – to prophets or angels.

We Must Pay Attention

1. Therefore (2:1) – because you are experiencing such heartache, and because Jesus is God’s Final Word, we must pay attention;
2. Pay Attention to – the word in Greek is *prosechein*
3. Drift away – (pararrein) – Slipping of a ring off of a finger; a particle of food that has slipped down the wrong way; of a topic that has slipped into the conversation; something that has ebbed or leaked away; It is regularly used of something that has carelessly or thoughtlessly allowed to become lost;
4. Nautical terms – the first term means, “to moor a ship.” If you forget to tie up your ship properly at night, it slips away in the morning. The second term means to miss the harbor – because the captain wasn’t paying attention and the ship not only misses home, but slips away to destruction on the rocks.
5. A second translation – William Barclay, in his commentary on Hebrews, suggests this translation: “Therefore, we must the more eagerly anchor our lives to the things which have been taught lest the ship of life slip past the harbor and be wrecked.

6. Not an isolated command – Hebrews 3:1 – says, “Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus . . .” Other translations say “consider Jesus.” Hebrews 12: 1-2 says, “Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus.”

Why should we pay Attention?

1. Because drifting is easy - Because it doesn't take a conscious choice to move away from the center of God's Word. Drifting means to float by. It's what a piece of bark or a leaf or a dead fish does in the river. It takes no life and no motion to float by. One need only do nothing.
2. Because we have, been given a great salvation?
 - a. Sidebar? What is the author talking about when he says; “spoken through angels” (verse 2)? Deuteronomy 33:2 tells us that when the Lord gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, he came with “myriads of holy ones.” Acts 7:53 – Just before he was stoned, Stephen said to the religious leaders that disobeyed the very law they proclaimed to follow when they rejected Jesus, and that this law was delivered by angels. Galatians 3:19 says the same thing – the law was given by way of the angels.
 - b. Because the Old Testament law was applied externally, and it was impossible to live up to it. Jesus illustrated this when he refused to perform the required ceremonial hand washings before eating. The problem, he said, isn't the outside of the cup, but what's on the inside of the heart. When we are saved by Christ, we are cleansed from the inside.
 - c. Because we are saved by Grace and not by works.
3. Because you will drift towards destruction if you don't
 - a. Some apply this conversation to people close to salvation, but not yet saved. In any group like this gathered among the church, there will be those who are close to salvation – they know the Bible, that Jesus died for them, but they let anything and everything get in the way, so that they are never saved. They miss the safe haven and drift towards destruction.
 - b. Probably more likely, the author is speaking to Christians experiencing persecution who take their eyes off Jesus. They don't lose their salvation, but they lose their peace, their joy, their usefulness for the kingdom, their testimony, and even their heavenly reward.

The Essence of Christianity is a love relationship with Jesus

1. Paul said it like this, “In Him we live and move and have our being” (Act 17:28). There is a musical expression: “He's inward with it.” It means you have merged with the piece of music that is the sound is not just something performed, but something coming from the inside out. Getting inward with it is the essence of Christianity.
2. Why did God create us? There is only one answer: for relationships. God decided not to have a life of God's own, but to share the divine life with us. God created us for a relationship with him.
3. God didn't send Jesus to deliver a proposition. God sent Jesus to deliver a proposal: “Will you love me? Will you let me love you?” In fact, Jesus not only got on his knees to deliver this proposal, Jesus was nailed to a cross to deliver God's proposal.
4. From “Fiddler on the Roof”

Tevye: Do you love me?
Golde: Do I what?
Tevye: Do you love me?

You're upset. You want out. Go inside.
Go lie down.
Maybe it's indigestion.

Golde: Do I love you?
With our daughters getting married and
this trouble in the town,

Tevye: Golde, I'm asking you a question.
Do you love me?
Golde: You're a fool!

Tevye: I know. But do you love me?

Golde: Do I love you?
For twenty-five years, I've washed your clothes,
Cooked your meals, cleaned your house,
Given you children, milked the cow.
After twenty-five years, why talk about love right now?

Tevye: The first time I met you was on our wedding day. I was scared.

Golde: I was shy.

Tevye: I was nervous.

Golde: So was I.

Tevye: But my father and my father said we'd learn to love each other.
So, now I'm asking, Golde...

Tevye: Do you love me?

Golde: I'm your wife!

Tevye: I know. But do you love me?

Golde: Do I love him?

For twenty-five years, I've lived with him,
Fought with him, starved with him.
For twenty-five years, my bed is his.
If that's not love, what is?

Tevye: Then you love me?

Golde: I suppose I do.

Tevye: And I suppose I love you, too.

Together: It doesn't change a thing, but even so,

After twenty-five years, it's nice to know

How do we come home?

Architect, inventor and Philosopher Buckminster Fuller served in the U.S. Navy during WWI gives us some help here. He asked his students to imagine they are on the deck of an ocean liner with one thousand people. Rocks are looming ahead and the passengers must find a way to steer the ship to safety. One person stands on the bow, pointing out the rocks, and the crowd of passenger's tries to guide the ship by shifting their weight. They run from one side of the deck to the other in response to the guide's instructions. But Fuller, a fulcrum figure in science and philosophy, suggested that there is a much better way to guide the ship to safety. In the steering mechanism of an ocean, liner is a piece of metal six inches square, called a trim tab. One person moving the trim tab can steer a great ship more effectively than even 10 thousand people running back and forth on the deck. The trim tab is the place to position yourself to take action that will maximize your impact on the course of human history.

In an increasingly complex world, find the trim tab of faith, Jesus Christ. When things aren't going well, every coach will tell you it is time to return to the basics.

The church may clutch Jesus to its side, but it no longer clutches Jesus to its insides.

The mysteries of God's kingdom are not in some pot of gold that bring you self-fulfillment, but a relationship with Jesus that costs you everything. We may not know where our next meal is coming from; we may face people who come to drag us away in chains; we may even take a premature troute to eternity. Of such is the way of the cross. It costs us everything, because faith in Jesus is a lived relationship. Biblical trus is not a possession you wield, but a life you yield.

This applies to the church too

Conclusion

Invitation