

Sermon

Grace Street Fellowship, Dr. Jim Burgin, pastor

Faith worth Holding Series #5

“Help for Hurting Believers”

Hebrews 2: 9 – 3:1; 10:23-25 - Focus verse: Hebrews 3:1

Opening

A big city real estate agent & attorney from New York City came out to West Texas and met a country farmer/rancher. The agent was dressed in a \$3,000 suit with fancy shoes, and the rancher had on overalls and muddy boots. Trying to get the buy-in of “the locals, the city slicker attempted to impress the farmer with his knowledge of the geo-political landscape. The farmer had a couple of questions. “Do you see that windmill over in the distance? How far away do you think it is? About 3 miles said the attorney confidently.” “Hpmh,” said that rancher, he said, “it is fifteen miles over there to that windmill.”

Question 2 “You see that mesa over there in the distance?” He said, “How far do you think it is over there to that mesa?” And, that attorney said, “Well, I would guess it would maybe be ten miles, fifteen miles, over there.” “Hpmh,” said that rancher, “it is sixty miles over there to that mesa!”

And he pointed to a great, big bluff out there in West Texas and said, “How high do you think that bluff is?” And the fellow said, “I guess that would be 300 – 500 feet high.” The rancher said, “Listen, man, that bluff is over three thousand feet high!”

And they came across a little trickle of water in the sand, and that Northeastern attorney began to undress, unclothe, and disrobe. And that rancher in amazement, said, “What are you doing?” And, the city man said, “I’m getting ready to swim this river.

Teaching: *Your experienced perspective makes a difference.*

Introduction

Antiochus Epiphanes, the King of Syria, in the 2nd century B.C., was considering invading Egypt. Naturally, the Roman Emperor did not want to be invaded, so he sent his Ambassador Papallias to meet Antiochus Epiphanes on the border of Egypt. Antiochus Epiphanes (the King) brought his great entourage with him, his army amassed on the border. Papallias came alone.

They chatted for a little bit, because they had known one another in Rome. Finally, they got down to business. The King of Syria said, “I am going to invade Egypt. I am considering invading Egypt.” Very quietly, Papallias said, “I would prefer that you not do that.” The King replied, “No, I am actually considering doing that.”

So, Papallias took a stick, and he drew a circle in the sand around where Antiochus the King was standing. Papallias said, “You consider it as long as you want to consider it, but before you step out of this circle you better have a decision.” After a few moments, the King of Syria said, “I’ve decided **not** to invade Egypt. What caused the mighty King of Syria to back down? He had an army with him. Papallias had no one, not even a guard. No, it was because of who Papallias represented, the emperor of Rome. Antiochus Epiphanes the King knew he was no match.

Teaching: *Careful consideration of what’s important, despite appearances, makes all the difference.*

We are in a “World of Hurt”

1. 2:8 – “Yet at present, we do not see everything subject to him.”
2. Are you kidding? That’s the understatement of the ages. That’s all you have to say. Have you ever had someone make light of your pain, because they hadn’t experienced it themselves, and they were more interested in giving you a cutesy theological teaching than they were in providing genuine care.

It feels like this: You have cancer, and they are saying “Take two aspirin and call me in the morning.”

3. These Hebrew Christians were being persecuted –
 - a. abandoned by family and friends;
 - b. Their businesses and efforts at making a living were blocked and banned, so that they were thrown into poverty. They were made a laughingstock of the neighborhoods and communities, and they couldn’t feed their families.
 - c. They were blocked from community resources – your kids sick? Sorry, no doctors are available for you.
 - d. More than that, their worship services were made illegal and disrupted by government police, so that pastors and parishioners were hauled out of their homes and dragged to jails where they were imprisoned and tortured.
 - e. Even worse, they were made the scapegoat of all society’s issues. Nero was a pyromaniac, and he burned Rome to the ground, but subsequently blamed Christians.
4. A modern parallel might be the experience of African Americans. Author James Cone tells us that between 1880 and 1940 five thousand black men and women were lynched in America, simply because they were black.
 - a. In this era, African Americans were publically humiliated, subjected to the utmost indignity and cruelty, stripped, paraded, mocked, whipped, pierced, derided, spat upon, and tortured for hours in the presence of jeering crowds for popular entertainment.¹
 - b. Newspapers would report every detail of a lynching, but the perpetrators were always “unknown men.” G Warren Harding, President in 1922 refused to sign an anti-lynching bill.
 - c. Bishop Payne of the A.M.E Church was so troubled that he questioned God’s existence.

“Sometimes it seems as though some wild beast had plunged his fangs into my heart, and was squeezing out its life-blood. Then I began to question the existence of God, and to say” “If he does exist, is he just? If so, why does he suffer one ace to oppress and enslave another, to rob them by unrighteous enactments of rights, which they hold most dear and sacred? Is there no God?”²
 - d. Jewish Christians addressed in Hebrews were abandoned, persecuted with abandon, and they were sorely tempted to leave their faith.

Transition: What do we do when we feel persecuted and abandoned?

¹ James Cone, “The Cross and the Lynching Tree. 2011, p. 31.

² Ibid., 57.

Lean into God's Family

1. The author of Hebrews wasn't being flippant when he said "this world isn't as it is supposed to be."
 - a. He was one of them, not an outsider. This author had experienced the same suffering, and he had seen those he loved suffer too. In Hebrews 11, he describes this suffering:

³⁶Some faced jeers and flogging while still others were chained and put in prison. ³⁷They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted, and mistreated. ³⁸The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves, and holes in the ground.
 - b. Hebrew 13:3 – "Remember those who are in prison, as though you were there in prison with them, those who are being tortured as though you yourselves were being tortured."
 - c. The author's confession about the disparity between the way things are supposed to be and the way things are was an intimate acknowledgement and acceptance of their suffering.
 - d. Further, he was bringing to them a word from God for their soul.
2. He says in 10:25 – stay active in church. Don't miss the God-given support of a spiritual family. You need the church. But the reason is that the church is designed to bless you – not to count nickels, noses (as some feel) or the three "Bs" – Buildings, Budgets and Baptisms. Hebrews 10:23-25 reminds us what the church means to hurting believers.

²³Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
3. AT CHURCH, YOU WILL
 - a. Embrace your Hope – Verse 23 says "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful." This is an affair of the heart. Hold fast to your hope. Because God has never broken a promise, you can anchor your soul to Him.
 - i. God didn't create you to curl up in bed, isolating from the world, your critics, and your problems.
 - ii. Neither did the Lord create you to be like leaves scattered across the back yard blown back and forth by the wind. They're active, but they are dead, pushed around by every wind and cross wind.
 - b. Find support for authentic Christian living
 - i. Verse 26 says we are to spur ourselves on to love and good deeds.
 - ii. The church will spur you on – prompt you, prod you – where?
 - iii. Towards your spiritual success – instead of an "eye for an eye" you love and help someone. The church will prompt you in that direction, then cheer your success.
 - iv. You will experience the blessing of authenticity – an integrated life – so that who you are and what you do come together.
 - c. Make a difference in the lives of your brothers and sisters. Verse 26 says "Let us consider how to spur ourselves on to love and good deeds." In other words, the church needs your

voice. Your voice will be heard, and you will experience the joy of making a difference in the lives of people you love.

- d. Be guarded from selfishness – Verse 24 says we are to consider others.
- i. How natural it would be in the midst of persecution to center of your own losses, but the church will stand in between you and the temptation towards self-centeredness.
 - ii. Of course it isn't self-centered to hurt, or to protect yourself, or to be alert and aware of your own difficult circumstances.
 - iii. But we all know how easy it would be to subsequently make ourselves the center of the universe, and subsequently need everyone else to follow suit. We know how to throw a pity party.
 - iv. We are “to consider” – Meaning to look at one another, think about one another, focus on one another, study one another, let your mind be occupied with one another. And the goal of this is stimulating others to love and good deeds.
- e. Find strength for your circumstances – the purpose of the church is to encourage you. Verse 25 says “let us encourage one another.”
- i. There is a regulation of the Royal Navy which says: “No officer shall speak discouragingly to another officer in the discharge of his duties.”
 - ii. In Job 4:4, one of Job's friends pay Job a great compliment. “Your words have kept men on their feet.”
 - iii. It is easy to laugh, or to make fun of others. The world is full of discouragers, but we have a Christian privilege and responsibility to encourage one another. Literally to pour courage into.

Look to Jesus

1. Chapter 3, verse 1 in our text says “fix your thoughts” on Jesus.” The Greek word here (*katanoein*) is better translated “fix your attention on” Jesus. The idea isn't just to look at the form of something, but to consider its essence. The outside of a bottle of coke, for example, might be pretty or not, but it is the coca cola inside that makes the sale.
2. The idea is to consider something so fully that the lesson it is designed to teach becomes clear. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said to “consider the lilies,” or to consider the birds of the air. He wasn't just saying take a glance and enjoy the moment, but give thought to how they are sustained as to how it affects your life. If God takes care of momentary things, how much more will he take care of you.
3. Here, we are being asked to look to Jesus. In verse 9 of chapter 2, the author says “But, we do see Jesus.”
4. In the first chapter, we learned that Jesus is the radiance of God's glory, the creator of the world and the one who sustains the world, merely by the power of his Word. We learned that he sits on the throne as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
5. In chapter two, we learn what Jesus did for us.

Dr. Robert Jeffress, on July 15th 2018 said this to his congregation. “I am going to admit something to you that perhaps I shouldn't admit. He had always heard not to “preach your doubts.” But if he is honest with you all, there are times I have doubts about the things I stand up here and preach to you week in and week out. There are times that I wake up in the middle of the night and I wonder ‘Is there really a God?’ Or is this all make believe? Is there really such a thing as “Life after death?”

Or is the world all there is? Even if there is a God and if there is a heaven and hell, do I really know I've done everything I can to please him and to be welcomed into heaven. I have those doubts occasionally, but every time I do, I come back to Jesus Christ and what he said. It is Jesus who said whoever clings to him will not perish. It is Jesus who said he is the resurrection and the life. Any who come to me. We can put our faith and trust in everything we did and everything he said.

What has Jesus done for us?

1. Jesus was “born to die.”
 - a. Verse 9 tells us that Jesus became a “little lower than the angels.”
 - b. Jesus became a man. He became a man, so that he could die. He died, because only His death could accomplish our salvation.
 - c. Pastor John MacArthur, in his commentary on Hebrews says it like this:
 - Those tiny hands fashioned by the Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb were made to take two great nails. Those little feet were made to climb a hill and e nailed to a cross. That sacred head was made to wear a crown of thorns, and that tender body wrapped in swaddling clothes was made to be pierced by a spear.
 - d. This is the reason Christ came to earth. His death was no accident. This was God’s plan for His son, and the gift of our Lord for us.
 - e. Jesus died in our place to remove the curse, so that our crown could be restored – the crown of royalty (*stephanos*), not award.
2. Jesus died in our place
 - a. Verse 9 says that Jesus tasted death for everyone.
 - b. Kings of Old had wine tasters or cupbearers. Their purpose was to taste the food or drink, so that the King could never be poisoned.
 - c. Here, Jesus reverses the roles, and he tastes the food and drink, except this time, the meal is poisoned. He tastes death for us, so that we will never die, and so we will never have to fear death again.
3. Jesus blazes our trail –
 - a. Verse 10 – Jesus is the author of our salvation. He is the pioneer. It is a reference to the one who blazes a trail, so that others can walk on that trail, or a patriarch who starts a family that others belong to through the years.
 - b. Jesus built the bridge with the sacrifice of his own life, and because he did – now we know the way, and we can follow the path.
 - c. Jesus made our salvation possible. When he returned to heaven, scripture says in verse 10 that he brought “many sons to glory.” Not only did he blaze the trail, but he brought us with him to his eternal home.
4. Jesus includes us in his family. John 1:12 says that “to as many as received him, he gave the right to become the children of God.” Jesus is our Lord. Yes. Jesus is also our brother.
5. Jesus defeated our enemy (Vss. 14-15)
 - a. Jesus shared in our humanity –this word for share is *koinonia*, which means fellowship, communion, or partnership.

- b. Jesus defeated Satan by taking away his weapon – physical, spiritual, and eternal death.

What about our suffering?

1. Suffering has a purpose.

The word *made perfect* in verse 10 doesn't mean that the sinless Son of God wasn't perfect. He was. The word is a word of completion, bringing to maturation in the way a cake has to be baked at a certain temperature for a certain amount of time to be just right. God allowed his son to suffer, so that he could fully enter into our world. On the cross, he experienced the full suffering of all humanity across all time.

2. Your very real and painful suffering is also temporary. Look at verse 11.

Look at verse 12. I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises. This is a direct quote from Psalm 22 – which starts, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me,” but ends with singing god's praises in the presence of God's people. When did Jesus do that? In heaven. When you are going through the tunnel of suffering it is hard to praise God. But one day, it will be over.

3. You are never alone – Jesus suffered to identify with us. He came not just to save us, but to sympathize us.

- a. A family with a little boy lost their mother to cancer. The little boy slept in dad's bed the first night after the funeral, but he couldn't sleep. “Daddy, are you looking at me?” Yes, son, I am. I can sleep if I know you are looking at me. Later that night, the father got out of bed, went to the window and looked up at the stars. Heavenly Father, are you looking at me?
- b. When you consider Jesus, you discover that your heavenly father is looking at you.

4. Our Suffering shapes us to identify with the suffering of other people – We will never understand what the Christian life is all about until we understand that it is about other people and not us. We are priests. 1 Peter 2:9 – We are part of a royal priesthood. God has left us here to represent him to others. God wants us to minister. 2 Cor. 1:4 – Strengthens us in our affliction, so that we can comfort those who are suffering with the same comfort we have received.

Conclusion

He was a boy, he says, about sixteen years old, and for years he had been in misery, wanting to find God, and didn't know how or where, reared as he was in a formal Anglican church. And on a cold, winter, snowy night, he turned in on a Sunday evening to a little Methodist chapel. There was no preacher there. There was just a layman, and the layman was exhorting from that text in Isaiah 45: “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none other” [Isaiah 45:22].

And as the Methodist layman exhorted, he pointed to the young fellow Spurgeon and said, “Young man, you look so miserable. Young man, look to Jesus! Look to Jesus.” And Spurgeon says, “And that night, I looked and lived. Had it been difficult, I might not have found it. Had it been hard and recondite, I might not have understood it. But I looked when I was a child, and I lived.” The illiterate, the intellectual, the rich, the poor, the blind, the lame, the halt, anybody can look. And he that looks shall live

Lyrics

Weak and wounded sinner
 Lost and left to die
 O, raise your head, for love is
 passing by

Come to Jesus
 Come to Jesus
 Come to Jesus and live!
 Now your burden's lifted
 And carried far away
 And precious blood has
 washed away the stain, so

Sing to Jesus
 Sing to Jesus
 Sing to Jesus and live!

And like a newborn baby
 Don't be afraid to crawl

And remember when you
 walk Sometimes we fall, so

Fall on Jesus
 Fall on Jesus
 Fall on Jesus and live!

Sometimes the way is lonely
 And steep and filled with
 pain. So if your sky is dark
 and pours the rain, then

Cry to Jesus
 Cry to Jesus
 Cry to Jesus and live!

O, and when the love spills
 over And music fills the night
 And when you can't contain

your joy inside, then

Dance for Jesus
 Dance for Jesus
 Dance for Jesus and live!

And with your final heartbeat
 Kiss the world goodbye
 Then go in peace, and laugh
 on Glory's side, and

Fly to Jesus
 Fly to Jesus
 Fly to Jesus and live!
 Fly to Jesus
 Fly to Jesus
 Fly to Jesus and live!

Invitation