

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
The Letter to the Hebrews – Chapter 12, Verses 9-17
Notes From Class on April 27, 2010
Last Revised on (April 26, 2010)

Songs

Opening Prayer

Almighty God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Thank you for letting us come here again tonight to study your word together.

We ask, as always Lord, that you will be our only teacher, the only voice we hear.

Please lead us into your truth and protect us from mistakes in our understanding.

We are sinners, Lord, and we marvel at your forgiveness.

We marvel that you continue to speak to us and to teach us,

and that you continue to discipline and chastise us.

So that we may become holy as you are holy.

And finally come to live with you forever.

Oh Lord please bless this time and this fellowship.

In Jesus Name We Pray

Amen

Introduction

Welcome everyone and thanks for coming to our weekly Bible study.

Presently, as you know, we are studying the New Testament Book of **Hebrews**.

Last week we covered the first **eight** (8) verses of Chapter **12**.

Tonight we will continue reading at verse **nine** (9).

But first let's begin, as usual, with a quick review of what we have studied so far.

Before we begin our review, please take this opportunity to get some coffee or tea at the back of the class.

If you do not already have one, please pick up a copy of the handout containing the ESV text for Hebrews.

OK now if everyone has everything they need, let's get started.

Review

As we have continually noted,

Hebrews appears to be the text of a **sermon**,

written around the end of the **First Century**, A.D,

to be delivered to a group of **Christians**

at least some of whom were in danger of "**falling away**"

and who needed to be encouraged to "**hold fast**" to their faith in Jesus Christ.

The preacher reminds them of the **unqualified** supremacy of Christ **(1:1 - 3:6)**.

and **admonishes** them not to repeat the mistakes of the Children of Israel,

who had so often fallen away from **God**. **(3:7 - 4:13)**.

He portrays Jesus as a great **high priest** **(4:14 - 5:10)**

and tries to help them understand that to reject **Jesus**, is to reject **all** hope of salvation. **(5:11 - 6:20)**

The old **priesthood** and **law** have been superseded by something better **(7:1 - 8:7)**.

The Old **Covenant** has been replaced by a **New** Covenant **(8:8-8:13)**.

The **ceremonies** and rituals of the Old Covenant have become **obsolete**. **(Chapter 9)**

The death of **Christ** has atoned for sin --- once for all **(Chapter 10:1-18)**.

Now **all** who are in Christ may draw near to God with confidence **(Chapter 10:19-22)**.

and if we have **faith** and **persevere** until the end, our souls shall be **preserved**. **(Chapter 10:23-39)**

Chapter 11 examines some of the great heroes of faith of the Old Testament and the various ways in which their faith **manifested** itself in action. **(Chapter 11:1-34)**

During their lifetimes few of these heroes of faith received much of what God had promised. Some were mocked, persecuted, tortured, and killed for their faith. All of them died before the coming of Christ. **(Chapter 11:35-40)**

There is therefore no excuse for Christians to lose faith and fall away, even when we have very great trouble in this world.

Such trouble has always come to people of faith. The faithful of an earlier era held fast even without the blessed assurance of knowing of Christ.

The preacher encourages the church to emulate these great heroes of faith, which he describes as a great cloud of witnesses,

setting aside our sin and other unnecessary baggage

and running the race set before us with endurance. **(Chapter 12, Verse 1)**

He encourages the church also, and especially, to consider Jesus, who is the origin, and object, and only perfect example of faith.

It was because of the joy set before him, that Jesus endured the shame and suffering of the cross.

We are invited to do likewise. **(Chapter 12, Verses 2 and 3)**

The preacher reminds his listeners that, while they have indeed suffered for their faith, they have not yet resisted to the point of shedding their blood. **(Chapter 12, Verse 4)**

And he reminds them that such suffering as they have endured, had been for their benefit.

God is treating them as his sons. **(Chapter 12, Verses 5-8)**

How could it be otherwise, and how could we wish that it be otherwise?

This completes our review.

Does anyone have any comments or questions before we read on?

Hebrews, Chapter 12, Verses 9-11

OK. Will somebody please read Hebrews, Chapter 12, Verses 9-11, in Japanese.

Thank you. Now will someone please read those verses in English (ESV).

9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?

10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Thank you.

So before I said that we should not wish to be free of God's discipline or try to escape it, because this is way of all who would live in God's household.

Now, the preacher makes this same point with what is, in effect, a brief parable.

(Verse 9)

Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?

We all have earthly fathers, he says.

This parable works best if your earthly father is wise and good, as mine thankfully is.

I do respect my father, and he did discipline me, more than most of my friends were disciplined.

So this little parable works for me.

The preacher says, think of your dad. He disciplined you didn't he? You respect him don't you.

And if your answers were "yes" and "yes" then the heavenly meaning of the earthly story shines through.

So too, then, should you respect, and be subject to God,

whose discipline is all of the struggles you have in your life.

Your present body will certainly die, because of sin, because of the Fall; that is true for everyone.

But the discipline which you undergo in the body affects your spirit and, therefore, your immortal soul.

God is the father of our spirits also, and he is developing your spirit and mine through this life we are living now, and these are developments with eternal implications.

How this **works**, exactly, is not known.

But we get the basic **idea** from the parable of earthly fathers.

(Verse 10)

For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

Our **earthly** fathers discipline us for a short time, when we are young,

for our benefit during the **remainder** of our life on this earth,

and they do that in accordance with their own **limited** earthly wisdom and sometimes **selfish** values.

but God who is **infinitely** wise, all knowing, and all powerful is grooming us for **eternity** and preparing us to share his **holiness!**

Q. So, should we say "please God, discipline us some **more!**?"

A. Perhaps **sometimes** we should pray like that, but I am not certain of that, and that does **not** seem to be the teaching here.

Q. Here what **is** the teaching?

A. **Perseverance** ... **through** suffering ... in **anticipation** of good things yet to come.

(Verse 11)

For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Surely when we understand that God is our **Father**, Christ is our **Brother**, and that we are being prepared to live together with them **forever**, we will gladly submit to whatever discipline **they** think we need!

It's **all** good.

Everyone bound for the kingdom **must** go through it.

Even **Jesus** did!

He was never punished for his **own** sins, of course, because he **had** no sin.

Yet he was punished for **our** sins in a way we can scarcely contemplate.

Thus we do **not** experience punishment for our sins, because **he** has done that.

Jesus **was** disciplined --- commanded to "drink from the cup" of Calvary. And He **obeyed!**

He certainly **did** struggle, including struggling with **fear** and some **temptations** that we can hardly imagine,

such as the temptation to use his divine power to prevent suffering ... his **own** suffering ... and **ous!**

Remember it was **through** his suffering that Jesus was "made perfect" (2:10)

Thus could Paul **rejoice** in being allows to share in Jesus' suffering (Col. 1:24)

Nevertheless, they call it suffering because it is **unpleasant**.

Even Jesus was **reluctant** to endure it. (Thus did his obedience have substance.)

Likewise Paul prayed repeatedly for its **removal** (Thus was God's grace sufficient)

and Paul was sometime filled with **despair** in the face of suffering.

We should not make **light** of it.

Suffering is serious business.

Hebrews, Chapter 12, Verses 12-17

Will somebody please read Hebrews, Chapter 12, Verses 12-17, in Japanese.

Thank you. Now will someone please read those verses in English (ESV).

12 Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees,

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

14 Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

16 that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.

17 For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

Thank you.

OK. So now we understand, that a kind of race lies before us, one which has been run by every man and woman of faith, including even the Son of God.

And we understand that it is not supposed to be easy, and that the difficulty is actually for our benefit!

And that we are certain to wind up in heaven with all the faithful who have been redeemed in Christ, if only we will stay the course, we should be re-energized!

Verse 12 reads

(Verse 12)

Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees,

This is a picture of a runner who is ready to quit, and also a reference to scripture (Isa. 35:3)

Now is time for this person to get his "second wind," to "shake it off," to "get tough"

(Verse 13)

and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.

Before this metaphorical runner was instructed to set aside weights and put off sin which might trip him up.

Now in a similar way, he is instructed to watch carefully where he is going.

This is a fairly common expression from the wisdom literature, where the application of wisdom is what makes one's paths straight.

The man who knows the way, who can avoid snares and traps and false roads and dead ends... the one who is wise the one with experience the one who listens to good counsel, he will survive until the end.

And Wisdom comes from God and the Wisdom of God is Christ and Christ is revealed by the Spirit.

And as many as are led by the Spirit, these are the children of God! (Romans 8:14)

This seems more like a "cross-country" race than one run on a track and, indeed, our race in life is like that.

We do need to cast aside unnecessary weights and put off entangling sins and then we really do need to look up and pick straight paths for our feet.

And we really do need to be led by the Spirit in the footsteps of Christ to our Heavenly home with God.

Otherwise instead of being sanctified and strengthened by the exercise of life and coming finally healthy into the kingdom, we may stumble and wreck ourselves seriously along the way, and maybe even unable to complete the course.

(Verse 14)

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

One example of picking straight paths for our feet, is in our relationships with other people.

We must simply strive for peace with everyone.

I think this means more than just avoiding conflict, but actually cultivating healthy relationships, for which ample and sufficient guidance is given in God's word.

The other example is holiness, which I understand to be absence of sin.

These are not things we can attain perfectly in this life, but they are things we must strive for, even to the point of death, I think.

And the suffering and discipline we have been discussing are the tools which our Heavenly Father often uses to accomplish holiness in us.

(Verse 15)

See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

Now as has so often been the case in this sermon, attention broadens to include the whole community which he is addressing.

No one must be left behind!

The grace of God includes both salvation and sanctification.

It is the objective of the community that every man, woman, and child come to saving faith in Christ, faith which manifests itself in enduring trust and obedience.

Anyone in the community who does **not** submit to the lordship of Christ may ruin not only **himself** but many others, by becoming a "root of bitterness" that sickens the whole community.

Some concrete examples are given in Verse 16

(Verse 16)

that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.

Sexual immorality is one but surly not the only sinful behavior included in the category of **unholiness** against which we are cautioned in verse 16

The Bible does **not** elsewhere put forward **Esau** as an example of **sexual** immorality.

But what he **is** an example of is someone who casually set's aside his **birthright**, and never got it back.

That is the main point here.

And it is a point that has been made in this sermon several times before --- i.e. that it is possible to **lose** one's salvation **permanently**.

Verse 17 reads

(Verse 17)

For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

I hope this does not describe me or anyone here, but it might.

Or there may be someone we know who is at risk of following Esau down the road of **apostasy**.

That is, they may be **born** into, or **wander** into, or come into **contact** with a Christian community.

They may **hear** the gospel but turn aside from it, possibly thinking they can come back later.

And sometimes it is **impossible** to come back later.

So we must constantly urge **everyone** to accept Christ as Lord, without delay, which is what Dennis has been preaching about these past two Sundays.

If ours is a real and **saving** faith, then it will manifest itself in a changed life, and it this will endure in the face of all hardship.

Of course this does **not** mean that everyone (or indeed anyone) who accepts Christ will be without sin.

We all **do** commit sins of various kinds, including **sexual** immorality and similar things.

At least some of the discipline and chastisement that we receive from our Heavenly father is directed **against** just such sins in us.

Yet if he **is** really our Father, we will **accept** such discipline and chastisement **gladly** and we will **endure**.

Prayer

Dear Lord

We thank you for our life and for all of the blessings you have given us, especially your love!

We thank you for what you have already accomplished for us on the cross to take away our sins.

We ask you dear Heavenly Father to continue to bless us in accordance with your great love and wisdom.

We ask you to help us understand Lord that suffering must sometimes come to each of us in this world, and that such suffering is necessary in view of the larger blessings that you are preparing for your children.

We ask you please to comfort us in times of trouble, and to heal our wounds. Please teach us to pray.

We ask you also to help us learn the lessons you most wish to teach us, so that we can grow in holiness.

Lord God please help us to keep our eyes up and forward, always trusting you, always obeying you.

Looking toward heaven and to that glorious day when you will return,

that Day when you will finally and forever put away Satan, sin, death, and all suffering.

In the meantime Lord please prepare us and strengthen us.

Please help us to not be overly concerned with the things of this world.

In Jesus Name we pray.

Amen