

(Hebrews - Part 31): Call to Remembrance

by A.W. Tozer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of remembrance, confidence, and faith in our Christian walk, encouraging us to maintain a long-range view and subtle determination to follow God's will.

Duration: 24:49

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of maintaining spiritual confidence and not giving up, even when things don't go as expected. He encourages the congregation to live by faith and not be discouraged by fear or impatience. The preacher reminds them that they need patience to receive the promises of God. He also highlights the danger of drawing back and losing faith, but assures the listeners that they are not of those who will perish, but rather believe in the saving power of their souls. The sermon emphasizes the need for confidence, purpose, and determination in the Christian life, and warns against being swept along by emotions without a firm foundation in faith and will.

Transcript

Verse 32 and following, But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions, partly whilst ye were made a gazing-stock, both by reproaches and afflictions, and partly whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.

For ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now they just shall live by faith.

But if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back under perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul. Now, the purpose of this little oratory passage here is to restore and maintain spiritual confidence in these young Christians.

You know, you can beat a congregation to death very easily by always presenting the dangerous side of things and never admitting or acknowledging any good when it is found. The men of God who wrote the New Testament epistle did not make that mistake, neither did our Lord. But while they were very faithful to rebuke and chasten and exhort and warn, at the same time they also were very careful to encourage.

We have here an encouraging passage of scripture. This is for your encouragement. He says, Call to remembrance the former days.

Now, here is seen the right use of remembrance. It is to unite our yesterdays with our today and our tomorrows. If we had no remembrance of what had been, we would be vegetables and not men.

By the mystery and wonder of remembrance we make yesterday today, and today will be tomorrow. Because our memory unites things, and a human life is like a painting. A painter begins with his canvas in one corner or top or bottom or somewhere, and he lays stroke after stroke and line upon line and color upon color and shade upon shade, and when it is all finished, he has his picture there and it is composed of what he gave it during the time he was painting it.

Now, human life is very much like that. If a painter were painting a picture and he laid on a brush stroke, and then when he dipped in the paint for the next brush stroke, the first one disappeared. And that was that way all the way through.

When he put on number two, number one disappeared. When he was finished, he would have a blank canvas. The only stroke would be the last one he laid on, and it would disappear shortly.

Now, life is not to be like that. Life is to be like the first. Life is to be a composite of all of its experiences.

So we are to call to remembrance, and that's the right use of remembrance. But there are some who say that we should not remember at all, and they quote Paul who said that he forgot the things that were past. But this is a misunderstanding because, you see, we're forcing a statement out of its context.

Any figure of speech or any passage of scripture, if it is forced out of its proper meaning, and is not corrected by other passages of scripture, will lead you wrong. For instance, if you take the word leaven, and make the word leaven always to mean something bad, then you of course take that authority on yourself to do that. But if you do, you will miss much of the meaning of the scripture.

Take the expression dead in sin. Because the Bible says that the she that liveth in pleasure is dead in sin, while she liveth, and because the Bible talks about sinners as being dead, we therefore have had those Christian believers who claim that a Christian is dead, unable to think, unable to help himself, unable to reason or to want to do right, unable to make up his mind to do right, unable to repent, unable to do anything, until he has been regenerated by a sovereign arbitrary act of God. Then he repents, then he believes, then he turns to God, only after he has been regenerated.

And that's taking the passage of scripture dead in sin, and making it simply ridiculous. Because what is meant here, of course, is he is dead to God. He, in this case, dead to God, dead to good, dead to righteousness, dead to heaven.

But a long way from being dead, some of these ladies who love pleasure, are a long way from being dead. They keep the drugstores and other stores in business by the amount of extra adornment they buy. They keep the closures and the hat-makers also, and they keep their husband jumping to keep them with a new car under them.

And they generally are a long way from dead. But they are dead in the sense the Bible meant it, that's all. And so it is with sheep.

If the Bible says, as it does say, ye are my sheep, my sheep hear my voice, if we are to take that as meaning always, that the Lord's people are sheep, then of course we couldn't be men anymore. We would have to be sheep. But it's a figure of speech, and so it is with birds and all else.

So when the Bible says that I forget the things that are behind and press toward the things that are ahead, it doesn't mean that we are to cease to remember all that is past, and let the brush strokes of our experience disappear like disappearing ink. And if we did it, I say, we would have a blank and no experience at all. Now what did Paul forget? Well, Paul tried to forget what kind of man he'd been before.

He said he was circumcised the eighth day of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew of the Hebrews. Touching the law, he was a Pharisee. Concerning the zeal, he was persecuting the church.

Touching righteousness of the law, he was blameless in all this. But he said, I forget these things and press on. He wouldn't allow any memory of yesterday to slow him down.

So the proper use of remembrance is to remember the things that help us and try to forget the things that do not. Now he says that Paul forgot only those things that slowed him down, that hindered him from making progress, but he says that we are to remember other things. Now in this time of crisis, keep in mind your past.

Keep in mind your fight of affliction when you became a Christian. Keep in mind that you were a gazing stock. Keep in mind that you endured the spoiling of your goods and cast not away, therefore, your confidence.

Like a soldier or like a group of soldiers, a company of soldiers that become suddenly frightened, lose heart, their courage collapses, they throw away their guns, the only protection they have, and make a headlong dash toward the rear. Now a Christian can get in that same fix. Don't forget that.

We get the impression from the preachers, and we don't mean to give it, but somehow we do give it, that Christianity is a pink cloud upon which God floats you off to heaven, without any discipline, without any will, without any purpose, without any subtle confidence, but simply with a great deal of emotion we are swept along. The truth is, the Bible has as much or more to say about confidence and vows and purpose and will and determination than it does about joy. The Lord knows that a man can be happy and be a scoundrel, but the Lord also knows that if a man has set his face like a flint to do the will of God, he'll not be a scoundrel, but he'll make it through.

Now Satan tries to terrorize and stampede God's people, and God says, you're not green troops. Don't you remember how once in your early Christian lives you suffered for Christ's sake? You're not green troops, you're not rookies who don't know how to handle a gun. Remember, he said, the time when you first became a Christian and were first illuminated, how you suffered for Christ's sake.

Remember that. Your great fight of affliction. Remember, you were made a gazing star.

People looked at you as they would look at a three-headed calf in a zoo. They looked at you as if you were completely crazy. Remember that.

Remember the affliction you endured. Remember that you became companions of people who were afflicted and persecuted. And remember that you lost your property for Christ's sake.

You lost your goods for Christ's sake. And therefore, have courage and keep up your confidence. I say Satan tries to terrorize, but he says, he that cometh will come and will not tarry.

He that cometh will come. He'll either come now to your present help if you need him and when you need him, or he will come to your final curing, whichever or both. He will come, the Lord will come, so don't let it bother you.

I believe in this. He will come, as the hymn says, to terminate the evil and to die at him the right. Now the just shall live by faith.

Notice it here. The just shall live by faith. Not the just shall live by his feeling, but the just shall live by faith.

Faith here is complete confidence. It's not an act of believing once done. It's not something that you do and settle it.

It is a complete confidence that remains with you all the time. Faith is a complete confidence, a state of confidence maintained. A state of confidence first in God.

We must and we shall, we must believe in God. Then we must believe in his Son Jesus Christ, the work he did for us and the work he's doing for us at the right hand of God now. We must maintain a state of confidence in the promises of God.

And we must maintain a state of confidence and certainty that God will come to our help. The Christian is completely thrown out on God, completely. He's thrown out on God and the writer of the Hebrew says, here, you've turned away from the world and you're attached to Jesus Christ.

Now be confident and maintain your confidence, for the just shall live by his faith. There are lots of times when you will not have any spiritual feeling at all. So when that time comes, live by faith.

The writer of Thomas Acampos said that when the Lord withdraws his comforts from me, that is when I no longer feel like singing, when he withdraws his comforts, he said, it is my business to remain uncomforted until the time the Lord gives me my comforts back again. So we are therefore to have our confidence, but it's a long-range confidence, not a petulant demand for immediate vindication. A lot of books have been written on prayer that never should have been written, and a lot of people buy them, my God, poor sheep.

They have very little discernment, and so they buy a book that has a nice cover, and they read it. And a lot of books on prayer are dedicated to, as one man said, getting things from God. That was the name of his book, Getting Things From God.

God has things, and you go and get them from God. Now that is one aspect of prayer, but it's only one aspect of prayer. The 11th chapter of Hebrews, which we come to next in our consideration, is the chapter of faith.

And you will find in that chapter that very few of the fruits of faith were given to the people while they were on earth. They had a long-range faith that looked into the future and dared to count the things that were not as though they were, and the things that were as though they were not, that dared to believe in the long-range view. And so many of the most of them died without seeing the fulfillment of the promises.

But they lived on and died, and are with the Lord. And as the choir sang, the souls of the righteous are in the hands of God. In the old apocryphal book, The Wisdom of Solomon.

And the souls of the righteous are in the hands of God, and no evil shall befall them. And though we think that they died under God's discipline, it was God who took them where they are to be safe, said the old writer, and keep them. So these people in the 11th chapter of Hebrews were not the nickel-in-the-slot Christians, the kind that went to the Lord and got things from God.

They believed God for things too big to get now. If you're satisfied with ten cents store jewelry, God might be willing to give it to you now. But the great things, the mighty things, God is making you wait, to discipline you.

If you want simply, if you want a mushroom, it'll grow overnight, let it rain, and you'll have your mushroom in the morning. But if you want an oak tree, wait seventy years, and take the long-range view and believe for the future. I think it's entirely possible to be petulant and demanding, and go to God and say, God, I'll have this and this and this, and I'll have this.

And sometimes the Lord gives it and then sends leanness to the soul. I'm not saying he doesn't answer prayer. There are times, there are critical times when God does answer prayer immediately and at once.

There are times when he has to answer at once. There are times when God has to send the answer special delivery. He hasn't got time to wait for the regular mail, and he does it.

I've had him do it. I know that, but I say that's one aspect of prayer, and one aspect of faith. The other aspect is the long-range view, that just shall live by his faith.

If he feels good in the morning, he will thank God and go his way. If he doesn't feel good in the morning, he will thank God and go his way. One man I heard make a testimony once.

I smiled at the time, but I see a lot of wisdom in it. He said, I feel just as good when I don't feel good as I do when I feel good. And I believe in this.

I believe in this kind of Christianity, to feel just as good when you don't feel good as you do when you feel good. God loves that kind of thing. If a man only loved his wife when he felt good, and as soon as he got a headache or a pain in his chest, he didn't love his wife anymore, all the homes in the world would break up overnight.

But the simple fact is, love is not something that rides out on your emotions for the moment, in spite of Hollywood and Jane Mansfield. Love is something that's a fixed and settled thing. Now, you've got to have a subtle determination, a subtle determination to identify yourself with God's cause.

Identify yourself. I remember an old fellow, a young fellow at the time, in the Old Testament, Elijah. Elijah went by, flung his mantle at him, Elijah, and decided he was going to follow the prophet.

Sometime in getting over that fence and joining the prophet, he said to himself, now, I have given up everything to follow Elijah. And he did. Turned back, said to himself, now if my cattle are alive, I'll be tempted to go back to my cattle.

And if my plows, or wooden plows, if my plows are in order, I'll be tempted to go back to my plow. I'll kill my cattle and use the plow for fuel, and we'll have a big feast and celebrate the fact that I've quit farming and started following a prophet. He settled it.

And if anybody, his wife or somebody, said afterward, Elijah, don't you think you'd go back, Elijah? He said, go back to what? The cows are dead. Go back to what? The plows don't exist anymore. They've been made to ashes, no place to go back to.

He had a subtle determination that he was going to follow. I believe in this, and I believe that we ought to teach it to young Christians. We ought to get the idea ourselves, and then we ought to teach it.

And we ought to show young people that when they become Christians, one aspect of their conversion is that of a subtle determination to follow Jesus Christ, regardless of what it may cost you or how you may feel about it at any given time. I think it was Dr. Simpson who said, Christians' feelings are like the loose change in his pocket, never the same twice. You look at the loose change just after you go out of church today, and then look at it tonight, and there's a way of changing somewhere right in your pocket.

Actually, it doesn't, you know, but it seems to, because it's so variable. And a subtle confidence that you're on God's side. I speak to a lot of these.

I talk to a lot of seminary students and so on. I had a wonderful young doctor just getting his M.D. out to see me last night. For two hours and 15 minutes we discussed things pertaining to his life.

And psychiatrists and the anthropologists and all the rest have greatly disturbed our young people. Greatly disturbed. But they say, that which was right to our fathers isn't right to us.

And that which our fathers believed in, we don't believe in anymore. Don't you see that, Mr. Torshaw? That they believed this was wrong. Today they accept it.

So they make morals to be relative. That's what you call the relativity of morals. That is, there's nothing pinned down.

There's nothing right in itself. It just floats. If you think it's right, it's right.

And if you don't think it's right, it isn't right. Everything floats. But the Christian isn't taking any, any of that kind of moonshine.

The Christian knows better than that. He has settled it. He believes in God the Father Almighty.

He believes in his Holy Son who died for him. He believes in the will of God as his righteousness. He believes in the Bible as the fixed revelation of divine truth.

And whatever the anthropologist may say in a given day, whatever the psychiatrist may say in a given day, he knows in whom he has believed. And he's able, knows he's able to keep that which he's committed unto him against that day. Of marginal things.

Our friends, some of our friends are Mennonites and Amish people out through the state of Pennsylvania. They won't drive an automobile. They drive a horse and buggy.

I, for my part, can't see any morality in that. That is, I can't see the difference between a horse and buggy and an automobile except for convenience and speed. Just the way of getting around.

I'm willing to let them have their opinion about it. But that isn't what you set your mind on. You set your mind to do the will of God.

You can do the will of God in an airplane. I suppose you can do the will of God in a space capsule, but that's one place I don't intend to do the will of God. Unless he sends me, and then of course if he sends me, I'll go.

But I doubt whether he'll choose me. He's choosing some old fellows, around 40, but I doubt whether he'll choose me. Now, we've got to make up our minds.

And we've got to make up our minds by a long-range, settled determination that we're going to bear the cross without ceasing, and as far as possible, without whimpering. Dr. R. R. Brown tells about a dear old Swedish woman who was dying. He was at her bedside.

She was a sweet old saint. She was praying to the Lord in English, but with a kind of an accent. And then she turned and testified to the man of God, and she said, she said, My father's been with me all these years, she said, and he's blessed me.

And she said, He's kept me from sin, almost. She was honest. She was honest.

It's pretty close to being, it was approximation, but she remembered a few little things that didn't exactly qualify righteousness, so she said, almost. And I believe this, that we are settled to bear the cross and to do the will of God, and if there should be a necessity for a little bracket, a little almost in there, put it in there. Be honest with God, but see to it that you carry the cross, and live for another world than this, and serve and wait for God's time, and lose whatever God calls you to lose, whatever it might be, lose it.

It's all right. Lose it, and honor God in everything. Now, that's a subtle determination.

He said, I want you to do this. Call to remembrance, and remember how you've lived. Now, don't get panicky, and don't quit, and don't get discouraged, and don't give up, because things aren't moving the way you think they ought to move in your life, or in your church, or in your home.

Cast not away your confidence. The just shall live by faith. That makes me feel good, just to hear him say it, just to know that this is the way God wants his people to live.

He doesn't give us little wings and say, now fly away. He says, the just shall live by faith, and we walk by faith, and not by sight. Any man draw back, he says, he draws back because of fear, or love of this world, or love of life, or because of impatience, because God doesn't answer his prayer, he wants to get mad and quit.

Well, he hasn't got faith. Go on believing. We're not of them that draw back, but of them that believe.

So, what should concern you this morning is not how you feel, but how you believe. Not how you feel, but what you believe, and how firmly you believe it. And as we celebrate this morning, the called out people, separated from the world by an act of the Holy Ghost, and by an act of our own.

We look like other people, but we're not like other people. We're God's people. And when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, it is a remembrance.

These things do in remembrance of me. As we look back at all that God has done, and forward to all that God will do, it ties our yesterdays and our todays and our yesterdays. God bless us, and give us grace now, so that this Feast of Remembrance will mean something to us.

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