

Let Us Go on - Part 2

by Roy Hession

Roy Hession's sermon emphasizes the importance of moving beyond foundational teachings to achieve spiritual maturity and trust in God's promises.

Duration: 47:13

Scripture: Hebrews 3:7-8, Hebrews 3:15, Hebrews 3:19, Hebrews 4:7, Hebrews 5:12, Hebrews 5:14 - 6:1

Topics: "Perfection"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of being captive to the world and the need to break free from its influence. He refers to the prince of the power of the air, who has dominion over the world. The preacher emphasizes that every person is born into this world as a captive and may not realize it until they try to break free. He also mentions a book by C.S. Lewis called 'Out of the Silent Planet,' which explores the idea of a redeemed human being taken to other planets unaffected by the fall. The sermon then transitions to discussing the importance of moving from living in the wilderness to living in the canyon, referencing the Apostle Paul's words in Hebrews chapter 3. The preacher encourages the audience to hold fast to their faith and not harden their hearts, drawing from Psalm 95. Finally, he highlights the need to continually seek and rely on Jesus as our heavenly high priest and to enter into the fullness of his life.

Transcript

We turn to the epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 5. Before we turn to the more direct phase of our subject this morning, I want us to look just for a moment at that central passage from which we get our main subject title, because it contains a difficult portion and it would be begging the issue to pass from that passage without looking at it and saying something of it. That central passage really begins in chapter 5, verse 12, that passage which tells us, let us go on. And in verse 12 he says, when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again, which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk and not of strong meat.

For every one that uses milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe, but strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age. It's the same word as perfection, mature. To them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Spiritual maturity isn't an academic thing or a thing merely of knowledge, it is apparently a moral thing. Strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern between good and evil. Full age isn't merely knowing your bible and getting all your

dispensations straight.

It's something moral and spiritual. Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection, revised version, unto maturity, full growth. Not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.

There are six things we're not to lay again. Two relate to our conversion. Repentance from dead works and faith toward God.

We aren't be forever going back and getting converted all over again. We should know the foundation from dead works has been laid and there's been that faith toward God and in his son that brought us back from the far country to sit in the father's house. It's a foundation.

We don't forsake the foundation, we build on it. And the thing about God's building is that the superstructure is of the same material as the foundation. If the foundation is a repentance of faith, so is the superstructure.

But you aren't going back. Say now, have I got to be born again? Some people get so shaken they're getting born again and again and again. Now says Paul, now you'll never get anywhere.

Get that settled. The foundation is there. The new birth you've entered in.

There may be failure, may be need to repent and come to the Lord again. But you don't go over that conversion experience again. You have to not go back but go on.

So we're not to lay again that foundation. And then two things are mentioned which relate to ecclesiasticism really. Baptism and the laying on of hands.

I don't know whether Paul was Church of England because it rather looks like baptism and confirmation. Though probably, I don't really believe that. I don't think it really was in Anglican.

I believe I believe the laying on of hands there is ordination. And you know what the laying on of hands is? In the hymn last night, it said about my faith would lay her hand on that head of thine. It's identification.

You identify yourself with a slain lamb and say that death is really mine. And when a man's ordained, if a congregation, so to speak, put their hand upon his head and they identify themselves with him, you go in our name. Well don't go forever around those things.

Don't let us be always occupying you. And then the next pair of things is what's called eschatology. What that word comes from is Greek or Latin, I don't know.

And I don't normally use it because we don't always know what it means. But it just means those ultimate things. Resurrection of the dead and judgment to come.

They're there. But we've got something more important to speak about than only and always that. It's the present we're concerned about.

Living in Christ now. So don't be forever laying those foundations over again, but rather go on to maturity, to full age. And this will we do if God permit.

Now comes a difficult passage. But I think I've got something that may help you on it because it's tortured many sensitive souls down the centuries. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away to renew them again to repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put him to an open shame.

For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh after upon it and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God. But that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected and nigh unto cursing whose end is to be burned. But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you and things that accompany salvation though we thus speak.

Although that last verse seems to be a little encouraging, he doesn't think they're in quite that plight. That encouraging verse hasn't succeeded in relieving the distress of many sensitive souls down the years. Well, now you can see what the difficulty is there.

There's a person who feels they've fallen away from the Lord and he reads there it's impossible to renew them to repentance and there's no doubt Satan has made good use of this passage. And he says, now you're finished. You've committed the unforgivable sin your own.

And sometimes the devil so preys upon a sensitive heart that, say what you will, they cannot believe it. They are determined to believe in their own damnation. It's extraordinary sometimes.

A person will not believe in anything else but their own damnation as if they wanted it. What darkness and trouble Satan can get sensitive souls in. And he has used this passage.

Now, because we know the whole message of scripture and because we have personal acquaintance with Jesus and the grace of God revealed in him, we know that that is not the intention of God. The intention of God in the gospel of his son is to give sinners a chance. And if the use that Satan has made of this passage is true, then it's not giving sinners a chance.

Who of us at times has not fallen away? Who of us then wouldn't fall under condemnation here and feel we were finished? So, whatever this scripture really means, judging it by the whole tenor of scripture and the content of the gospel, that meaning cannot be true. Well, now, many people, many books have tried to explain this and I've read a good many of them. I expect you have over the years.

And whereas I've been happy and glad to accept their explanations, I have to confess that I felt that they have explained the passage away, not explained it. In other words, it doesn't mean this and it doesn't mean that. They haven't really told us what it does mean.

And they haven't told what constructive purpose it has in being in this part. Paul didn't write something that hadn't got a constructive, positive purpose. And for many years, like many of you, as far as I could get with it.

But some years ago I was taking meetings in the parish of Leyland and I was staying with a vicar of Leyland, old Mr. Pito, who is now in glory, great scholar, and he produced one day a book by an old scholar. And I'm dying to get that book again. I can't remember who it was and I did talk to his daughter and I'm going to try and track it down.

But there I found an explanation which completely satisfied my heart and gives us the real meaning as I understand it. You must judge for yourself and we can't go into all details. And, of course, it has a positive meaning for us.

First of all, this passage about it being impossible to renew them to repentance must be understood in its context. What is Paul speaking about? Let us not lay again certain foundations but go on to perfection, to maturity. And then he brings this passage in.

Whatever it may mean, it must be related to that context. Secondly, this good man points out that there is a slight error, it's hardly the word, a little warping of the translation. It was as if even the translators of 1611 were fascinated by this passage, horrified by it, just as a rabbit can be horrified by a snake.

Unless, of course, rabbits don't live where snakes do, which you know what I mean. And he gets fascinated and he walks right into the creature's grasp. And thus it was, it is said, that they translated that phrase, if they shall fall away, in such a way to give it an undue prominence.

In actual fact, Paul is just describing certain people. And he says there are certain people who have been once enlightened, have tasted the heavenly gift, have been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, have tasted the good word of God, the powers of the world have come, and have fallen away. It's just one of the descriptions amongst many of these people.

But the translators said, if they shall fall away, lifting it up to a tremendous emphasis, because they felt it was a difficult passage and they made it, it would seem, more difficult. Actually, it's just in the same passable tense, and have fallen away. And then one further thing, before we get down to it, to find what its meaning is, this word fall away, is not that very, very much stronger word we were thinking of in departing from the living God, which speaks of deliberate apostasy, it would seem.

Not so this word. This word is what it means, fall away. It means deviate, get off the road, sideslip.

The person concerned may still have their face heavenward, but they've gone off the highway of holiness. It isn't that terrific strong word of apostatizing. Obviously, it cannot mean that a man who sideslips, who gets off the highway of holiness in some manner or another, you can't renew him to repentance.

Why, we've all been renewed many times to repentance. Now, those are preliminary things. Now, as I saw it and read this dear old writer, I saw this.

It's all to do with this matter not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, for in the nature of the case, it's impossible to renew them. You lay foundations and they're laid. In the nature of the case, you can't renew those foundations.

And what we need to do is, for a lax believer, is not to take him back and get him converted all over again, to try to renew him to a repentance which has been foundationally laid, but lead him on to see there's a present saviour, a present high priest, whose blood and life are enough for any present coldness and deadness that may have come in. In the nature of the case, it's impossible to renew them to repentance because the foundation's been laid. And then that word renew, renew, impossible to renew, that speaks of new birth.

They have been renewed, but they've got cold. Things have gone wrong. And what they need is not to be led back to be converted all over again, but to be led on to see what we shall see in later morning, the full

gracious provisions of a high priest for failing saints.

Because if you renewed them again to repentance, it would be tantamount, as it says in verse 6, to crucifying the son of God afresh, erecting Calvary all over again, and putting him once again to an open shape. Now, there's more to be said on this subject than that. There's more that this good man helped me to see in even the subsequent verses.

But let's leave it at that because we don't want to spend all our time merely in removing a difficult passage. In other words, it's not a question of the unforgivable sin, but of ministerial method. What are we going to do for the lapsed believer, for ourselves when we get cold? Go back, no, be led on to see our heavenly high priest enough for our present need, and enter in to the fullness of his life.

As we said the other day, there's only one unforgivable sin. It's a sin you won't repent of and confess, if you're willing. Of course the way back to God is open for the vilest offender, the vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon received.

Well now, we pass from that central portion, let us go on, to think about what we've got to go on from, and to what we've got to go on to. And there are four such things I think we can find in this epistle. And this morning, for the remainder of the time, I want us to think about, let us go on from living in the wilderness to living in Canaan, because this is the picture to which the apostle Paul refers us in chapter three.

Will you turn to chapter three? Breaking into the argument at verse five. And Moses verily was faithful in all God's house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after. But Christ as a son over his own house, whose house are we if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end? Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, and here he quotes from Psalm 95, which we all know so well, for we sing it every Sunday morning in the Church of England, wherefore as the Holy Ghost saith today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness, were taken back to those weary wanderings for 40 years in the wilderness.

When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works 40 years, wherefore I was grieved with that generation and said, they do always err in their heart, and they have not known my ways, so I swear in my wrath, they shall not enter into my rest. Take heed brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, but exhort one another daily, while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, for we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end, while it is said today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. And then he asks three questions, we have to go to what the revised, one of the other versions for this, for who, when they heard, did provoke, was it not all that came out of Egypt, the whole lot were involved, and with whom was he grieved 40 years, was it not with them that sinned, whose carcasses fed in the wilderness, and to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believe not.

So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Now that passage goes on, we shall read the next bit later on, to halfway through chapter four. So half of chapter three and half of chapter four take our minds back to the story of the Israelites who came out of Egypt, but who failed to enter into Canaan, and who died in that wilderness, a whole generation died out.

Well now you know the story, they came out of Egypt, they began, they came out by divine power, by faith, Moses kept the Passover in the sprinkling of blood, they sprinkled the blood on the doorposts, and when

God saw that blood that night, he passed over those houses, and the destroying angel only went into the homes of the Israelites, of the Egyptians, and the firstborn of all such were slain. And that was enough for Egypt, they had enough, and they let them go. That wasn't enough, because they had then to cross the Red Sea, Pharaoh changed his mind, pursued after them, they were not only redeemed by blood, but they were redeemed by power, and the Red Sea parted before them, and they went over dry shod, and the waters came and engulfed Pharaoh and his host.

God's purpose, however, in bringing them out, was only that he might bring them in. He had a much better land for them than even the most lush conditions in Egypt. It was a good thing that conditions weren't lush, but they did have hard bondage, otherwise they would never have been willing to have left, and have ventured out as they did.

But God brought them out, and he had this land of milk and honey, of waving corn, of streams, and everything that their hearts could desire for them in exchange for Egypt. And you'll remember, it took them a long time to get there. That was never God's intention.

His intention was that they should go to Sinai, spend a time receiving the law at his hands, receiving the blessed ritual of the tabernacle, and of the priesthood, and then a short 10 days journey would have taken them, as it did indeed, to the borders of the land. And God said, then you can go out, no matter what the enemies are, no matter what their giants, the Lord our God, here it is, that go before you. No one should be able to stand before you.

And he promised, gracious promises, that be the enemy what they, what he might be, God would deliver him up into their land, and they would possess his land. That was God's intention. But because of disobedience and unbelief on the part of the people, they failed to enter in when they got to the borders of the land.

They said, oh we can't. They heard about those giants, and they made the drastic mistake of comparing the giants with themselves. The giants were giants, and in their sight they were grasshoppers.

What they should have done would have been to compare the giants with God, and then it would have appeared that the giants were the grasshoppers. But they didn't do that. They took their eyes off God, they put their eyes on the giants, and they panicked and said, we can't go on.

They began by saying, we can't believe. They ended by saying, we won't believe. We don't want to go in.

We want to go back to Egypt. It were better for us there than here. And so God swore to them that they should not enter into his rest.

He said, all right then, you don't go in. If you won't trust me, if you won't obey me, you won't go forward in implicit faith, knowing that I can deal with every difficulty, then you shan't go in. And he said, only your children should go in.

And for 40 years that nation wandered up and down in that wilderness from one encampment to another. God didn't forsake them, the pillar of cloud was always there, but they weren't permitted to go into that land. They wandered until that whole generation had died out in the wilderness.

The wilderness was strewn with their carcasses. Then it was that their children grew, ultimately went in. There were only two of the original generation who did go in.

As an old cupid has said, Caleb, Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, were the only two who ever got through to that land of milk and honey. All those that went out with such a high hand and such great hopes of Egypt, not one of them got into that land except those two men. And they only because they had another spirit, because they wholly followed the Lord, because they believed in the Lord and they counseled that be the giants what they might be, they should have gone in.

So God said they're the only two. All the rest of you are going to die. Incident to which the Apostle Paul directs our thoughts.

Because you can see the reference, can't you, to ourselves. We've been brought out of our spiritual Egypt, many of us, most of us, that's not all for all I know, some of us may still be in the spiritual counterpart of Egypt. The spiritual counterpart of Egypt is what the scripture calls this present evil world.

And we read that Jesus has gave himself for us that he might deliver us from this present evil world. It cannot therefore mean delivering you by bringing you to get into heaven, to live in this earth, that we needn't be under the domination of this present evil world. The world in scripture means human society organized without reference to the will of God.

And of course human society is organized without reference to the will of God. You've only got to go into some nice respectable drawing room where the fashionable or not so fashionable are gathering and start talking about Jesus Christ in a loud audible voice and a chill will come over the whole proceedings. They don't want this man to run over them, to reign over them.

And it doesn't mean the bad of the world which is organized without reference to the will of God. The good is institutions, it's education as well as it's brothels. The whole thing has been captured and dominated by one called the prince of the power of the air in scripture.

Elsewhere called the prince of this world there's a pharaoh who's captured the whole thing. And every man is born into that world, is dominated by that world, is a captive in it. And you won't know what a captive you are until you try to get free.

Please turn the cassette over now. Do not fast wind it in either direction. And every man is born into that world, is dominated by that world, is a captive in it.

And you won't know what a captive you are until you try to get free. When there's no chance of us trying to get free the devil gives a plenty of rope. I don't know what you're talking about bondage, I'm as happy as I like.

But you stop wanting to come to Christ and you put in the rope and hold you tight. And you'll find your absolute slave, your chain. It's very interesting that book of C.S. Lewis is called Out of the Silent Planet.

It looks like a science fiction book but it's much more. And it's on the bookstore. It's not a bit of advertising.

I think there's only one copy there in any case. But there's a redeemed human who gets wafted out of this planet to some of the other planets where the fall has not yet taken place. Well the Eldila, these angelic beings are, where there's something like paradisaal conditions.

And they're so interested to meet this redeemed human. They want to know what's happened to this planet. For after a certain point in history it went silent.

They can't establish contact. They want to know what has Mareldil done about it. That's God.

And they listen with tremendous eagerness to the story of what did happen and what Mareldil, God, has done about it. This is the silent planet captured in toto by the God of this world. And if there's one unsaved man here, I tell you you're a captive, taken captive of the devil at his will.

You haven't got to be immoral. You can be refined and intellectual. But the word of God says that unless we've come in repentance to Christ and be born of his spirit we're part of that great social structure dominated by Satan which is due to be destroyed by the brightness of the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But thank God we have, many of us, been delivered. Delivered in the same way as Israel was, by precious blood and by redeeming power. We've come and seen ourselves to be failures.

By faith we've laid hold of the sacrifice of Christ and to keep to the imagery we've sprinkled by faith the blood of the Lord Jesus on our heart. Thou hast died for sinners therefore Lord for me and now because he saves the blood he passes over us. That word doesn't mean he omits us, it means he hovers over us.

God stretches his wings of protection over everyone who's come to his son and judgment will never touch us. But also by divine redeeming power the old things that held us, the old power of the world has been broken and we've been brought out. But God wants to bring us in.

It isn't that we should finish with that old life but that we should enter into a new life. It isn't that we should see the things of the world are empty and barren and useless and be merely negative. He wants us to find joys and sweets in his beloved son that utterly outshine the things of the world.

Paul says he counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. Excellency, that is that which excels. And what he found in the Lord Jesus a thousand times excelled what he had as a proud self-righteous religious palace.

He even dumped his religiousness to have Jesus. You have to. You don't only have to give your sins up to be saved, you have to give your religiousness, your respectability, your decency and say it doesn't count a thing.

It hasn't done one thing to blot out one sin in my life. What price your decency then? It will never, never get you to heaven. Saint Augustine said his virtues were about splendid sins.

Are you prepared to accept that my friend? Your virtues but splendid sins in the sight of God. You come naked as a sinner no matter what you may think you are to the foot of the cross. This is the way.

Well, but when you do you'll find as God has promised the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. But in the case of the Israelites they didn't get in. They got out but not in.

And so it can be with us. We may have a happy assurance of knowing Christ as our saviour being born again but we may not be in the enjoyment of the riches of blessing. I don't mean to say that you may never have done but I'm talking about this moment and this moment we may not be in that happy enjoyment.

We've been brought out but the moment we're not in Canaan. We're somewhere in between in the wilderness. Paul makes reference to this picture again in 1 Corinthians 10.

Perhaps you'll just look and we'll see what the sort of things have happened in the wilderness and that characterize the wilderness life. 1 Corinthians 10 in verse 6 talking about this very incident and how so few only two got through. It says in verse 5 but with many of them God was not well pleased for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Now these things were our examples to the intent we should not lust after evil things if they also lusted. Neither be idolaters as they were as were some of them. Neither let us commit fornication as some of them and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.

Neither let us tempt Christ as some of them also tempted and were destroyed as serpents. Neither murmur ye as some of them also murmured and were destroyed of the destroyer. Paul picks on five things that characterized their life in the wilderness.

They were lusting after evil things. They got tired of that miracle manner and they began to desire and wish for the leeks and the garlic and the onions and the other tasty dishes they used to enjoy in Egypt. Now that's lusting.

Lusting is wishing, wishing, wishing for what God hasn't given you. Lusting doesn't necessarily only to do with sex in the bible. Lusting after things is wishing, wishing for that which God hasn't given.

He may have it for us in the future but he's wanting it now. And that's it. And nothing puts me in the wilderness more quickly I know than lusting.

You can lust, wish for something God hasn't given you. Wish for marriage and when at the moment God hasn't given it to you it's sin. Wish for a change of job, wish for more money when God hasn't given it to you at the moment.

And it always makes us lose our taste for the heavenly manner of the Lord Jesus. And then we get self-pity, we look back at the world and they look so much happier than we are. Secondly, they were idolaters.

They made that golden calf. And we can be idolaters too in the wilderness. It puts us in the wilderness and is characteristic of the wilderness.

We can have things that we love more than Jesus Christ, that we put in his place. And this isn't something that occasionally happens, oh how quickly we can do that. I know I've been doing it over certain things, certain interests and hobbies.

And they can get too big a grip on us. And they got the first place. It can be another person.

All sorts of things. That puts us in the wilderness, robs us of our riches. It's characteristic of living in the wilderness.

Then it says let us not commit fornication as they did. They committed fornication with the daughters of Moab and started worshipping their gods. Whether Paul means to mean that literally, that we're not to commit fornication literally, or whether he's thinking of it spiritually, spiritual flirtation with the world, I'm not sure.

It probably means both. The battle for purity goes on in the heart of the Christian right to the end of the day. Right to the end of our lives.

There's not a single epistle of Paul in which he doesn't give a serious injunction with regard to sexual impurity. And he's writing to believers. If only in the heart or some other subtle way.

But it may also mean spiritual fornication. Compromise with the world. Flirting with the world.

Unwilling to be bold and brave in our witness for Christ. Pulling down the covers. Spiritual fornication.

Wanting to keep in with the others. Unwilling to bear the reproach of Christ. Or when that creeps into our lives.

And it does very easily. We're in the wilderness. And you know you are.

The joy is gone. And neither does it tempt Christ. I'll say a word or two about that in a moment.

Neither murmur ye. Complaining about what God has allowed. Murmuring.

Very akin to lusting. And that was one of the great characters of murmuring. Complaining about the people we have to work with.

Complaining about conditions. Murmuring. Feeling that God seems to have left us.

Doesn't look, isn't looking after us. Look what he does for us. Doesn't need to do it for us.

And all this is life in the wilderness. And this can be the portion of us. Although we've had such a wonderful beginning.

We've been brought out of Egypt. Well now that's what Paul says in Corinthians. And that just gives us a sketch of what we mean by having been brought out of Egypt.

But perhaps be living in the wilderness. Out of our full inheritance in the Lord Jesus. But when Paul refers to this incident in Hebrews, he doesn't touch on those things so much but on two other things.

Going back to Hebrews 3. In Corinthians he tells us what the people did in the wilderness. In Hebrews he tells us rather the effect that all that had on God with regard to his people. Verse 8. The day of provocation.

It provoked him. Verse 9. It tempted him. Verse 9. It proved him.

Verse 10. It grieved him. And what I think it all means that it all summed up in tempting the Lord is this.

When we're full of unbelief and complaint and saying God seems to have forgotten us. Forgotten me. Doesn't think we're doing for us for our family what he does for others.

You tempt God to deal with you according to your thought of him. You say we think sometimes God seems to have left us. He said you don't know how much.

You tempt me to leave you. You say he doesn't think we're doing what he wanted for me. You don't know.

You're tempting. Putting God. We're tempting God.

And if he treated us according to our little thoughts of him and of his love. If he treated us according to unbelief and doubts and murmurings. We would be all in a very very sorry condition.

That's what it means. You tempted me. But you know one other thing you did? You proved me.

I was shown to be not yielding to that temptation. I came out victorious out of that time of temptation. You not only tempted me but you proved me.

You saw my work that in spite of all your thoughts of me, your rebellion, your murmuring, I did not deal with you according to your low thoughts of me. I was merciful. I provided you water when you didn't think I was going to.

I gave you meat when you said I wouldn't do it. Oh what a temptation we've been to God. And again and again we've proved him to be other than what we thought of him.

Yet we go on with this. And that fact grieves him and although he's not going to deal with us according to our low thoughts of him, he has to discipline us. And so he had to forbid their entrance into that promised land.

And so it is with us he has to discipline us, humble us. But understand this, the disciplinings of God are not, as I understand it, punitive in their intention. The only due punishment for our sins is that which the Lord Jesus took of his body on the cross.

And no man, as I understand it, could ever say I'm being punished for my sin. I don't care how closely related sin and consequence may be. I think it's wrong ever to say this is the punishment of that, because it isn't big enough.

Whatever you may suffer is not adequate as a punishment. How can we call it such? The only due punishment for sin is that which we see put upon the Lord Jesus on our behalf on the cross. No, the things that happen to us are restorative in their intention to provoke us to repent and come down and get restored.

Behind a frowning providence there's always that smiling graciousness. That's the intention of our wonderful God. And so that's the first thing that Paul says about these happenings in the wilderness.

The effect they had on God was to provoke him, to tempt him, but oh they proved that he wasn't what they thought he was, but nonetheless being grieved with their continual hardness of heart and unbelief, he had to exclude them from that promised land. And we find ourselves missing the best. He is dealing with us so much better than we deserve, but it nonetheless means I'm not in that promised land, I'm not in the enjoyment of that canyon, that land of flows of milk and honey, because of all these things that go on in my heart, and that I'm unwilling to come to him in repentance about.

And then the other lesson he draws about this is this, that the whole nation started, but none of them except these two got through. You've got that in verse 17, or rather verse 16. For who, when they heard, did provoke? Who were they that provoked him? Was it not all that came out of Egypt by Moses? The whole lot.

They all came out, but their carcasses lie in the desert. And that seems to be the solemn use that the apostle makes of this passage. It's just this, it isn't how you begin in the Christian life that matters, it isn't how I begin in the Christian life that matters, it's how I end.

That's the thing that matters, how you end. Do you understand, do you realize that, do I realize that? The thing that really matters is not how you begin, how you end. And we all know the sad fact that many have begun well with Christ, but their carcasses lie in the wilderness.

They haven't gone on, and they've ended their days cold and out of touch, compromising, ineffective, without having to any real extent tasted of that fair land of the present and the full and the free enjoyment of salvation in Christ. They're saved. I'm not suggesting that may not be so, though it may be some of them were never really saved.

Sometimes I said last night, they tell you, well I never really was. All right then, we can only accept what you say. But others were, know and say they are.

But whereas we can begin well, we may not end well. We may not end well. Now, that is the reason why you have this simile in scripture of the Christian life likened to a race.

Now, we've referred to 1 Corinthians 10. Just at the end of the previous chapter, we can't look at it now, there isn't time, Paul uses this simile of the race. Know ye not that they all run into a race, but only one receives the prize.

Now, that's a wonderful simile, and yet a poor one. It's a poor one because it might give you the impression that we're racing against one another, that I'm trying to excel the other fellow in the team, and he wants to excel me. We want to be thought better of and get on better in contrast to one another.

That, of course, is not intended. Nothing further from the truth, nothing more obviously a work of the flesh than that motive when it comes into our hearts. No, the reason why we have the simile of the race is because everybody starts a race.

And the thing about a race is not the starting that matters, it's the end. If you want to get a good view, you want to go to where the tape is. That's where the cameras are.

And that's why this simile of the race is used, because the emphasis is not on the beginning so much as on the end. And that is the thing that matters. That's what John says in Revelation, hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

That's the prize, the well done. Not every Christian is going to get a crown. We may forfeit our crown by compromise and coldness and not going on with the law.

And John was concerned that they should end and have that crown. Paul said, henceforth there's laid up for me a crown of life. Well now, how are we to assure ourselves that we're going to end well? Can I tell you by being right now, and after this now, the next now, and the next now, there's nothing you can do to take out an insurance policy that you won't fall in coming days.

All you can do is to be right and enjoying the Lord Jesus now, this now, and the next now. And if the following now you get cold, you've got to get right with him again. There's plentiful grace to cover all that new sin that may come in.

That is the only way. And that, as we said yesterday, is the great emphasis on this part of the epistle. Twice we get it, verse 6. Christ as a son over his own house, whose house are we if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the firm unto the end.

It isn't holding fast our resolutions. It isn't holding fast our promises. It's holding fast our rejoicing.

Holding fast this offered grace. Confident that be my faith of what I am, I have a great high praise. He is the friend of sinners.

His blood does avail. And I'm going to go on quickly coming to him in the present tense. There's no other way for being sure that the end of the race is going to be right than just that.

Every moment. That is the great emphasis on this epistle. Then of course you've got it again in verse 14.

For we are made partakers of Christ if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence, of our rest, of our joy, and our sight of this Savior who's all the time having mercy on people that need mercy so desperately and continually. And you keep on coming. Actually in this passage, chapter 3, there are three todays.

Everything is present today. Verse 7, Wherefore as the Holy Ghost saith today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart. There's the first today.

Today, hearing his voice, don't harden your heart. Don't worry about yesterday. You had a wonderful blessing yesterday.

But he may have a new thing to say to us today. Then today, let's not harden our hearts, but break quickly. It's a daily break as God may speak to us about anything he chooses.

Today, if you hear his voice, don't harden your heart. Don't depend on the past. There may be a new issue to face today.

Today, let's say yes Lord. You're right, I'm wrong. There's a second today here in verse 13.

But exhort one another daily while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Exhorting one another, helping one another, being open with one another, not suffering sin upon our brother, being concerned when you see him compromising, or getting cold, or not acting at the highest, challenging in grace and gentleness one with another. I often talk to you about these things.

I can't go on today. And after this day, another day. It's got to go on in this precious fellowship where we help one another daily.

It's the only way of maintaining that I'm going to end right is it's today, and I need my brothers today. And are you willing to be helped today? Are you willing for someone to talk to you today? You can't see what's on your back. You need somebody else to tell you.

They're blind spots. And they come quickly very often and repeat themselves, I need my brothers today, and we need to serve one another today. It's all got to be in the present tense.

And then the third today is, for we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence, steadfast unto the end, while it is said today, living with Jesus in the now. Today. I don't depend on a wonderful experience in the past.

When I get home, when you get home, you don't depend on what God did for you here in Abu Dhabi. Those notes that you've got, you say, well that'll give me back the blessing. I don't think they will.

Maybe when you're cold, the notes will be cold. You'll need Jesus that day. And after that, the next day.

It's got to be contemporary. And oh thank God, the blood shall never lose its power. Jesus' blood avails for me forever.

It shall never lose its power. There's grace for weaklings, grace for people who get cold, who quickly come to Him. He ever lived to make intercession for people as weak and poor as we are.

And today, each day, I've got to be coming. And that's the only way. That's the lesson the apostle draws from this solemn word about this wilderness wandering.

There's another aspect of it in the next chapter which we can't treat with now. But there it is. Maybe we'll touch upon that tomorrow.

That I think is our portion for today. Today, if you'll hear his voice. Today, help one another.

And above all today, I've got to be knowing I've got a savior. Going to that savior, depending on him, getting right with him today, availing myself of his precious redemption. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, we realize that we want us to walk with Thee in the present. Forgive us for harking back. Forgive us for looking on, hoping that in one some future day we'll get the victory.

When Thou does want us to allow Thee to save us now, oh, write this word today upon our hearts. We ask it in Thy dear name. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

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