

33—Hebrews 12:12-17—We Shall See the Glory of God

I. Introduction

- A. Can you think of a place in your yard that will not grow anything? Perhaps, you've been to the desert and you've seen the deadness of that land.
- B. God is able to make deserts into gardens and in doing so, we who have been made into that beautiful goodness will see God.
- C. The analogy is how does God turn sinners into Christlike children of God. Our text explains how God does this through faith in Christ.

II. Main Point

- A. The main point has been to be run with endurance the race set before us. In this section, we are instructed on how to run with endurance that we might be healed!
 - 1. (How does God heal disabled knees)
 - 2. (How does God make that which is unholy, holy?)

III. Outline

- A. Strengthen and Make Straight to be healed
- B. Strive for Peace and Holiness
- C. A Sad Example of not Striving

IV. Exposition

- A. As we pick up there in verse 12, we see that this image of a race is still in play. It is a helpful illustration as we consider how to run with endurance the race set before us. In this first section, we are commanded to strengthen and make straight paths so that we may be healed.
 - 1. To understand what the preacher is saying, we must give some thought to where this quote came from in verse 12 and its context. It is found in Isaiah 35. It is commanding the church to strengthen drooping hands and weak knees.
 - a) This passage in Isaiah is part of a larger section that runs from ch. 24 and ends with an amazing promise in ch. 35.
 - b) This section in Isaiah is describing how the world ends and that we his people will behold the glory of God.
 - (1) However, that ending is only for those who continue trusting in the Lord and walking in his ways and God will see to it that we do.
 - (2) Within that section there are beautiful promises that are picked up on in the book of Revelation, things like wiping away every tear from our eyes.
 - (3) But also, there are promises of judgment and exile because they had abandoned the Lord.
 - (4) I think the preacher here in Hebrews sees discipline to be like the exile.
 - (a) You can read the OT and see exile as merely another rogue nation like Assyria trying to take over the world.
 - (b) Or you can see it as God sending these nations to punish Israel because they had went after other gods.
 - i) He was doing that to turn their hearts back to him.
 - (c) The same is true of last week's text.
 - i) You can see discipline as a string of bad luck or just coincidences that randomly happened.
 - ii) Or you can submit to God's good discipline knowing that he loves you as his son and daughter and wants the very best for you—to share in his holiness and see him some day.
 - iii) Refusing to submit to the discipline of the Lord does not benefit you. In fact, you can become bitter at God.
 - c) It seems difficult to apprehend what has caused the drooping hands and weak knees unless you understand the context of Isaiah 35.
 - (1) However, we must not forget last week's text where it commanded us to consider Jesus who endured such hostility from sinners so that we may not grow weary—being fainthearted.

- (2) The issue in Isaiah 24-35 is the same. Because of the exile, they were becoming fearful.
 - (a) Fear is debilitating. It causes us to do things that we would not normally do.
 - i) Fear is a symptom of unbelief or weak faith.
 - (1) Jesus often said this to his disciples—“Why are you afraid, O you of little faith.”
 - (2) Fear doubts the goodness of God. In Matthew 14:31 Jesus asked his disciples—“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”
 - (b) Fear and weariness can cause one to give up.
 - i) This word for drooping can be translated as listless.
 - (1) Now that’s probably not a common word you hear everyday. But it simply means to lack interest.
 - (2) Hands that are disinterested need to become interested with hope that is to come because you are a son of God’s family.
 - (3) We at least need to be like the kids who are asking from the backseat on the way to the vacation spot—“are we there yet?”
2. Verse 13 picks up another quote from Proverbs 4 which commands us to make straight the paths for your feet.
 - a) We have hands and knees and feet that need attention. We are told to strengthen our knees, and make straight paths for our feet.
 - b) To strengthen is normally used of a crippled person who has been healed. It’s like, straighten out those disabled and stiff knees and walk this straight path.
 - (1) The destination is to be healed there at the end of verse 13.
 - (a) We know that healing comes only through faith in Christ and that complete healing is coming at the resurrection.
 - (b) However, we must finish the race now. We must fight the good fight of faith.
 - (c) And as the second part of v. 13 says—so that what is lame may not be put out of joint.
 - i) Knees that are out of joint cannot run the race set before us.
 - ii) Out of joint literally means—out of the path.
 3. To leave the path of following Christ, is to take up another path...another god of some kind. We never remain neutral.
 - a) We will see that more clearly at the end of our text in Esau.
 - b) My guess is that this whole idea seems unfair.
 - c) It sounds like God is asking us to do the impossible (grow a garden in a desert). Who in the world tells a crippled person to get up and walk the path so that they may be healed.
 - (1) As our next set of verses will make clear, this isn’t merely physical healing.
 - (a) We are to become like Christ. His ways become our ways. His thoughts become our thoughts.
 - (b) We no longer want to live in slavery to sin. We want to live in righteousness. The righteous live by faith.
 - (c) We believe we are justified by faith in Christ but we also believe we are sanctified by faith in Christ.
 - (d) God is making we who are by nature sinners that are unrighteous and unholy into a community of people who look like Jesus.
 - (2) The impossible command to straighten out drooping hands and disabled knees and then make straight paths for our feet actually happens as God disciplines us through the various means of our sufferings and enables us by his grace to be transformed into his likeness.
 - B. So, we’ve heard the command to be strengthened and make straight paths for our feet. This has kept us clearly connected with running with endurance the race set before us. Now the preacher moves from the athletic example to a more straightforward explanation—strive for peace and holiness.
 1. Peace and holiness are clear descriptions of what God’s Kingdom will be.
 - a) Peace will finally be complete and we will be completely separated from sin and evil of this world at the close of the age.

2. It only makes sense that we would be preparing for heaven now. Therefore, we are commanded to strive for peace and holiness.
 - a) It does say strive or pursue. We will not have both of these completely this side of heaven.
 - (1) We know that pursuing peace with everyone will not work out in every case even though we are commanded to try.
 - (2) It says in Romans 12:18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.
 - b) There's a subtle warning there at the end of verse 14—if you are not striving for holiness, you will not see the Lord.
 - (1) Jesus preached this—Matthew 5:8-9 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
 - (2) This ties in so clearly to the previous quote from Isaiah 35 which stated—They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God.
 - (3) It goes on to explain in Isaiah 35 that the Lord will come with divine retribution (v. 4) to save his people: ‘Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and ears of the deaf unstopped’ (v. 5). Those who have been redeemed out of the captivity would return to Zion (v. 10) on the highway called ‘the Way of Holiness’ (v. 8). (Sailhamer 367).
 - (4) All the miracles of Jesus causing the blind to see and the deaf to hear pointed to what the Kingdom will be like when the end comes.
 - (5) I can't help but mention blind Bartimaeus here.
 - (a) He was literally off the path crying out to Jesus for to have mercy on him.
 - (b) As you know, he did heal his blindness but what did Bartimaeus do then?
 - (c) He got on the path and followed Jesus. It says in Mark 10:52 And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.
 - i) He got more than physical sight. His eyes were opened to behold the salvation of God in Christ.
 - (d) Following Jesus is the path of holiness.
 - (e) Those who follow Christ by faith will see him at the finish line! And in him, we will see the glory of God!
 - c) But we must strive for peace and holiness now knowing that Christ promises to save all who hold fast to him.
 3. While those commands are on one level personal, they are also corporate too.
 - a) Notice there in verse 15 where it explains further how we are to strive for holiness—seeing to it that no one failing to obtain the grace of God.
 - b) The following verses describe what it looks like in failing to obtain the grace of God.
 - c) But if you think every person who has made a profession of faith is automatically in while they live their lives however they want then I'm not sure you've understand what the book of Hebrews has been laboring to make clear to us.
 - (1) And frankly, I don't know why anyone would even come to church. If I thought I was going to continue following Christ all by myself and that I could live however I want without submitting to the discipline of the church then I would not be here.
 - (2) I come to worship but I also come because I'm afraid that my heart will grow cold and I will not want to worship.
 - (3) I come because there's a real potential for me to fall into sin and never repent.
 - (4) There's an even greater possibility that a root of bitterness springs up in me and I become defiled.
 - (5) Churches are not perfect but a church that does not love each other enough to go after them when they are in sin, is a very dangerous situation.
 - (6) We all are lumps of clay that God—the great Potter—is forming. He does that through the weekly gathering of his people.
 - (7) Coming to church is formative discipline and not coming to church should lead to corrective discipline because we need it when we wander from the path.
 - d) How are we seeing to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God?

- (1) How are we seeing to it that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled?
 - (a) If we don't, that defilement spreads to others.
- (2) How are we seeing to it that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau?
- e) One way is to understand what a root of bitterness is.
 - (1) Moses explains this in Deuteronomy 29 verses 18 and 19—Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.'
 - (a) The people of God were to be aware of each others' hearts.
 - (b) If they saw any sign of someone thinking they were safe while stubbornly walking in ways contrary to God's ways, they were to do something about it.
 - (c) Or that person may end up like Esau.
- C. Our text now ends with one of the saddest stories in all of Scripture. Esau is the example that you should not be. And we all have the potential to be an Esau. The last point—a sad example of not striving for holiness.
 - 1. The story of Esau is laid out for us in the book of Genesis. He was the son of Isaac, Abraham's son. He had a brother by the name of Jacob.
 - a) The part of the story the preacher wants to highlight is the day Esau sold his birthright.
 - (1) He and Jacob were twins but Esau was the firstborn.
 - (2) He came home from hunting one day and the text says in Genesis 25 that he was exhausted.
 - (3) Esau demanded that Jacob give him some of his stew but Jacob replied with a proposition—"sell me your birthright." Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?"
 - (a) It goes on to say in Genesis 25 that Esau despised his birthright.
 - (b) JUST GIVE ME THE SOUP!!!
 - (c) Can you imagine thinking so little of your birthright to trade it for ONE bowl of soup?
 - (d) The firstborn was supposed to receive the blessing and inheritance.
 - (e) But Esau looked down the path ahead of him and did not see any value in the coming blessing and inheritance.
 - i) The path to blessing and life is hard and narrow and he didn't want it. He could not even suffer missing one meal.
 - (f) There was no injustice done here. He got exactly what he wanted.
 - b) The text goes on to explain the story that's in Genesis 27 when the blessing went to Jacob and not Esau.
 - (1) It says there in our text in verse 17—that afterwards, when desiring to inherit the blessing, he was rejected.
 - (a) Isaac could not give him the blessing.
 - (b) He was rejected by his father.
 - (c) He had lived his life as though it meant nothing up until the end and then he wanted it.
 - (d) It's like despising Jesus and his ways but on death's door you want to inherit eternal life.
 - (e) It didn't work out that way for Esau. He was rejected.
 - (2) It goes on to say that he found no chance of repentance, though he sought it with tears.
 - (a) We often put off repentance thinking that we can do it anytime. We know we should but the heart becomes cold and disinterested in the things of God.
 - (b) I cannot find anywhere in the Scriptures where God denies someone who genuinely repents.
 - (c) So, I don't think what Esau was seeking was repentance but rather the blessing without repentance.
 - i) We all want resurrection life but we refuse to take up our cross and follow Jesus.

- ii) You cannot bypass the narrow and hard path that leads to life. It doesn't work that way.
- c) I want to point something out to you that someone else pointed out to me (Paul Washer).
 - (1) A preacher once explained the text that says, "Jacob I loved and Esau I hated."
 - (a) He described how God showed Jacob love and how God showed that he hated Esau.
 - (b) The way he hated Esau was by giving him everything he wanted.
 - i) He did receive a blessing even though it was the lesser one.
 - ii) He became wealthy and powerful. He became a great leader of a great nation called Edom.
 - (1) You might think that looks like love. However, God's hatred shows up in Esau's life when God never disciplined him.
 - (2) God let Esau do exactly what Esau wanted to do.
 - (3) He let Esau be Esau. He never intervened in his life. He did not work through suffering to make him holy. He simply cut the rope and let him go his own way.
 - (c) How did God show his love for Jacob?
 - i) God seemed to have beat Jacob up everyday of his life.
 - ii) Jacob was not allowed to continue on as Jacob.
 - iii) His name meant cheater but God did not let him continue to be a cheater.
 - iv) In fact, through many tribulations over and over again, God changed him and renamed him Israel which means to fight against.
 - v) Indeed, Jacob's life could be summed up as the one who wrestled with God.
 - vi) He went into the Kingdom with a limp but he went in very different than who he was.
- d) So, we might ask ourselves, does God love me or hate me? Does his blessings make me holy or am I unholy like Esau?
 - (1) You may go into the Kingdom limping and lame but here's the promise—Isaiah 35:5-6 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.
 - (2) Is God making you holy or has he cut the rope and let you go your own way.
 - (3) Matthew 5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."
 - (4) The only way to be pure is through repentance and faith in Christ. Come follow Jesus.