

Do Not Expect a Quiet Life

The Book of Hebrews

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Bible Text: Hebrews 12:1-11
Preached on: Sunday, September 27, 2020

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Well, tonight, our subject matter in Hebrews as we come now, don't we, towards the end of this book, and we're in chapter 12 verses 3 to 11 with a title to go with it. "Do Not Expect a Quiet Life." Do not expect a quiet life. We've been looking at endurance, and how pilgrimage in chapter 11 became a race in chapter 12, and all that we need in order to run that race, to run it with endurance. And we thought about endurance and that quality that we need to have. Indeed, need to have it to do with the fact that we don't expect a quiet life as Christians. That ability to keep going, to overcome disappointment, setback, hardship. Here we will see in a moment, persecution, hostility, and to still have heaven in view. That's what the Lord Jesus had. And it's his example that the writer, when he says, "Looking unto Jesus," it's the example of our Lord who prevailed, didn't he? Who came through monstrous opposition and even the cross, but, if you will, made light of it, because this was all in order to obtain that joy set before him. That joy included actually our salvation. So, he endured it. He put at naught, as it were, all of the things that were hostile against him, the way in which men spoke ill of him, the agony of the cross, it's shame, and it's pain, because he knew the work he was doing was of vital importance for our well-being.

So, a quiet life, dear friends, I am afraid, is not what is marked out for us in this race that we have to run dispensing with weights, perhaps old habits that hold us back and sins, more obvious sins, which, like around our feet, like sort of brambles, that we will trip over and will certainly hinder our speed of progress. Non-Christians don't have quiet lives either. You do realize that. Non-Christians don't, troubles befall them. They're not in some favorite category at the moment. Far from it. The pandemic, there ought to be more consequence to them than to believers. It will crash in upon their expectations perhaps more strongly than upon Christians. We have a light hold upon this world, don't we? Or we should do that we are not putting all our treasure here. I'm preaching on that next Lord's Day morning. We're looking beyond it, because we know this is a passing phenomenon. Going. It's going to all, one day, be burnt up, isn't it? And therefore, we don't cling to it, because it's not going to last. The non-Christians, this is all they have. And they cling to it. So, when it's threatened, or when they feel it's threatened, and the impact upon them is that much greater, isn't it? Their fear, their concerns are that much more magnified because this is it, or they feel it could be it, and there is nothing else for

them. If they lose it all here with coronavirus or whatever else, they have no expectation of anything beyond that is of any help to them or encouragement.

But, Christians, similarly, we are caught up in things. Accidents happen to us. Troubles come to us, whatever they might be. And perhaps we can be guilty at times of promising ourselves, “One day, we’ll have a quiet life. One day, we will ‘retire.’ One day. All the troubles will be sorted out. Our children will be happy. Nothing else there to concern us or worry us about them. We’ll have sorted out all of the issues and conflicts, and we can kind of sit down and sigh with relief.” Well, friends, it’s not going to happen. I’ll say that now. It’s not going to happen. And we can’t expect it, nor, somehow, promise that to ourselves. Our Lord didn’t have a quiet life, did he, ever. There was always something happening. Conflicts happening against him. Things that were in his path, in his way. And so, those smooth teachers who say smooth words and lie, basically, what they promise to Christians, that, well, if you got trouble, you got something wrong. It isn’t like that. You should just have an easy fulfilled passage through life. I want to say from here again. They’re lying. That is not what Scripture teaches. That’s not what this passage teaches. It teaches anything but that.

So, it’s just as our Lord wasn’t able to stop and say, “Well, that’s all sorted. No more stress. No more worry. No more burden.” In fact, he had all the burden to have to carry to the cross. What a burden eventually was awaiting him there. And so, we, who look unto him, have to look at that as being our lot as well. We look to him, not at the world, not at its hopes or what it promises itself. And “Wow what a retirement I could promise myself if I read the Saturday magazines carefully there. Oh, I could have a bit of that have a bit of that as well.” And smiling faces that seem to have got it all sorted. Well, I don’t believe it. And it’s certainly not what the Christian faith tells us to expect.

First heading then is this: enduring through hostility. Enduring through hostility. That subject of endurance really is like a transition point from, well, from chapter 11, because chapter 12 verses 1 to 2, that’s what these Old Covenant saints did. That they persevered against great opposition, because they saw far off heaven itself. Well, how much the more, when we look at our Lord, we see his endurance. What was that compared to the endurance of the Old Testament saints. He had to endure the cross. And he had that joy set before him.

And so, that endurance is themed there, comes in again at verse 3. Before then, the writer gets us into the heart of what he particularly wants to talk about in this passage that we’ll come to in a moment. But it’s this, isn’t it? Enduring. Carrying on despite everything that might persuade us to stop and say, “No,” to that. Being determined that no, it’s not going to stop us. That opposition, hostility, persecution, these are not going to stop us. That’s where endurance is really seen, isn’t it? When the kind of push-back is at its most forceful. When the pain is most severe. When the losses is, in terms of earthly losses, are the most huge, and where we have to really consider them, but then we press on through, and that’s endurance, because of what we see before us.

Now, the writer says there that, well, the danger is that those push-backs, that hostility, sort of surrounding culture, by and large our surrounding culture is a very hostile one, that we can become weary and discouraged in our souls. So true, isn't it? We can become weary and discouraged. Just, "I just feel stopping. I just feel like, to that extent, giving up." That's the efforts that we put into whatever we do, and just getting difference coming back, which is just the polite way of being hostile, if you want to think of it in that way.

But then, there is our Lord. And well, how did he find life? Well, he didn't find it easy at all, did he? In just a few outtakes from the gospels. I am just confining myself to the gospel of Mark for simplicity's sake, but that hostility and, well, the writer is saying, "Look, you haven't had to resist now to the shedding of your blood. You haven't had to die for the faith." If you like, the Lord Jesus Christ did. It cost him his life. It cost him his blood. That's what he was willing to surrender in order to procure our salvation.

And his whole ministry, leading up to the cross, was one of hostility from sinners. Same Mark, just picking out a few moments there, Mark 2:5-7, well known episode of the healing of the paralytic man who was lowered through the roof. "When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven you.' And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 'Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?'" They weren't happy with him, were they? They didn't like this and couldn't see he could actually be the Son of God and that he is able to forgive sins on that basis, because of who he is. And so, no, it was blasphemy. That aggression, that anger, is building up, isn't it? Which is going to spill over later.

Mark 3:5-6 healing on the Sabbath day. And we find there that it says, "And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man," the man with the withered hand, "'Stretch out your hand.' And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other. Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him." That was the backdrop. There is his ministry. Common people hearing him gladly, while people performing all kinds of miraculous cures from people. Well, that's the Pharisees' response, "How can we destroy him?"

Other examples, there are many, aren't there? Mark 6:1-4 in his own hometown this time. "Then He went out from there," verse 4, "and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him. And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, 'Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?' So they were offended at Him. From his own hometown they were offended at him. They weren't happy with this. They didn't think that this was appropriate, that this man actually came from a fairly average background, very humble background, should be speaking to them in the authoritative

tones he was and performing these miracles. They were offended at him. They were part of that story of opposition.

And Mark 7:1-2, just another illustration, “Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem. Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault.” Come a long way, had they perhaps from Jerusalem to see him. Might have thought that they would come, just want to hear what he’s got to say. And that they would just want to marvel at the miracles that he is performing. But no, they were annoyed, unhappy, as they saw his disciples eating bread with, what they considered, defiled hands. That was it. That’s all they could see. Couldn’t see anything else. Not the ministry. Not his teaching. That was the fact that his disciples were eating bread with defiled hands. Oh dear.

And it’s all part, that backwash of opposition and hostility, because it finally finds its full fruition Mark 14. Reading just from verse 1. Here we are in Jerusalem. Now, the Lord has come to Jerusalem, and all those people have come out of Jerusalem to find fault with him, and they’re going to have their moment. “After two days it was the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put Him to death. But they said, ‘Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people.’” So, their trickery, but they wanted the result of having him put to death.

And that hostility was always there, wasn’t it? That hostility was always there. So, you have the miracles. You have the teaching of our Lord. But then the response of the Pharisees. Then the response of the Scribes, whoever it might have been, that came out to find fault. We have in that, don’t we, about Judas. Ah yes, it was him, wasn’t it there, unfaithful friends. That what’s he found. And people he turned back. The disciples who looked very promising, and then they turn back.

That’s how it works, isn’t it? That’s hard work to endure, to get up next day and do it all over again. To get up next day, and go somewhere else, and preach again. And it’s going to be the same people there, same opposition, same kind of results, same responses. Go to bed. Get up the next day. Nothing has changed. And of course, our Lord knew that eventually it was going to lead to the cross itself. That can be hard for Christians, can’t it, too. And that’s what the writer is telling us here. But, well, look what he did! And he had to die at the end of it! He didn’t have the option of sparing his life. No, that was forfeit. That had to be given over in order for us to be forgiven our sin.

So, we are at a better place than him, the writer is saying. We haven’t reached that point. So, let’s endure. Let’s be able to bear the criticism, the opposition, the hatred, and everything else, and keep going forward. Enduring. Fighting through weariness. Fighting through discouragement in our souls. That’s reality. The Bible is real. It’s a real book talking about real people and how they really feel. And we can feel it, can’t we friends? We can feel it. We look around and see the favor given to Islam in our country, and we know that, and we see the way in which radical feminism gets a say here, and other voices get heard, and the Christian voice gets rather drowned out. All of the fake

Christian voices sometimes gets heard, but somehow not the real Christian voice. That can be very discouraging. Negative outcomes. Evangelistic endeavors were a little bit hampered at the moment, but we know when we are able to spend the time that we do that we don't exactly get a great result out there. People are not turning aside to really listen. So we mentioned it before, mention it again, that we did an open air on the Saturday before the big Tuesday. When all the announcements were made, they led to the march lockdown, and it was in the air, and you kind of knew, something big in the air. Announcements are coming up. There is something out there. At that point it could have been deep in something that would have swept hundreds and thousands to their death. Didn't know. And yet, we were crossing a town, preaching that. People just passed by. And urging them. They just passed by.

Well, that's evangelism in Britain today I am afraid. And that's not the uncommon experience. Yeah, we're going to endure. We're going to press on. And that we must. And that we should do our duties still to people, whether they listen or whether they don't. So, we pray through. And we press on. And it's hard work. And we take great heart from what we read in Hebrews 12 and the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. Well, he had a lot more than us to have to do. And he was going to have to die at the end of it for sure. So, we can smile and think, "Well, we're not going to be asked to do all of what he had to do. So, let's press on all the more."

Now, my second heading: divine disturbances. Divine disturbances. Well, if the world at large is going to ensure we don't have a quiet life, if hostility is always there, people talk about revival, wonderful, it is a huge lot of hostility, even in times when God's Spirit is working with power. Some people are objecting to it. A lot of people are arguing against it, ridiculing. But we notice here that actually behind all of these things towards the church, towards his people, using persecution, using the hostility of sinners, is actually God himself. God himself. That he is the bringer of disturbance, and he is the bringer of impositions upon Christians. He is the bringer of the overturning of plans. It's him. And he says it here very clearly, very openly. And we're not to forget. Because, apparently, the people then, the writer felt, they forgot it, in verse 4, they had forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons. We read Proverbs 3 earlier, but as we have it here in Hebrews 12. "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." Well, that teaches us something. It teaches us the truth of our heading tonight. Do not expect a quiet life. Christians are not going to get it, because there are going to be divine disturbances. God himself is going to arrange for us to have unexpected events and difficult events. He is going to bring challenges, even opposition against us. And it's all because of our relationship that we are in.

And the writer is saying, "Don't undervalue nor despise the relationship that you are in, if you are a believer, that you are relating to God in a Father, son context." The father is there, and our own children. The writer talks about it, doesn't he? When we discipline our children, they are sons and daughters, for their good, for the season that we do. And the writer sort of says, "We try our best at it." We pay them respect as children. That time or so we should have done. But there is a higher degree of fatherhood relating to a son,

which is God relating to his people. God as our heavenly Father relating to us as Christians, as to his children, sons and daughters that he has adopted to himself. Just as fathers on earth, with their own children, have at times to discipline them and rebuke them, well, our heavenly Father, towards his children, well, it's the same. And well, earthly fathers, we don't always get it right. But our heavenly Father does. And it's a wonderful relationship that he is in towards us, even when it hurts. Even when it's painful. That's what the writer is saying. That these challenges that would come upon them, these difficulties, they shouldn't forget.

Well, it tells you this, because God, as our heavenly Father, is going to bring correction. He loves us too much not to. He is so bound in covenant relationship with us, that if he is our God, and we are his people, then he is going to transform us. He is going to want us to resemble his people. He wants us to resemble, actually, his Son. And if his Son endured hostilities, well, then, we are going to have to learn to endure too. And we can't expect to kind of just pass through it unscathed, or to find some sort of cheat, as it were, as if in a game you find a cheat card, and that gets you through twenty levels of the game, or whatever it is that you are doing. No, no. You, all of us, all of us have to go through the same way. And if we don't submit to it, it says, it talks to us, doesn't it, about kind of despising it, being angry about it. Somehow, feeling that we should be treated better than this. Then, it's not going to well for us, and we're going to have to repeat the lesson, and we're going to have to re-sit the exam again where he says it again. And so, perhaps, we learn wisdom, because the fact may be, we may never learn wisdom, and we remain under a degree of chastening and limitation that God may put upon us.

So, yes, it may take away a degree of health. He may take away a degree of wealth. He may take away our good name, if we have a good name to start with, but he may take that away. Or our standing in some particular community. He may take away friends. So, there are a host of ways that divine disturbance comes. That's where we're all wanting, I guess, to feel a bit of ease, a little bit of comfort. And the Lord in his goodness does provide us with such moments, and he is gracious to us and gives us far more than we deserve. But he never allows us to be too comfortable or too settled. There'll be a disturbance, a shaking. He won't have us to become careless, as though we're just too comfortable. Well, really, in a sense, through no fault of our own, we've had some happy providences and there is a danger that we just become a little careless, even without realizing it. Well, our divine teacher, our heavenly Father, is wiser than to just let us drift in that. There will be some providence that will come. Some shaking, some stirring which will bring us back to our sense and shake us loose from any careless thinking in that way.

It's all there, isn't it? That he chastens in verse 5. That he brings some degree of punishment to us, something that humbles us. It's a bit painful. The word there in verse 6 of Hebrews 12, strongly he scourges. Scourges! That's strong! And he reserves the right to do some scourging of us. He deals with us in verse 7, and, well, it is, isn't it, there caught out in some way, and he deals with you. He deals with us. He has words to say to us and brings limitations upon us.

So, if we are caught up in this world too much, then he will redirect our focus, maybe send a pandemic, not the sole function of it, I could well believe there are a host of functions that this pandemic is meant to accomplish, not for us as believers, we'd say, right? It makes us just look beyond this world. We just got a little bit too embedded here, too focused on this here and now. It reminds us of our mortality and tells us that plans could be just swept aside like that, and that we can suddenly find ourselves in a state of flux and uncertainty, and trying to make decisions which can then be overturned, because some fresh development way, way, way beyond our own control. And he's teaching us in that way, "Don't rely on this world."

We can be caught in sin, caught out in sin. That we're slow to repent. We lingered with something, just kept hold of it, and the rebuke comes. And we feel it. And that's it. We part then from that sin. We think this has been too long. Too long. We perhaps had gentle warnings, and warnings increased in terms of their severity, and wind was getting stronger, if you like, and we still were toughing it out. And then, we had to give in. Something happened that may have left us feeling ashamed and exposed, and we realized that we were too slow, too slow off the mark. We clung to something too long, and it's time now to let it go. Pass from it. Repent. Be done with it. Move on. And God, as our heavenly Father, scourging, chastening, rebuking his children, and we learn from it.

But we learn, don't we, that not to get discouraged, though we get weary, discouraged in our souls and fail to see beyond actually what's happening, who it is who is on our case, because it's God and he's doing it out of love. Yes, he's doing it out of love. He's receiving us as children. It's remarkable, isn't it, that we can even be called the children of God. There's some title there that we have that adoption that brings us into such standing with him that he calls us children. So, his love, he's not a distant Father, he's not some remote figure who doesn't really show any interest, perhaps inquires a couple of times a year how are you getting on? Fine. That's great. Move on. No, he's intimately interested in us. But that spells trouble for us at times. It means he's on our case. And it means he's looking to work in us proof of our true belonging to him is that he's always working on us. That's what he says. Illegitimate children have no father. Nobody to care for them. Nobody to love them in that way. And they drift. And the sad fact is, isn't it, we often see the outcome. It's very, very sad. And the children are the ones who pick up the worst of that, but we're not illegitimate. We are belonging to him. And we're in his family most definitely.

And so, his love will mean that he's going to produce something in us. He's going to work, like working on a sculpture. Just a big block of stone. Well, I wouldn't know what to do with that. I'm sure I wouldn't. But as somebody as a sculpture, knows exactly what to do with it. I have to break a piece here and fashion something. There's a bit of work, isn't there? There's a hammering, and the rock can't answer back, we're flesh and blood, we feel it when we are being refined, when we're being challenged and rebuked. We feel it. That's what the writer says. Very candid, isn't he? "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present." He's not making it out to be a comfy, comfy ride. He's saying, "It's not pleasant at all, but painful." But he reminds us that it's stunning love. And so, if it's stunning love, it's constructive.

It's dreadful, isn't it, some of the ways in which fathers behave atrociously. There is no love. They've not got a good end in view for their child. They're not thinking when they discipline that child what it is by way of outcome they're looking to produce. But God does. He may have to be very firm with us. At times he is going to produce something in us and it's all here, all his plan and policy. It's no secret. He's going to do it for our profit it says in verse 10, "that we may be partakers of His holiness." That's it. That we may be partakers of his holiness.

He cannot suffer us to look anything other than like his Son. He can't suffer us to look anything like this world, to resemble it and all of its poverty of thought and action. No, he wants us to be like his Son. He wants us to live like that. To have that endurance. To deal with hostility as he dealt with it. To have heaven in view and to pass through all the pain, all of the ignorance of this age, with our faith intact. He wants us to be partakers of his holiness. He wants us to be pure. He wants us to be wise. He wants us to respond in a loving way. He wants us to be patient in affliction. He wants us not to be contaminated by this world, not to give in to it, to concede to it in order to find a bit of peace, a bit of quiet in it. No, he would have us to be like his Son.

And that's the work he is doing. That's this what we have in verse 9. "Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?" That "live" is not simply a kind of bare physical existence. It's actually a spiritually rich existence that he, the Father of spirits, the one who knows our soul and has insight into it, and knows the secrets of our hearts, knows the secrets that we don't even know about ourselves, and he's working on it.

Putting it another way in verse 11, afterward painful at the time, but, nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those being trained by it. The peaceable fruit of righteousness. Righteousness in respect of our way of life. That we morally are people of integrity. That we are upright. That we're not devious. That we don't do it in some sort of sleight of hand kind of way. That we're upright people. We love justice. We love what's good. We love God-honoring things. We hate what God hates. And there is that about us.

And it's peaceable. There is something about it that is very satisfying to the soul. It has a really good effect upon us. It doesn't make us angry. It doesn't make us aggressive. It's something that works within the soul. Makes it very clear, very determined, very much separated from the world, but not sort of angry, denouncing it, and some way or other just being antagonistic for the sake of being antagonistic.

Well, it says, doesn't it, to those who have been trained by it. Trained by it. Well, the fact is, sometimes we resist it. We do. There is a sovereign God bringing sovereign lessons to his children. Father wanting by his discipline, it's not just for the sake of, I don't know, just removing something from us, but in order that we grow in holiness toward his Son. But we're going to be trained by it, and that looks to us, doesn't it, to be willing partners in this. As children responding to our father. Not despising it. That's one of the things he warns against. "Do not despise the chastening of the Lord." Don't get in such a way that

you think, "This shouldn't happen to me." Or "He can't do this to me. What right has he got to stop me doing this or to interfere with me in that?" That's rebellion. Then he wants to change that. And that training is that training of repentance, isn't it? It's that training of parting with our own selfishness, to part company with our sin. To be worked upon and to comply with that. To be part of that. And this is what he is wanting us to grasp.

We're going to gain the partaking of his holiness. We're going to gain the peaceful fruit of righteousness that afterward would come. Notice, it doesn't say in a week or in a year. No time set on it. But be sure it's there. It's the promise of God. It will happen. Even if you're going to have to wait for it to happen. It's not telling you right now and kind of when this will end, you know, when will the pandemic end? Well, there is a good question. We don't know that. Neither do we know this. When will this particular discipline end? Well, it may never end, might it. It might be for the whole of our life. Well, it is in one sense. But particular phases of it may be for a while, but he won't tell us precisely how long, because we've got to be trained by it. We've got to learn in it. We've got to be vigilant, and watchful, and listening, and ready to learn. In that state of preparedness that we are reading the Bible carefully, wanting to know where are we? Where do I fit in this? What's the best fit for what's happening in me? Which character in the Old Testament maybe or character in the New? What verse is particularly one for me to ponder and wrestle with. And we need to be alert. We need to be patient.

Can't get discouraged, can we? We want something to happen quickly that afterwards can't come quickly enough. We lose focus. So, we've got to be patient. We've got to submit prayerfully. It talks about that, doesn't it, there that we have to submit ourselves to it. Be readily in subjection to the Father's Spirit within us. Training that we are submissive to it. We're prayerful, and that we're alert in our prayers, and we're asking to understand ourselves better. To learn what it is that perhaps what God is driving at with us. What it is he is wanting to have us remove, or begin to remove, or begin to confront within ourselves that is an obstruction or weights perhaps, one of those sins that ensnares us.

And to have a long term in view in it. A long-term view that we're not just looking for some quick fix. Yes, put it like that. Not looking just for some present gain just to get out of this and on to something happier and better. He's training us, actually, that we might be a better fit in heaven with joy set before us. And he wants us to agree that's what's set before us. That we are preparing our minds more for that, readjusting our focus to see that more clearly, and to live for it more emphatically, more definitely, in this life.

And so, we're to have that long term view. After all, that's what the Lord Jesus had, isn't it? A long-term view, not the short-term view. A short-term view, he would have wanted that cup to pass from his hand and would have settled for that. Twelve legions of angels coming to his assistance. He might have gone to that. But he had a long-term view, and we're included in that view.

And we have to get his perspective on it and see that whatever chastisements, whatever chastenings, whatever scourgings we might have to endure, whatever this pandemic has

been imposing upon us that we might still have to endure. For how long? We know not. We pray, "How long oh Lord? How long?" But we know that he has an intention. A good intention. A loving intention as our heavenly Father. And he wants us to more and more resemble his Son. Nothing less than that will do. Nothing less than that will satisfy him. And if we oppose that, then we oppose his discipline. We are fighting against his training plan. And we will find that we don't progress. We won't grow. We won't move on. Stuck. Stay in the same place. And that would be tragic, wouldn't it?

So, we submit happily to him. Let's put it like that. Submit happily to him, and, even though it's painful, we know it's for our good, and we know we're in good hands, loving hands, our Father's hands. And that relationship with us is one that will mean, well, it's not going to be a quiet life. Not on earth. But it's going to be a wonderful life when, finally, we get to heaven, won't it?