

Topic/Subject: ***Without Holiness, No One will see God***

Scripture: Hebrews 12:14-24

Background Scriptures: Genesis 25:28-34 and Genesis 27:1-39, Luke 2: 22-40

Facilitator: Deacon Keven Wright

I. Biblical Focus/Introduction:

Have you heard the expression “Being a Christian isn’t easy.” Being a Christian can certainly be a challenge at times. It's not always easy to stay true to your beliefs and values in a world that often seems to be moving in a different direction. However, I believe that with faith, perseverance, and a strong support system, it is possible to navigate the ups and downs of life as a Christian. It's important to remember that we are all human and make mistakes, but it's also important to strive towards being the best version of ourselves and living a life that is in line with our beliefs.

II. The Lesson:

In this passage, the writer of Hebrews comes to the problems of everyday Christian life and living. He knew that sometimes it is given that a man would mount up with wings as an eagle; he knew that sometimes a man is enabled to run and not be weary in the pursuit of some great moment of endeavor. Also, he knows it is hardest to walk every day and not faint. Here he is thinking of the daily struggle of the Christian way.

He begins by reminding them of their duties. In every congregation and every Christian society, some are weaker and more likely to go astray and abandon the struggle. It is the duty of stronger ones to put fresh vigor into listless hands and new strength into failing feet. The phrase used for slack hands is the same as it used to describe children of Israel in the day when they wished to abandon the rigors of the journey across the wilderness and return to the ease of the fleshpots of Egypt.

One of life's greatest glories is to be an encourager of the man who is near to despair and a strengthener of the man whose strength is failing. To help these people, we have to make their way straight. A Christian has a double duty; he has a duty to God and a duty to his fellow man. Let's illuminate the description of the duty of man. "Make your heart good in the sight of the Lord, and make your ways straight in the sight of men; so you will find favor in the sight of the Lord and men." (Article Testament of Simeon).

Simeon is an excellent example of someone who was entrusted with a great promise; that he would see the Messiah before he died. He kept the promise well by waiting and waiting for the answer with great hope and expectancy. When Simeon arrived at the temple, the Holy Spirit prompted him; this is the one! Mary was just another young mother with a baby to everyone else in the temple. But the Holy Spirit opened Simeon's eyes to see that Jesus was the Promised One in whom hope and comfort are found. He is the Christ. So what is the lesson learned from Simeon? Simeon taught us that we must pray often. He teaches us that we must believe God's is not our timing. He teaches us that we must trust even if God's promise takes longer than expected. (Luke 2: 22-40)

To God, a man must present a clean heart. To men, he must present an upright life. To show a man the right way to walk, by personal example, to keep him on the right road, to remove from the path something that would make him stumble, to make the journey easier for faltering and lagging feet, is a Christian duty. A man must offer his heart to God and his service and example to his fellow man.

The aims which must be before the Christian

We must aim for peace. In Hebrew, the thought and language peace was no negative thing. It was intensely positive. It was not simply freedom from trouble, it was two things:

First, it was everything that makes for a man's highest good. As the Hebrews saw it, the highest good was to be found in obedience to God.

Proverbs 3:1-2 says: My son, do not forget my teaching but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity." The Christian must aim at that complete obedience

to God in which life finds its highest happiness, greatest good, perfect consummation, and peace.

Second, peace meant a right relationship between man and man. It meant a state where hatred was banished, and each man sought nothing but his neighbor's good. Hebrews says; seek to live together as Christian means ought to live, in the real unity which comes from living in Christ." The peace to be sought comes from obedience to God's will, which raises a man's life to its highest realization and enables him to live and produce the right relationships with his fellow men.

One thing to be noted, this kind of peace is to be perused. It requires effort; it is not something that happens. It is the product of mental and spiritual toil and sweat. The gift of God is given, but they are not given away; they have to be won, for they can be received only on God's conditions, and the supreme condition is obedience to himself. Man must maintain his holiness. Although he lives in the world, a holy man must always, in one sense, be different from it and separate from it. His standards are not the world's standards, nor his conduct the world's conduct. His aim is not to stand well with men but to stand well with God.

The Dangers that Threaten the Christian Life

There is a danger of missing the grace of God. Micah 4:6 states, "I will assemble the lame"; in other words, "I will collect the stragglers."

It is easy to straggle away, linger behind, drift instead of march, and so miss the grace of God. No opportunity in this life cannot be ignored. God's grace brings us the opportunity to make ourselves and make life what they are meant to be. A man may, in his lethargy, his thoughtlessness, his unawareness, his procrastination, miss the chances that grace brings to him. Against this, we must be on the watch.

There is a danger of what the Revised Standard Version calls "a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit." This phrase comes from Deuteronomy 29:18; here, it describes the man who goes after strange gods and encourages others to do the same and who thereby becomes a destructive influence on the community's life. Thus, *the warning here is against those that are a corrupting influence*. There are always those who think the Christian standards are unnecessarily strict and meticulous, and there are always those who need to

see why they should not accept the world's standards of life and conduct. This was the case for the early church. It was a little island of Christianity surrounded by a sea of paganism. Its members were, at most, only one generation away from heathenism. It was easy to relapse into the old standard. This is a warning against the infection of the world, deliberately, sometimes unconsciously, spread within the Christian society.

There is the danger of falling into immorality or relapsing into an unhallowed life. The world unhallowed has an illuminating background. It was used for profane ground in contradiction to the consecrated ground. The word unhallowed is used for the person who was uninitiated and uninterested in denial to the devout man. An unhallowed life is without any awareness of or interest in God. In its thoughts, aims, and pleasure, it is entirely earthbound. We have to have care unless we drift into a frame of mind and heart that has no horizon beyond this world.

To sum it all up, Hebrews points us to the story of Esau. He puts the two stories together (Genesis 25:28-34 and Genesis 27:1-39). In the first Esau story, Esau came in from the field hungry and sold his birthright to Jacob for a share of the food he was preparing. The second story tells how Jacob subtly robbed Esau of his birthright by impersonating him when Isaac was old and blind, gaining the blessing that belonged to Esau as the elder of the two sons. When Esau sought the blessing that Jacob had shrewdly obtained and learned he could not get it, he lifted his voice and wept (Genesis 27:34).

To understand this text, we must take a unique look at this story and dig deep for a better understanding. Esau was a sensual (unspiritual) man, a man who put the needs of his body first. We all have the same choice. In this world, man has the choice to eat and drink, traffic and marry women, and bring up sons and daughters, but none of this takes place in the world to come. Esau was content to take this world because he did not believe that another world would come. After returning from a day of hunting, Esau lost perspective because he was hungry and was willing to give up his birthright for a bowl of stew. We can infer that Esau did it because, at that moment, it didn't seem that his birthright was doing him much good. It wasn't addressing the real needs of his life. We all know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. So let's look at the second part of the story when Jacob also tricked Esau out of the blessing by pretending to be Esau when Isaac was giving the blessing.

Afterward, when Esau showed up and realized he had been tricked and that his father could not change his mind, "he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry (Genesis 27:34). This is where our text is referring to when it says, "He found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears." There was no opportunity to change Isaac's mind and undo what he had already done.

The first problem of the sin of Esau is short-sightedness. Very often, we make a decision not realizing the long-term effect because all we are thinking about is the short-term advantages and disadvantages.

This is opposed to deferring gratification, the concept that you sacrifice the small benefit to acquire a more significant benefit in the future. However, that is not the worse problem about the sin of Esau. The issue is what Esau gave up, what he discarded, what he despised, abandoned, the abandonment of hope, the abandonment of a person's only lifeline, the abandonment of what is life itself, the abandonment of the only Savior of our soul. Esau had the right to a treasure no other man on earth had. He had the right to God's promise, including all his future children. It does not matter how high a cost we are asked to pay, and it is never wise to give up something of infinite/eternal value to obtain something of only temporary value. People who do this don't realize this is what they are doing, but they are.