

Celebration of Discipline

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Date: 16 July 2017

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[0 : 00] Well, I bring you warm greetings from your sister church, Church of the Resurrection down on Capitol Hill. I've known a few of you for a couple years at vigils or other various Renew DC events.

I hope to get to know some more of you after the service today. If you've got a Bible, turn back to Hebrews 12, which is going to be our text today.

Hebrews 12, verses 3 through 14. As you're getting there, I want to kind of set this passage up a little bit for you guys. I know that you have been doing your own sermon series through Colossians about being made alive in Christ.

Christ is at the center of Colossians. Christ is the highest. Christ is the best. He is the reason. He is the everything. Through him, we are made alive, truly alive in every aspect of our heart and our mind and our body in all facets of our life.

I wanted to piggyback a little bit on this. And offer a bit of a companion piece this week. I wanted to talk about discipline and hard times. About what happens when, even though we are alive in Christ, we still face adversity.

[1 : 10] So, in Hebrews, like Colossians, we get chapter after chapter where Jesus is shown as the author, the perfecter, the center, the everything of our faith. If you're not familiar with the book of Hebrews, here's a 30-second summary.

Hebrews was in all likelihood meant to be heard as a sermon. So, they would have heard the entire thing as one. So, people hearing this passage tonight on God disciplining us would have first heard chapters 1 through 11, where they would have heard that Jesus is better than angels.

Jesus is better than Moses. Jesus is better than Joshua. Jesus is our great high priest. So, with confidence, let us draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham. He is the mediator of a new covenant that we have with God. Jesus is our tabernacle. He is our holy place that goes with us throughout the world.

Christ's sacrifice was sufficient. It was all-encompassing. It was perfect. And it was through that that God will say, I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more. We can be confident through our faith in Christ, and we can be confident in our faith in Christ.

[2 : 26] Christ's sacrifice is our God. So, this is what we've set up as we come to chapter 12 to talk about what's called in Bible studies the imperative, the implication, the what are we supposed to do in light of all this.

As we prepare to dive into this, will you pray with me? Father, we thank you for your word and the privilege to sit under it. Your word is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword.

Will you use it to pierce through our dull senses tonight? Will you use it to reshape our minds and our attitudes and our hearts and our steps ever toward Jesus?

And it's in his name that we pray. Amen. There's a lot of times when things can happen to us because of things that we did.

And everybody knows that person in their life who, no matter what happens, will always say, well, you know, everything happens for a reason. One of my favorite bumper stickers I've ever seen is, everything happens for a reason.

[3 : 35] Sometimes that reason is that you are stupid and make bad choices. Not all the knocks that we get in life are God disciplining us. Some of them are just us.

But sometimes, sometimes God will take things away from us that we love. Sometimes God will give us things that he doesn't think we can handle. Why? Why does he do these things?

Well, look with me at verses 5 and 6 of our passage tonight. This is a great place to start. My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastises every son whom he receives. That comes from Proverbs in the Old Testament. It's Proverbs 3.11 if you want to read it later.

So why does God discipline us? Well, one really good reason is because he loves us. Because to demonstrate that love for us, he disciplines us to shape us into a better version of ourselves.

[4 : 37] And that's one of the two things that this passage talks about, is what to do when God disciplines us. And the other one, which we'll get to later, is how do we discipline ourselves? But first, why is God disciplining us?

It's because he's our Father and he loves us. I think that most people probably knew that kid growing up who had no rules, who could stay out as late as he wanted, who could watch whatever he wanted on TV.

He didn't really have to do any homework. There were just seemingly no boundaries for him. And his parents must have been the coolest people because they just let him get away with whatever they wanted to.

They certainly were a lot cooler than mine. I'm not going to lie to you. I wrote this before I realized my father was going to be in the congregation today.

But seriously, let me ask you this. You probably knew one of those kids. So, if you flash forward to today, how do you think that person reacts today when he is told no?

[5 : 47] What do you think would have been more loving, ultimately, for his parents to have given him no boundaries or for his parents to have provided him discipline? Verse 5.

When God disciplines us, he is doing so because he sees us as sons. He sees us as his children. When you're a Christian, the Holy Spirit is daily shaping you into a person who looks more like Jesus.

This is seen in your study on Colossians last week. Part of that discipline is living in the way that Christ would have us live. Husbands, love your wives. Wives, love your husbands.

Children, honor your parents. Parents, honor your children. Employers, honor your employees. Employees, honor your employers. We are called to do these things with no promise of reward because they are good works, and God is glorified when we do them.

So, what does that mean? Why is God glorified when he disciplines us? God doesn't necessarily discipline us because we screw up. Jesus himself talks about this in John 9.

[6 : 53] He and his disciples are walking. John 9, 2 specifically. He and his disciples are walking. The disciples see a blind man, and they say to him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?

Jesus answered, It was not that this man sinned or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. That the works of God might be displayed in him.

That God would be so glorified because the hardship that this man had been given gave Jesus a chance to display his grace and his mercy and his power and his own glory by healing the man in the sight of all.

Why was this man blind? Why had he been afflicted since birth? Because of something he did? No, so that God could be more glorified. Why was Jesus sweating blood in the Garden of Gethsemane in our Gospel text tonight?

Because he was about to go to the cross for all of our sins. Was he going to the cross because he had done something wrong? No. It's so that God could be more glorified in his plan to redeem us.

[8 : 03] So, what does that have to do with you and me? Well, it's really simple, fortunately. This is not always a good thing because sometimes simple things don't mean that they're easy.

And it isn't. This is no exception. This is not easy, but it's actually very simple. Verse 11 of our text tonight. For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant.

But later, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Stop assuming that the hard stuff in your life is nothing more than an inconvenience.

Look for ways that God is working on you and praise him for it. And this sounds ridiculous. Bless him for it. And that sounds absurd.

The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. And blessed be the name of the Lord. Look at those areas where you can clearly feel God kind of working on you and rounding off the hard edges of your soul.

[9 : 13] Look for those areas in life where he's clearly guiding you away from something or guiding you towards something. God trains us and he shapes us. Why does he do this?

Because he is our Father. Why does he do this? Some of you might really bristle when you hear language like that, when God is called our Father. I get that.

I do. Many of you had fathers who disciplined you. Maybe not so much so that you could eventually flourish, but to vent their own anger and soothe their own twisted souls.

Maybe you had a father who abandoned you. He didn't want to have anything to do with you. Now, if you had a father who modeled what our Heavenly Father is to us, then praise God. Go and call him today.

Thank him. But, if you didn't, please know you can look to God to be the perfect father that you always wanted but never got.

[10 : 11] God is our perfect father. He disciplines us in order to shape us. And he allows us and he shows us how to discipline ourselves. And that brings us to question two.

How do we discipline ourselves? You can't be in one of our churches too long, either sitting under the preaching of Tommy or Dan, or Dan Clare and Sean back in my church.

You can't be around us too long without running into the name Jamie Smith. James K.A. Smith wrote a book called Desiring the Kingdom. It's all about the liturgies of culture around you, about the spiritual power of habit.

Throughout the book, Smith asks the question, do we love the things, how do we know that we love the things that we say that we love? How can we tell? It actually can end up being a very uncomfortable question.

How can we tell the things that we love? We can tell it by what we spend our time on, by what we spend our energy on. Again, it's one of those things that's simple, but that doesn't necessarily make it easy.

[11 : 18] There's a phrase that I used to hear in seminary that you'll occasionally hear in talking about worship, and I think it really applies here. It's a really fun Latin phrase, and it's *lex arendi, lex credendi*.

It's really easy to remember, what you pray is what you believe. And this is often kind of expanded to be what you worship is what you believe.

How you worship shows the things that you believe. What you truly believe in will be shown by what you worship. This is at the core of what Jamie Smith talks about.

You can tell what you worship by the liturgies that you create in life. So as we are called to cast off sin, to put aside sinful ways, to choose the path of Christ, this is very difficult.

Remember that quick highlight reel that I gave of Hebrews. Right before this chapter in Hebrews 11 is something called the Great Hall of Faith where all of the, or many of the standouts of the Old Testament are named.

[12 : 26] If you look at that list, though, if you're familiar with the Old Testament, one thing is abundantly clear. Everyone on that list is every bit as messed up as you or I. Everyone on that list is a sinner whom God used for his purpose and his glory.

And even so, with this grandstand of sinners watching us, we are still exhorted, the writer of the Hebrews tells us, to press on to the goal.

Verse 3, consider him who endured that is considered Jesus. This is all like Colossians, like the entire Bible, the book of Hebrews.

Everything Points to Christ. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

Consider whom? Consider who? Consider Jesus. Jesus, the God-man, fully God and fully man, prayed in the garden that God would find some other way if there were any other way that we could fulfill your plan without going to the cross and taking on the sin of the world.

[13 : 42] Can we please do it that way? And he prayed so fervently that he sweat blood. Even before he shed his blood on the cross, he was bleeding under the weight of God's discipline.

And there appeared to him an angel from heaven strengthening him. And being in agony, he prayed more earnestly and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground. And as he rose from prayer, he came to his disciples and he found them sleeping for sorrow and he said to them, Why are you sleeping?

Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation. As I was thinking about these two passages, I realized that Jesus' instructions here are very good for us as well.

There is no better daily discipline to get into than prayer. It isn't glamorous.

It isn't there's no lightning bolt. It isn't world changing. It is just simply a conscious effort every day in those little everyday ways to discipline ourselves, to follow more after Christ.

[14 : 55] And I think that prayer and making a routine habit of prayer throughout the day is one of the best ways to do it. It's not just about changing our minds.

It's about examining our hearts and our hands and seeing where we spend our time. Maybe it's about on a pragmatic level the self-discipline that God calls us to do, figuring out where our worship is, where our allegiances lie.

That can be done with figuring out how we really spend our money, taking a really hard and unflinching look at that. It can be done figuring out how we spend our time, taking a really hard and unflinching look at that.

Our passage ends tonight by talking about the kind of self-discipline that we are called to do, that we are empowered to do. Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees and make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather healed.

So, before this all becomes about how we are all each getting better and stronger and faster, what does this all mean? It's no surprise if you have read Colossians, if you have read Hebrews, if you've read the Bible.

[16 : 20] This is all about Jesus. God disciplines us because he's our father, and sometimes he has to discipline us in order to mold us into the mold of Christ.

And he disciplines us because we are sons. The writer of Hebrews is clear to say sons and not sons and daughters, although there are other places in the New Testament where that language is used.

This can really trip us up. In a modern day, we often want to just kind of inherently say sons and daughters. My wife and I are in the process of adopting our first kid.

We have been reading a bunch of books on adoption. Baptist theologian Russell Moore in his book on adoption actually addresses this exact thing, and I just wanted to point out what this discipline that God gives us is for and what it means.

In a modern context, we do want to put and daughters on the end of any sentence. When we are in Christ, we are truly sons and daughters of God, but there is a bigger component. In the ancient world, what did sons do?

[17 : 27] They inherited. They received the riches of the household, the estate, the land. How great is it that all Christians, this is Russell Moore, how great is it that all Christians, men and women, are adopted by God and gifted the inheritance of peace with God, the inheritance of union with Christ, the inheritance of eternal life in a new recreated heavens and new earth with new resurrected bodies.

How amazing is that, that that is our inheritance. God is our father and we are his sons, and that is possible only through the work of Jesus Christ. That great inheritance that we have was won for us by the suffering of Christ on the cross.

When he who was not sin became sin so that we might become the righteousness of God. part of becoming the righteousness of God is God disciplining us and us disciplining ourselves.

We are called to do it. We are empowered to do it. Why shouldn't we do it? Becoming more and more like Christ is one of the greatest things in the world.

And there are times, there are days where, I'm not going to lie, my fallen mind and my sinful appetites would buck against that and would say that being disciplined by God, that becoming more Christ-like, that there are a lot of things that are better than that.

[18 : 54] But it's not because it's not glamorous, because it's not the kind of thing that is going to get noticed or remembered.

It's often easy to overlook. But for the Christian, for the one who knows that what we have as inheriting children of God, there truly is nothing better.

There's a great film from a few years ago called Man on Wire. It's a story about a guy who strung a tightrope between the two towers of the World Trade Center in the 1970s and walked across them.

It is an absolutely amazing film. If you've ever read anything about tightrope walking, you'll always hear the same thing when someone is learning. They'll just tell you the same thing over and over again.

Don't look down. Never look down. Never look at your feet. Never look at what you're doing. Look at where you're going. And I think that that's true in everyday life as well.

[19 : 55] If I'm walking along this stage, I'm only looking at my feet. If I'm not looking at where I'm going, I'm going to trip down the stairs and I'm going to fall. How much more true is that when somebody who's walking across a wire one inch thick suspended 105 stories above the ground, which is about a quarter mile.

When you're walking on a tightrope, if you look down, if you look at what you're doing and not where you're going, you're going to fall. Read verses 12 and 13 with me.

Lift your drooping heads. Strengthen your weak knees. Redouble your efforts. Call on the body of Christ for help if you need it. please call on the body of Christ for help.

Do not do this alone. Don't look to yourself. Don't look to your own devices. Look to Jesus. He is the point of this whole thing. He's the center of this whole thing.

In a culture where happiness is everything and comfort is king, the idea of willingly submitting to a plan of discipline is just ridiculous. ridiculous. It's utter foolishness to submit to someone else's discipline when it comes to my thoughts and my desires and my heart.

[21 : 12] But the church is supposed to look foolish because Jesus Christ, God and man in one person, went to the cross and died for millions and billions and trillions of sins that he didn't deserve.

And he did it out of love for us. I want to end by going back to our Old Testament text for a moment. In Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy chapter 8, tonight we heard verses 1 through 6.

And this is really about not looking at what we're doing but keeping our eyes focused on where we're going. I chose this chapter, I chose this passage of Deuteronomy 8, 1 through 6 because it's a great word about God disciplining.

I'm sorry about God disciplining. I would have kept going to the end of this passage but I was afraid that if I did, no one would have heard what came in the middle.

What came in the middle and where we ended our reading on was, Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you. So you shall keep the commandments of your Lord by walking in his ways and by fearing him.

[22 : 30] But then it continues and it gives us a picture of what eternal life in the presence of God through Christ will look like.

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks, a land of brooks, of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out of the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, a land in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper.

And you shall eat and be full and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. God disciplines us because he is our good shepherd.

God disciplines us because he is shaping us, he is guiding us, he is driving us into this great land that we will all eventually inherit.

Will you pray with me? Amen. Amen.