

Fruiting not falling

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 October 2020

Preacher: Philip Wells

[0:00] Well, good morning everybody and welcome to this pre-recorded service for the 18th October 2020! The Calvary Church here in Brighton. As you can see we're meeting by YouTube and planning to find our way to meeting together as time goes on.

Of course that's something so important for us to do and we really, really want to do that as a church together. So welcome if you're regular or just dropping in. My usual introduction, my name is Philip Wells, I'm elder here at the church and our church is based on the south coast of England, just on the south coast south of London.

And back in the days of normality we were 70 or 80 people meeting together. So that's us and you're very welcome to join in this morning.

If you don't know us, let me just say that we are a church in a state of some shock and grief and very conscious of our weakness and dependence upon God at the moment and that will reflect itself in what we say and think about this morning.

So we come seeking God and his wisdom and his comfort and we come seeking the Father through Jesus the Son.

[1:37] And let's begin with a prayer. You, almighty God, are the heart knower and look upon our hearts.

In our sin, grant us your forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ. In our weakness, grant us your heavenly power, the power which is made perfect in weakness.

In our perplexity and grief and shock, grant us the comfort that comes from the God of all comfort. And grant us the wisdom that comes from heaven to those who ask. And in our emptiness and need, fill us with the fullness which comes from your glorious abundance.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. The writer to the Hebrews has a very clear message for Christian people, which is fix your eyes on Jesus.

[2:39] In Matthew 14, 30, you may remember that Peter was called by the Lord to walk on water and he was beginning to do so. But then he saw the wind and began to be afraid and beginning to sink, cried out, Lord, save me.

Well, we absolutely need to fix our eyes on Jesus and we need to be not intimidated by the wind or the waves around us. And then by the power of Jesus, perhaps we'll be able to look back in days to come and say, wow, we walked on water as we fixed our eyes on him.

Chapter 3, verse 1 of Hebrews makes this explicit where it says, Fix your thoughts, fix your eyes on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.

And Hebrews 4, verse 14 says, Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus, the son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.

[4:06] Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

And in a moment, we are going to approach the throne of grace and come to the great high priest for the help that we need. But first, let's sing a couple of songs back to back.

First of all, thinking of Jesus is the name we honour. Jesus is the name we praise. And then thinking about Jesus as the high priest. Before the throne of God above, I have a strong, a perfect plea.

A great high priest whose name is love, whoever lives and pleads for me. So those two songs, number 304, Jesus is the name we honour. And before the throne of God above.

So let's sing those. One, two, one, two, three, four. Jesus is the name we honour.

[5:22] Jesus is the name we praise. Majestic name above all other names.

The highest heaven and earth proclaim that Jesus is our God. We will glorify.

We will lift Him high. We will give Him honour and praise. We will glorify.

We will lift Him high. We will give Him honour and praise. Jesus is the name we worship.

Jesus is the name we trust. He is the King above all other kings.

[6:22] Let all creation stand and sing that Jesus is our God. We will glorify.

We will lift Him high. We will give Him honour and praise. We will glorify.

We will lift Him high. We will give Him honour and praise. Jesus is the Father's splendour.

Jesus is the Father's joy. He will return to reign in majesty. And every eye at all.

And every eye at all shall see. Jesus is our God. We will glorify.

[7:23] We will lift Him high. We will give Him honour and praise. We will glorify.

We will lift Him high. We will give Him honour and praise. Let us pray. To the throne of God above I have a strong network perfectly A great high priest whose blameless love Whoever lives and pleads for me My name is written on his hands My name is written in his grave I know that while in heaven he stands No path can force me to depart No path can force me to depart When Satan tempts me to despair And tells me of the guilt within I look to help and see him there Who made an end of all my sin

Because the sinner's Savior died When sinful soul is drafted through The God the just is satisfied To look on him and pardon me To look on him and pardon me Behold him then the risen Lamb My perfect spotless righteousness The great unchangeable I am The King of glory and of grace One with himself I cannot die My soul is purchased by his truth My life is saved

With Christ on high With Christ my Savior and my God With Christ my Savior and my God With Christ my Savior and my God Now we're going to pray together To the Through the great high priest Before this throne of grace Let's pray God our Father we come to the one who loves us The one who has planned everything Chosen us, brought us Given his Son to us Given the Spirit to us The one who loves us and disciplines us For our good We come in praise and thanks and love To our Heavenly Father We come confessing sins of thought

[11:44] And word and deed Of commission and omission We don't want to ignore Or minimise our sins But earnestly ask you for forgiveness And earnestly ask you to give us true Continual and deep repentance Help us to grow up And also to grow down And become like Jesus Not just in our outward behaviour But in the secret inner processes of our hearts We want to be grateful to you And not grumbling So please help us And deliver us from ingratitude From questioning your wisdom Thank you that you are wise In all that you do Deliver us from the temptation Of finding fault With your hand upon our lives Where we think you have dealt badly with us In what you gave us Or in what you chose to remove from us The Lord gives The Lord takes away Blessed be the name of the Lord

Thank you for every good and perfect gift That you have given to us That comes from heaven above Into our lives We pray asking you for help In our time of need And at this moment We need your help To process all that's happening Around us Particularly as a church Help us to see things Through the spectacles of scripture Rather than through the lens Of mere and raw emotion Help us to be a church That walks by faith And not by feeling That walks by faith And not by sight Please give wisdom To our elders and deacons May they or we Be guided through these next months So that in time to come We'll be able to say He made my feet Like hind's feet Upon the high places Help us to learn The lessons of instinctive trust in you

And trust in your providential dealings Help us as we cross the desert To find refreshment There is a stream That makes glad the city of God Lord make us glad By that stream Help us to keep together As your family As we go forward Please provide the things That we need in the desert Manna Water Guidance Shepherding And may none of your sheep Wander Or perish We pray for our world In all its need We pray for the leaders And governors Of the nations That they will turn From self and human confidence And put their trust In the only God We pray For you to have mercy

On our city And particularly Bless and strengthen All the gospel churches Large and small In our city And we particularly think Of our brothers and sisters At Barkill Evangelical Church And New Life Church Moolescombe And the Grace Church Plant And Ebenezer Reformed Baptist Church And Southern Cross Evangelical Church And Peacehaven Evangelical Church As well as the bigger churches In our city We pray for those Who are in need And suffering At this time That each may know Comfort from the God Of all comfort And we pray again For those who have Deeply lost their way Good Shepherd Go and bring them To themselves And bring them back to you In a deep And true way And at this time We ask that you will Be close to your people That bring glory To yourself Teach us afresh And teach us Really and deeply That you are God All our hope is in you And that you Never never fail So may we Know this For sure Ourselves And may the world See it Amen We're going to pray The Lord's Prayer together Our Father in heaven Hallowed be your name Your kingdom come Your will be done On earth As it is in heaven Give us today Our daily bread And forgive us Our sins As we forgive those Who sin against us And lead us Not into temptation But deliver us From evil For yours is the kingdom The power And the glory Forever and ever Amen Still thinking of Fixing our eyes on Jesus I'm reminded of these words In John 15 verse 1 Where Jesus says I am the true vine And my Father is the gardener He cuts off every branch in me That bears no fruit While every branch That does bear fruit He prunes

[16:48] So that it will be Even more fruitful And in these words Jesus talks about The centrality of himself He is the vine He is the sustainer Of his people And only in belonging to him And drawing from him Do we bear fruit And he talks about The necessity of fruit If there is no fruit Then we're only seeming To be in Christ And in reality There is not Life but barrenness And there will be A cutting off He cuts off Every branch in me That bears no fruit And he talks about The Father's method In producing fruit He prunes If I was a vine branch I don't think I'd particularly Want to be pruned If branches could feel pain It would be a painful process It certainly involves loss If I was a vine I'd be saying I quite like that branch Why are you cutting it off?

It's certainly something That I was attached to But there is a purpose in this And the Father's purpose Is to produce More and better fruit He prunes While every branch That does bear fruit He prunes So that it will be Even more fruitful And I don't think That's a million miles away From our situation As a church We've received What seems to us A painful And perhaps even Inexplicable A couple of losses But let's see this As coming from The hand of a firm But loving Heavenly Father Who wants us to Mature And be fruitful And he's actually Not afraid To do this in a way That we might find Painful and uncomfortable And he does it So that We will be Even more fruitful So let's take heart From what the Lord Jesus Says In that text

We're now going to Go back to The desert For two readings First of all 1 Corinthians 13 1 Sorry 1 Corinthians 10 Verses 1 to 13 That Christopher's Going to read And we'll learn Some searching lessons there And then Brenda's Going to read To us From Hebrews Chapter 5 Verse 7 To 6 Verse 12 The passage That we're In the middle Of considering together So thank you Christopher and Brenda For those two readings 1 Corinthians Chapter 10 For I do not want you To be ignorant Of the fact Brothers That our forefathers Were all under the cloud And that they all Passed through the sea They were all baptised Into Moses in the cloud And in the sea They all ate The same spiritual food And drank the same Spiritual drink For they drank From the spiritual rock That accompanied them And that rock Was Christ Nevertheless God was not pleased

With most of them Their bodies Were scattered Over the desert Now these things Occurred as examples To keep us From setting our hearts On evil things As they did Do not be idolaters As some of them were As it is written The people sat down To eat and drink And got up to indulge In pagan revelry We should not commit Sexual immorality As some of them did And in one day 23,000 of them died We should not test The Lord As some of them did And were killed By snakes And do not grumble As some of them did And were killed By the destroying angel These things Happened to them As examples And were written down As warnings for us On whom the fulfilment Of the ages Has come So if you think You are standing firm Be careful That you do not fall No temptation Has seized you Except what is Common to man And God is faithful And he will not let you Be tempted Beyond what you can bear But when you are tempted He will provide a way out So you can stand up

Under it During the days Of Jesus' life On earth He offered up Prayers and petitions With fervent cries And tears To the one Who could save him From death And he was heard Because of his Reverent submission Son though he was He learned obedience From what he suffered And once made perfect He became the source Of eternal salvation For all who obey him And was designated By God To be high priest In the order Of Melchizedek We have much To say about this But it is hard To make it clear To you Because you no longer Try to understand In fact Though by this time You ought to be teachers You need someone To teach you The elementary truths Of God's word All over again You need milk Not solid food Anyone who lives On milk Being still

[21:52] An infant Is not acquainted With the teaching About righteousness But solid food Is for the mature Who by constant use Have trained themselves To distinguish Good from evil Therefore let us Move beyond The elementary Teachings about Christ And be taken Forward to maturity Not laying again The foundation Of repentance From acts That lead to death And of faith In God Instruction about Cleansing rights The laying on Of hands The resurrection Of the dead And eternal judgment And God permitting We will do so It is impossible For those Who have once Been enlightened Who have tasted The heavenly gift Who have shared In the Holy Spirit Who have tasted The goodness Of the word of God And the powers Of the coming age And who have Fallen away To be brought

Back to repentance To their loss They are crucifying The son of God All over again And subjecting him To public disgrace Land that drinks In the rain Often falling on it And that produces A crop useful To those For whom it is farmed Receives the blessing Of God But land that produces Thorns and thistles Is worthless And is in danger Of being cursed In the end It will be burned Even though we speak Like this Dear friends We are convinced Of better things In your case The things that Have to do With salvation God is not unjust He will not forget Your work And the love You have shown him As you have helped His people And continue to help them We want each of you To show this same Diligence To the very end So that what you Hope for May be fully realised We do not want you To become lazy But to imitate Those who through Faith and patience Inherit what has Been promised Now having heard Those words Let's move to Our talk The title I've put There is Fruiting and not Falling I think anybody With half a brain Could think of a Better title than that But it does make Some sort of sense I hope We will find out As we proceed But let's ask God's help first Lord We need to hear From you We need Your touch Upon our lives By your word And spirit So please Open the scriptures To us And prove to us Again That the scriptures Are living And active And powerful And dividing Right down Into our hearts And spirits And making us Fruitful And enabling us To draw From the Lord Jesus Upon whom

We fix our eyes Now By the help Of your spirit Amen Well we prayed And let's look Now at the text We're in Hebrews Chapter 6 And the letter To the Hebrews As you will remember Or I'll just say If this is the first time You've been looking at this Is a letter That has A strong thread Of warning And it's a bit like This picture Of somebody At Berlin Gap There's a big Crack in the cliff And they're Going So ridiculously Close to the cliff edge It's really Really dangerous Do they not realise The danger The picture Would send shivers Down your spine And that's The danger And you would Want to say Danger Get out of there That's what we're Going to be looking at And as I've said Before This is mostly An in-house issue For people Who say they're Christians But you're very Welcome to watch If you don't

Wouldn't say That you're a Christian Because it will Show you the sort Of things That being a Christian Involves So there's my Little diagram With my spindly Drawing Of a cliff edge With water At the bottom Of it And we've got Person A Who's on the path There's the safe path Person P Who's wandering Off the path Person C Who's actually In real danger There they are And person D Who has fallen over And is beyond rescue And of these People Which one are we God help us That we might be Person A Now how can we Make sure that we're Person A That's really what This is all about How can we live As person A The one who's Safely on the path So there's my Little picture again And we're going to Look more closely And carefully At another aspect Of this passage I think it deserves Our careful attention Go a little bit Further into the text So my plan is

[26:55] Just I'll briefly Recap some of the Issues that might Have cropped up In your mind As we read This particular passage Of which there are Five And I'm going to Ask these three Questions Where do these Where

do He's referring to People who might Be falling over the Edge And he doesn't Want them to Where did they Start off from Where did they Get to And what was The danger So looking at Those three Things Where do they Start off from Where do they Get to And what Is the danger Of this situation So let's Look very briefly At those Five questions And objections That might come To your mind Number one It says that He says they Were infants Did he really Think they were Infants We looked at This last time And we said No he's Probably Using sarcasm What conditions Were his hearers In this word Nothros Meaning lazy And that's Really what We're looking At the Condition of Laziness

And how to Avoid it And also This set of Elementary principles Which seems a Strange set of Elementary principles Including baptism And laying on Of hands And we'll look At that God willing Hopefully next Week because I Think there's Something to be Looked at there So let's just Leave that on One side Until we get To that next Week God willing This whole Question of Whether Christians Can fall away That's really At the heart Of what this Passage is About And that's What we're Going to be Exploring The Calvinist The Calvinist View which I Think is Exactly what the Bible teaches Says that God Decides who's Going to be a Christian He saves Those people And keeps Them And Jesus Says I Give them Eternal life They shall Never perish No one can Snatch them Out of my Hand And that is A true Statement But it Doesn't Invalidate That the Great shepherd Keeps his Sheep by Warning them And sometimes Terrifying them Of the prospect Of wandering Away That's how he Keeps them But it's him Who keeps Them I know it Looks as Though the Writer says The readers May not be Kept But let's Just work Through that Even if you Said oh People Just have Free will There's a Problem Because it Says it's Impossible For those Who have Been enlightened Etc So they're Not free Anyway And the The point Of this Which I Think we Keep coming Back to Is that The Christian Life is Lived on The basis Of living Walking With the Lord Today Having Faith Keeping Going In Faith In Inheriting The promises Through Steadiness Through Holding On to Our Confession Through Not Being Knocked If We've Fallen Over We get Back up Again And it's Like the People in Hebrews 11 Who Through Patience Inherit What has Been Promised So Just Quickly To points. This one about falling away will be very close to what we're talking about just now.

Okay, so the three questions, where did they start from? This is number one. Where did they start from? Now, where do they start from? Now, clearly, the writer is saying that the possibility of falling away is to be treated as real. It's not just hypothetical. It's not something that is just there to scare you, but you can pretty well ignore it. We're to be treated as a real possibility.

And you may say, well, it's only real for people who didn't start in the right place. Maybe it's obviously because they didn't start in the right place. Now, I'm going to say there are very definitely wrong places to start. So if you start your Christian life with a Christianity that doesn't include repentance, that's the wrong place to start. True Christianity must start with turning from sin to the Saviour. There's no other way to do it. We turn to Christ, but we turn from sin, and we hate our sin. We leave it, and we move away from it and turn towards the Saviour. That's the way to start. People try to start Christianity without understanding that the cross is the place where Jesus bore the wrath of God. They say maybe Jesus just was setting an example, or, I don't know, Jesus was showing his mastery or something. But no, you can't really start there. You have to start at the cross, which was a place where Jesus bore the wrath of God for us sinners. There's no salvation otherwise.

[31:43] People start Christianity perhaps by thinking we're on a road like a ladder, working our way up through achieving merit, through our good works. That's the sort of typical Roman Catholic take, or perhaps a Jehovah's Witness take on spirituality. And the Bible has got a completely different starting point. We don't acquire merit.

We are given righteousness as a free gift through faith in Jesus Christ, by grace. And that's the place to start. So there are wrong places. But I have to say, that won't let us off the hook on this particular passage, because these people seem to start in exactly the right place. In terms of the advantages they have, the privileges they're given, you can't fault them. A little bit like the reading we had in 1 Corinthians 10, where Paul, who says the same thing, but from a different point of view, he says, the people in the desert, they were all under the cloud, they all passed through the sea, they were all baptized into Moses, they all drank from the same spiritual drink, they all drank from

the spiritual rock, but they didn't make it to the end. They all had the advantages, advantages. But some of them, they all had the advantages, but some of them did not live up to them.

Some of them committed sexual immorality. Some of them tested the Lord. Some of them grumbled. Some of them were idolaters. And these things were examples for us, he says.

Don't rely on your advantages. So if you are standing firm, he says, be careful that you don't fall.

If you're standing firm, be careful that you don't fall. Let him who stands take heed lest he fall. Well, what was the starting point of these people in Hebrews 6? Well, I'm looking at verse 4 and saying, they had been given light and not darkness. It says they have been enlightened.

[34:03] What is the natural condition of the human race? Well, there is a certain nobility to human beings. They're made in the image of God, although that image is spoiled. It's not completely eradicated.

Human beings are creative. They are made in the image of God. God is a creator. Human beings create. It can't help but create. We create sentences and call it talking and conversation.

We create football passes, or some of us do. Wonderfully creative, beautiful game, isn't it? Football. Some people create music. Some people create art. And we all create choices.

We're not pre-programmed in that sense. We go through life as responsible, free moral agents. And we are responsible. So if a rock hits you, you can't blame the rock.

But if a person hits you, you can blame the person. If the car won't start, you can hardly blame the car. Unlike the bit in Fawlty Towers, where the car won't start and Basil Fawlty gets out a stick and hits the car because it's so naughty.

[35:19] Only some people will remember that. But human beings are praiseworthy and blameworthy. That's what human beings are like.

But in particular in connection with this thought, all human beings are in the dark as far as a saving relationship with God is concerned. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4.4, The God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel, of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

They cannot see that. So the sun's shining, but they cannot see it. But these people in Hebrews, they have been enlightened. They've been given light. They're not just in darkness.

They've had this advantage that their eyes have certainly been opened to this. They've seen the light. So where did they start from?

They've been given light and not darkness. Where did they start from? Secondly, they tasted and they hadn't just spectated. So he talks about tasting.

[36:29] They've tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit. They've tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the coming age. So I think taste, if we think of tasting as having the full gastronomic experience.

So it isn't, for example, we sometimes talk about head knowledge and heart knowledge. I don't think it's a terribly helpful way of talking about it. But if you want to use that expression, it wasn't just head knowledge.

They haven't just read about Christianity. But some of Christianity, they've actually experienced it. So there's my tongue tasting. They've tasted the heavenly gift, the thing that God gives from heaven.

They've tasted some of that. Maybe they've been in the middle of a meeting where God has been praised and they've tasted what it is to enjoy the God of heaven.

And they've tasted something of the glory of God and tasted something of the brilliance of salvation. Maybe they've tasted something of the love of God's people.

[37:35] Maybe they've been loved in the fellowship of God's people. They've tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age. Perhaps as they'd been to a Bible study, they said, yes, God is speaking to me through this.

The Bible is true. And not only is it true, but it's good and desirable. And I've learned something and my life has been changed to a degree. I've received benefit from this.

I've known that God speaks through the Bible. They've tasted these things and maybe even had answers to prayer. So in these things, I'm saying, where do they start from?

Well, they started in the right place. And here they have tasted and not just spectated. But having tasted does not make a barrier around the cliff edge.

It does not mean I'm immune to the dangers of the cliff edge. Just because I started off by tasting doesn't mean that I can go to the cliff edge with impunity. And thirdly, well, they'd apparently started.

[38:38] But crucially, they had not yet finished. They started the race, but they haven't yet finished it. And he says, verse 11, we want you to keep the same diligence to the very end in order to make your hope sure.

We don't want you to become lazy. Well, there's somebody who started, verse 10. You did the Lord's work.

You've helped his people. You've shown love for his name. And in a sense, you're still helping God's people. In a sense, to an extent. But there in my little picture is somebody who's on the way through the desert to the heavenly city, but has got lazy.

And I said, no, that's fine. I'm not going to go any further. This is far enough. I started well. But this is as far as it goes. I'm just going to put my feet up spiritually at this point.

Because, you see, starting is not the same as finishing. And it's finishing that counts. It's still running the race that counts. It's still marching to Zion that counts.

[39:50] And our brother, whom church people will think of, ran that race to the end, walked to Zion to the end. And he was still marching to Zion when he left this world.

Finishing is what counts. Not just starting and then giving up. Putting your feet up. They'd apparently started but not finished. And there is no substitute for finishing.

It is in the nature of true faith to outlast this world. True faith has something of eternity about it. And it doesn't give up halfway. It doesn't peter out. It is something eternal. And it shows because people don't just start the race. They finish it.

Matthew 24, 13, Jesus says, maybe the context is a little bit different, but this is what he says. He who stands firm to the end will be saved. He who stands firm to the end will be saved.

[40:51] Not those who get lazy and put their feet up halfway through. He who stands firm to the end. So no one can say, I've got far enough on this journey. I remember how I started.

I gave my life to the Lord at such and such a time. And I used to serve in the Sunday school. And I used to help us on. And I've done all that. And I'm now going to put my feet up.

Oh, no. Oh, no. You can't say that. No one can say, I've got it far. As far as I'm going to go on this journey, I don't need to press on any further.

No, we all need to press on and finish the race and keep on walking and fight the good fight. Okay, well, that was about where did they start from?

And they started from the right place. Number two, where did they get to? Well, this is what happens in verse six. It's impossible if they fall away to be brought to repentance because to their loss, they're crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

[42:00] So where did they get to? This is quite an important question, isn't it? Because in our worst days, Christians might think maybe that's me. Maybe I've fallen off the edge and there's no way back.

And I think the very fact that you're thinking that probably means that there is a way back because you're still sensitive to the situation. Now, these people, says the writer, this is where this is all heading.

You come to a point of saying that Jesus is wrong. At their loss, they're crucifying the Son of God all over again.

And my simple take on this is when Jesus was crucified, it was the judgment systems of this world saying guilty, bad, wrong, unacceptable, intolerable about Jesus.

This man deserves to die. And these people are saying the same thing all over again. Because what did the cross say? The cross said Jesus is worthy of death.

[43:07] The cross said Jesus is guilty and wrong. And he says that if you take this line, you now got Hebrews 10, 29, which says a similar thing.

How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot and has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him

and who has insulted the spirit of grace?

So to get to this point that you say Jesus is wrong, he's worthy of death, is like to trample him underfoot. And that's a terrible place to be.

There's no way back from that. And take heart, brother or sister, if you're worrying about it. Because I think the fact you're worrying shows you haven't got to that point. That's a terrible, extreme position to be in.

There's no way back from that. And these people have got themselves in the place of repeating this hideous position of saying Jesus is guilty and wrong and does not deserve to live.

[44:13] They're saying Jesus is wrong and they're also saying Jesus is rubbish. They subject him, he says, to public disgrace all over again. The cross is a place of disgrace.

The cross is really a place where the crucifying authorities treat people as rubbish and disgrace. And that's what the writer of the Hebrews says, you really, really don't want to get to that point. And maybe this is what some of the people had got to.

That they'd so turned from Christianity that maybe even publicly they had done terrible things like disowning Jesus in public, like insulting Jesus in public.

Some maybe, you know, you can think of persecutors who have pressured Christians to do insulting and belittling things to the name of Jesus, to their Bible, to, well, whatever.

[45:21] But he says you really don't want to get to that, to publicly repudiate Jesus, to say he's rubbish. Or maybe to quietly repudiate Jesus.

That would be a disgraceful thing for us to do and we really don't want to get to that point. And in this condition, he says, if you're saying Jesus is rubbish, well, there's no way back from that, is there?

So I use this word literally, I don't know whether I'm using it right. In this condition, there is literally nowhere else to turn for salvation. There is no way back from this.

Of course, there is no other way than the way you've just trampled on. And it is literally impossible to repent if at the same time you are stating that Jesus is rubbish.

Oh, please, don't get into that position. That's how far the fall goes. That's what's at the bottom of this cliff.

[46:21] And, dear brothers and sisters, surely none of us would remotely want to get to that point. It's a long, long fall.

Don't go near that cliff edge. And my third point here. What was the danger? Well, I'm now thinking of verses 7 and 8, where it says, actually it says for.

Our new international version doesn't include for, but it is there in the original. The for meaning this is the reason for what I just said. I just said this because of what I'm about to say.

I just said this for. This following sentence is true. And he says, for the land that drinks in the rain, often falling on it, and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it's being farmed, receives the blessing of God.

But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. That's the danger of being cursed. In the end, it will be burned. That's what you do with unfruitful land.

[47:27] And he says, he refers to this land. And it's interesting the way he puts it. It's very worthwhile stopping on to look. He talks about land that drinks in the rain.

There we are, some rain. And there's some vegetation being produced. Now, he's actually quoting back from Deuteronomy chapter 11.

And I'm going to pause while you find Deuteronomy chapter 11, because this is how things were set up in the land, as the promised land, when the nation entered the promised land.

Now, I can say while you're finding Deuteronomy 11, that in the old covenant, land sort of worked as a physical barometer of blessing. Not quite the same in the new covenant, because our relationship with land is different.

But in the old covenant, land was a physical barometer of blessing. If the land was doing well, it showed that we were blessed. And in Deuteronomy 11, 11, it says, The land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven.

[48:45] It is a land the Lord your God cares for. The eyes of the Lord your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end. So if you faithfully obey the commands I'm giving you today to love the Lord your God, to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain new wine and oil.

And I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle and you will eat and be satisfied. And then it goes on to say, Be careful, because if you are enticed away and worship other gods and bow down to them, the Lord's anger will burn against you.

He will shut the heavens so it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce. So there's land that drinks in the rain. And this is what Hebrews is referring to, land that drinks in the rain, often falling on it, produces a good crop.

And as we've read in Deuteronomy, this shows a condition of blessing, of advantage, of favour, of the Lord's smile.

Now, let's think about the thorns and thistles. Thorns and thistles indicate something completely different.

[50:07] You remember in Genesis chapter 3 that when God spoke to Adam subsequent to his sin, he said to Adam, Cursed is the ground, it will produce thorns and thistles.

And thorns and thistles then is indicative of curse. And you get the same sort of language in Isaiah 5.

And again, I'll pause while you might be good enough to look up Isaiah 5. This is the rather famous chapter about the song of the vineyard.

God planted a vineyard. He gave it lots of advantages. He, we're told in chapter 5, verse 1, he dug it, cleared it of stones, planted it with the choicest vines.

He built a watchtower. He looked for a crop of good grapes. And God asked, what else could I have done? I really looked after this vineyard.

[51:08] What more could I have done for it? And I looked for good grapes and it yielded only bad fruit. And it goes on to say in verse 6, briars and thorns will grow there.

Well, I know briars isn't exactly the same word as thorns, but I'm pretty sure it's the same idea. Briars and thorns indicate the condition of abandonment.

So when the writer to the Hebrews uses the idea of lamb drinking in rain and thorns and thistles, he's not just making a rather random statement about the countryside.

He's putting it into this context of the way God gives advantages to his people and then looks for fruit.

And he doesn't want to see this curse of fruitlessness. So here's land that is cultivated and given many advantages.

[52:13] But he says, how on earth does it produce thorns and thistles? You know, what's going on if land that has been given rain and sun and cultivation and care, many, many advantages, many, many blessings and produces thorns and thistles?

And you might say, that's just perverse, isn't it? How could that happen? How ungrateful? How perverse? How deeply, deeply wrong?

Something has gone deeply wrong when that danger becomes the reality. So what was the danger?

The danger is of receiving blessings, advantages and actually not responding to them. Having hard hearts. Letting God's blessings run off us like water off a duck's back.

And not taking things to heart. And not changing. And not being grateful. And not honouring God. And turning into briars and thistles.

[53:25] How ungrateful and how perverse. Don't do it. Well, that was a quick run through these issues here in chapter 6.

We're going to come back to them. But let's conclude in this way. The mark of the elect, because God does have his elect, but the mark of the elect is that they believe the promises and heed the warnings.

Let him who stands take heed lest he fall. That's something for all of us, isn't it? If we feel we're standing, just beware.

Don't stand on our laurels, as it were. But each day, take heed lest we fall. No matter where you started, that doesn't guarantee anything.

It's taking heed lest we fall today. You might have started very well. Might have started in exactly the right place. But let's be honest, that was some time ago.

[54:29] Might just have been a year ago. But it was in the past. You can't rest on that. It has to be how we're living today. Starting well does not give you safe permission to explore the cliff edge.

I'll just repeat that. Starting in the right place does not give you safe permission to explore the cliff edge. And number two.

Let him who stands take heed lest he fall. Bear in mind where you might end up. What seems like a little innocent exploration of the cliff edge to begin with will end up in a severe drop.

And it doesn't bear thinking about what's at the bottom of that cliff. Denying Jesus. Trampling on him. Saying he's wrong and rubbish.

Nobody wants to get to that point, surely. And thirdly, the danger here. The danger of having advantages like rain and blessing.

[55:37] The advantages don't compensate for absence of fruit. We have to produce genuine fruit. What sort of fruit is this?

Well, it's a subject in itself. But whatever fruit that you get from looking at Jesus. From fixing our eyes on Jesus. It seems to me that if we fix our eyes on Jesus, we'll actually become like the person that we're looking at.

Say dogs become like their owners, don't they? Well, whether that's true or not. If we belong to Jesus, let's become like him. And not just on the outside.

On the inside. And not just partially, but thoroughly. Fruit of courageously standing for Jesus. Holding fast to the confession of our faith.

Not being ashamed of him. Fruit. Well, the sort of fruit that comes from fixing our eyes on the world to come. Looking ahead beyond this life. That's got to produce some change in us, hasn't it?

[56:41] It's got to make some sort of difference. So let's produce the fruit that comes from looking to Jesus, taking a courageous stand for Jesus, and having our eyes fixed on the world to come.

Fruit like not hardening our hearts. Not developing a hard heart. Well, the mark of the elect is that they believe the promises and heed the warnings.

And I've said this about can genuine Christians fall away? Well, genuine Christians don't fall away and can't fall away. But when it comes to actual real life, there is no neat theoretical answer.

The theology doesn't make up for how we live. And the only answer in real life is stay on the path. Don't go near the edge. That's the nearest we get to this conundrum. It just says, you, stay on the path. Don't go near the edge.

[57:47] Or put it another way. Let him who stands take heed lest he fall. And that's for all of us. And that's for today. It's a good lesson for us to take to heart right now.

And let's right now pray a prayer together. Lord, we're in this wilderness situation. We've got a path to tread.

And I guess that each of us is aware for each of us individually there are byways and risks and diversions that would take us close to the cliff edge.

And for each of us, please deliver us from this. We can't survive on this path without the help that comes from heaven, from the great high priest.

So help each of us to draw from him the help that we need each day so that we will march to Zion and arrive safely. Looking to the promises and putting our trust in you.

[58:48] And we pray in the name of the great shepherd. Amen. We're going to close with a song that meant a lot to somebody that I'm sure we can all identify as we sit at home.

And this was recorded specially for him. But he wasn't here long enough to listen to it. He's hearing better music now. But maybe we on earth can join in with this song and benefit from it and join in with sweet memories.

It's a song of Christian testimony and resolute certainty. Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. It's Christ-centered and it looks forward as well.

Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine. It looks forward to the promised rest at the end of the desert.

So let's sing this before we close.

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine.

[60:19] Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine. Heir of salvation, purchase of God.

Born of God. Born of His Spirit. Washed in His blood. This is my story.

This is my song. Praising my Savior all the day long.

This is my story. This is my song. Praising my Savior all the day long.

Perfect submission. Perfect delight. Visions of rapture burst on my sight.

[61:25] Angels descending. Bring from above. Echoes of mercy. Echoes of mercy.

Wishes of love. This is my story. This is my song. This is my story. This is my song. Praising my Savior all the day long.

This is my story. This is my song. This is my story. This is my song. Praising my Savior all the day long. Praising my Savior all the day long.

Perfect submission. All is at rest. All is at rest. I in my Savior am happy and blessed.

Watched. Watched. Watched. Watched. Watched. Watched. Watched. Watched. Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

[62:37] This is my story, this is my song. Praising my Savior all the day long.

This is my story, this is my song. Praising my Savior all the day long.

And having sung, we'll close with a prayer. And when this is finished, we have the opportunity to listen or sing along with that song that we learnt last week.

Afflicted Saint to Christ draw near, one of the Sovereign Grace songs. And we'll play out with that, but just now let's pray. May the God of peace, who, through the blood of the eternal covenant, brought back from the dead, our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will.

And may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

[63:59] Amen. It's goodbye from me just now, and see you soon. But as we sing out with Afflicted Saint to Christ draw near, I'll say bye-bye, bye-bye just now. Bye.

Afflicted Saint to Christ draw near, your Saviour's gracious promise dear.

This faithful word you can believe
That as your days your strength shall be
Your faith is weak, your foes are strong
And if the conflict should be long
The Lord will make the tent a flea
That as your days your strength shall be
So sing with joy, afflicted one
The battle's fierce but the victory's won
God shall supply all that you need
Yes as your days your strength shall be
Should persecution rage and flame
Still trust in your Redeemer's name
In fiery trials you shall see
That as your days your strength shall be
So sing with joy, afflicted one
The battle's fierce but the victory's won
God shall supply all that you need
Yet as your days your strength shall be
When called to bear your weighty cross
Or sore affliction, pain or loss
Or deep distress or poverty
Still as your days your strength shall be
Still as your days your strength shall be
So sing with joy, afflicted one
The battle's fierce but the victory's won
But the victory's won

[67:40] God shall supply all that you need
Yes as your days your strength shall be
To bear your heart and sustain
To bear your heart and sustain