

Hebrews 12:1-14

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: 14 August 2022

Preacher: Joel Grigg

[0:00] Father, we pray, may only your word be spoken and only your word heard.

! We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. You know, my brothers and sisters, it's wonderful to be able to be coming and worship with you all.

And first, on a personal note, if I could just give it, that some of you know that a month or so ago, when I was in the hospital for a week, and I really do appreciate your prayers for that time.

You know, believe it or not, a hospital can be one of the loneliest places. It really can. So I really appreciate knowing that prayers are being offered on my behalf.

And you know, because as Christians, you know, we're never supposed to be sad, are we? You ever notice that? You know, it was about 10, 12 years ago.

[1:17] I was at a meeting with some different clergy. And during it, as we're walking over to the chapel, and somebody came up to me and they said, Hey, how are you doing, Father Joel? How are you doing?

And at that moment, I realized I have a choice right now. And so I looked at him and I said, I'm doing lousy. I really am. And so he looked at me and he said, You know, that's refreshingly honest. Refreshingly honest. Because, you know, we think about it. As Christians, the world expects us to walk around smiling.

The world expects us to, everything is perfect, fine, wonderful. Nothing ever bad happens to a Christian, does it? So, of course, no, we're always supposed to be happy.

We're always supposed to be in a good spirit. But yet, so often, and because of that, we hide. We try and set up the shield around us and we go into our happy place.

[2:31] We like to go into a happy place, even though it may not be a happy place. Just a place that we can, it's kind of like, get smart. The cone of silence.

You know, we do that. We have our own personal, spiritual cone of silence. And we all go in and say, How are you? You know, it comes down. And we say, Fine.

Wonderful. Happy. It is absolutely great. Now, you know, it's hard to believe it's been, what, 12? More than that now.

A number of years ago, it was in 1993, that Jim Valvano spoke some words that were some of the most encouraging words in a speech that anybody could ever hear.

You see, he was receiving the Arthur Ashe Courage Award at the ESPYs. Some of you may have seen it. He's standing up there. Here's a man who is in the final struggles with cancer.

[3:36] And he stands up and here's a man who, everybody remembers one of the, from, was it 1983? Him running full blast out on the court, the basketball court, when North Carolina State won the championship.

Full of energy. Great. And moments before, he's being helped up stairs by one of the most encouraging and energetic commentators ever in college basketball, Dick Vitale.

Taking him slowly up these stairs. So now Jim Valvano looks out to the people and he says, I'm going to talk longer than anybody else.

Because I don't care. I don't know how much time I have now, but I hope I'm going to say something to help you. Now, most of us, if we sat here, if we watched that, most of us wouldn't know precisely what he did or what he said then.

Yes, he announced the Jimmy V Foundation for Cancer Research then. But we do remember a few closing words. Because here's a man who was struggling.

[4:47] He was struggling. So what does he say? Don't give up. Don't ever give up. You know, those are words that every person needs to remember when they're going through a tough time.

Don't give up. Don't ever give up. But you know, as Christians, what do we do? Again, we go into our cone of silence when we don't want the world to see that things are difficult for us.

All we do is we put on this facade and take on that motto. I'm not giving up. Even though I'm emotionally distraught.

But I'm going to put on my happy face. And I'll ask this question to you rhetorically. How many clergy do you think today are in a pulpit, preaching God's Word, externally sharing, sharing the gospel, the greatest news that anybody could see.

But on the inside, they're being torn up. In the inside, they're hurting. Whatever the cause is. And it's not just clergy.

[6:08] It's all of us. When you woke up this morning, what were you thinking? Were you thinking when you got up and you said, Good morning, Lord. Or, good Lord, morning.

It's morning. You know, it was Archbishop Justin Batty from the South Sudan who wrote in the Global South Fellowship comment about the Lambeth Conference that just concluded.

He wrote, he said, The world is suffering in so many ways right across the globe. Many human needs focused on this conference, meaning Lambeth, raising from climate change to human dignity.

Sustainable development. We all struggle. But have you noticed in nice bishopese, what did he say?

There are human needs. Human dignity. But so often our Christian walk, do we absolutely name those things?

[7:26] Not really. Because we struggle. We struggle it now because we really always have to be positive. The world wants us to be positive. You know, in many respects, the world needs us to be positive.

Why do I say that? Think about Matthew chapter 5 in the Sermon on the Mount. What does Jesus say? You are the salt of the earth.

You are the salt of the earth. And if the salt has lost its saltiness, what good is it? What good is it? But yeah, I read one translation on that.

You could say, because salt is kind of just salt. We all think about it. Would you please pass the salt and pepper? You know, it's nothing. Salt is nothing to us. Except if you're in the wintertime up in this area.

You want to put it down in the ice. Right? But a good translation for us today of that might be, you are the red hot chili pepper of the earth.

[8:30] You are the red hot chili pepper because the world needs spiced up. That's kind of the purpose of the church today. We are called to spice things up.

But we are called to spread the good news of Jesus. But you know, we can't do that if we're putting this facade, if we're putting ourselves in the spiritual cone of silence.

We need to be honest with each other. We need to be honest with our Lord in the struggles. We need to look into his word and to ask ourselves during these times when it's difficult, when we're looking, when we're trying to spread the gospel.

But we know we're hurting. Where do we turn? Do we turn to another fellow Christian? Because you're most likely. If somebody came up to you and said, you know, listen, I'm really struggling today.

What do you say? I don't know. Sometimes, oh, don't worry. Nothing. You're not struggling. You'll be on your own.

[9:47] You know, sometimes we want to act like the, like the old men sitting in the local diner. Who sit there, talk about the world's problems and solve all the world's problems.

Just sitting there at the local diner. You know, sometimes we like to be that. We have a choice. We can go into words, God's word, and we can look into God's word and how to take courage and how to face the difficulties.

Or we can be like the little old men sitting at the diner, eating breakfast. Solving the world's problems. Inflation. Mass shootings.

Family problems. Even though there's nothing that we can do sitting at the local diner, we can make ourselves feel good. Can't we?

No, we can't. Or how else do we try and encourage ourselves? We really have limited choices when we try and figure out how to encourage ourselves.

[10:50] Some of us, we turn to music. We turn to pop music. We'll turn to, like the theme from Rocky. Okay, if you saw when it came out in the movies, it was a fantastic, energizing opening.

Few movies can do this today. because right across the screen in huge top to bottom letters came the letters ROCKY with that trumpet fanfare behind it and you don't who can forget Sylvester Stallone standing up that's the way that music makes us feel we can conquer anything about it anything or if ROCKY doesn't help us maybe we should turn to ROCKY 3 for the rock version Eye of the Tiger Eye of the Tiger you know with that beat the bass driving us we can get into our heads I can do anything now right or if you're a track and field star you might turn to Evangelus in Chariots of Fire and then you'll walk down the street like the runners on the beach pitching yourself on the beach but you know we try these things and we think we're going to do better excuse me we think we're going to do better but yet as brothers and sisters in Christ as we look into God's word and then eventually we're hit with that scripture which calls us all in 1st Peter humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God so that the proper time he may exalt you casting all your anxiety on him because he cares for you how in the world do we cast our cares on our Lord he knows what we're going through he knows our struggles how do we do that how do we do that in today's world where there's so many so many things that are coming up to us might I suggest here today just for a few moments that we look into God's word into his scriptures that were really written to people who are going through very very very similar struggles that we have today we can turn to the book of Hebrews because there was a book that was written to Christians in the 1st century who were they were suffering there was a threat of persecution there was a threat of martyrdom they could have been arrested as they worshipped now last time I checked we may complain a bit last time I checked the government was not about to break in the doors and try and arrest us but you know this is a church this is a time and a congregation that the book of Hebrews was written to that said remember remember your faith as the book starts in the sundry various and sundry times throughout history

I'll paraphrase it God has spoken God has spoken and in perfect way he has spoken through his son Jesus Christ our Lord and verses or excuse me chapters 1 through 10 the author explains why Jesus is the perfect sacrifice for our sins how we can place everything on him why Jesus is that perfect sacrifice and why our sins are forgiven period once for all in Jesus they're saying just like Jim Valvano on that night in 1993 don't give up don't give up don't give up we have the perfect word the sure word and just to kind of put a little cherry on top of this sermon what's he do he says what we call today faith's hall of fame chapter 11 lists by name many many many many many saints who struggled who struggled in their faith from Abraham

Isaac Jacob all the way down even some we don't read about much Gephthah and the light and Deborah but you know they all struggled they all needed to get out of their self enclosed spiritual cone of silence and live for God and hence we come to chapter 12 in our epistle today when we hear God's word giving his people encouragement in tough times that's what God's word in Hebrews chapter 12 tells us today keep going keep going keep going because you know Christian walk today might seem difficult might seem futile but you know deep down we may have this woe is me aspect in our lives but as we remember and we read through Hebrews when we think about the commands that the Lord gives us in verse 1 and beyond what does he say he says here's my recipe for encouragement for the church when you are feeling down when you're feeling struggles when you doubt yourself remember these things because if you look right at the beginning of chapter 12 since therefore we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses that's faith hall of fame that he just finished writing about let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us now many of us if we're if we're honest we would say really but you have no idea what I'm going through you don't know what my boss just told me yesterday you don't know the problems that I just found out with my teenage son or daughter you don't know these things do we we just want to cast this aside even though this letter was written to people who are going through the same type of thing we place ourselves in a special place not in our own cone of silence but we put ourselves in our troubles are on a special pedestal that nobody has ever ever experienced before right yeah know what is the author saying here what's the first thing he gives us three things to do during these difficult times what's the first thing he says looking to

Jesus looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith the first thing we're called to do when we're feeling these down times when we're feeling troubled and depressed look to Jesus look to

Jesus look at him pick up the gospel and read the accounts of the struggles that he had trying to minister he knows what we're going through he knows the difficulties that we had or we do have he knows what it's like to have the most closest friends here on earth to run away when he needed them the most he knows what it's like to have his creation spit in his face

[19 : 58] I don't think you've ever had your son or daughter spit in your face literally have you he knows what it's like he even went into the temple and tried to clean it out and he said no I'll paraphrase he said this place isn't big enough for the two of us but yet did Israel listen no God sent the prophets to Israel numerous times warning them turn to me did they listen no and yet we think our problems are special my brothers and sisters take a moment and look at Jesus the cross of Christ for it is the cross of Christ which gives us our ministry the cross of Christ is that defining moment event which we can remember in our difficult times

Jesus has been there and he is still with us the first thing we're called to do in the word is very simple remember the cross of Christ remember the cross of Christ but the verse doesn't end just there from the cross of Christ God calls us to remember the calling of Christ because the verse says who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God he put up with people spitting on him whipping it's one thing I do like about Mel Gibson's movie the passion of the Christ a lot of people didn't like it but the best thing about that is it didn't hold back it showed the whipping the scourging the anger the sin that Jesus took upon himself from his creation and he endured it he endured the cross despising this shame and is seated at the right hand of God the first thing we're called to do is remember the cross of Christ and there is God's calling to us remember

Christ's calling for he is the founder and perfecter of our faith now you think but Jesus knew what was going to happen he always had the eternal focus on his ministry on his calling think back into John chapter 2 when Mary went to him and said hey they brought out a wine what did Jesus tell her woman my hour has not yet come he knew that his ministry still needed to take place on the cross and there was still ministry after it we see clearly that the cross sets out the core of Jesus his ministry and yet the cross continues his call we can look to the cross the shame and the difficulties but we know that Jesus is calling

Jesus is calling his ministry continues we live out the redemption by living out our calling as well because earlier in Hebrews chapter 7 what does they say consequently he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him since he has always lives to make intercession for us you know when we're going through those difficult times we say no woe is me you know we like to sing that song nobody knows the trouble I've seen yeah they do and Jesus is there because he knows he's making intercession for us as the apostle John wrote my little children I'm writing to you so that you may not sin but if anyone does sin we have an advocate with the father Jesus Christ the righteous and why is this important why is this important because the world around us needs us to be that red hot chili pepper to season the world to bring and take the gospel to those around us what is your calling what is

God calling you what is he calling you today that's a good question when those tough times come our woe is me we see the clouds and we tend to let this shadow cast over us we see the man we pray to the Holy Spirit give me give me give me guidance give me guidance please so what do we do Holy Spirit gives us a map for our ministry but because we still have this doubt we start reading that map upside down you know it's so difficult see the cross enabled Christ's calling and continues to be there for us by the way did anybody pay attention to the words of our song we sang for a gradual anybody pay attention to them before the throne of

[26 : 16] God above I have a strong imperfect plea a great high priest whose name is love whoever lives and pleads for me my name is graven on his hands my name is written in his heart I know that while in heaven he stands no tongue can bid me hence depart that's Jesus calling brothers and sisters the first thing God calls us to remember when we're going through these difficult times first remember the cross then remember the calling remember Jesus' calling and remember your calling that he has given you because that is the calling for which we fulfill we fulfill what God has given us so we have the cross we have the calling of Jesus and last but not least we have the character of Jesus we're called to remember in verse 3 of chapter 12 consider him who endured the sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or faint hearted in your struggle consider him who endured such hostility of sinners against himself so that you don't grow weary so we remember the cross we remember his calling and we remember his character we

remember the character of Christ because this is who he is quite often we just kind of look over but right at the end of Luke chapter 2 everybody knows the beginning of Luke chapter 2 we love the beginning of Luke chapter one of the days of

Caesar Augustus you know the whole nativity narrative but at the end of chapter 2 Luke gives us regarding to Jesus and the child grew and became strong filled with wisdom and the favor of God was upon him Christ's character was something to develop from the beginning throughout his entire life his character came out in his ministry he had intimacy with his father continuously how often do we read in the gospel after there was a great healing service what's the first thing Jesus do after these big healing services he got away didn't he he went away by himself to pray alone what do we do to recharge our batteries because it takes a lot of energy there if we look then in John chapter 6 says that

Jesus after feeding the 5,000 he didn't walk around like doing the rocky dance you know that no he immediately crossed the sea of Tiberias and even though the crowd followed him he took his disciples with him and he taught them now scripture doesn't record specifics of what he said at that time but you know I'm sure one thing is this you need to be ready because your character is going to be threatened your character needs to be like mine and your character needs to be firmly rooted as you minister for God they needed to have their time with the Lord they needed to have their character develop they needed to have their eyes focused on God the Holy Spirit as they ministered Jack Welch who was the former CEO of GE is famous to say that the day that you face a problem it's too late to make a decision on how what your character will be like as you face that problem it's too late my brothers and sisters the world needs us it doesn't mean that we have to be all Pollyanna all the time but if we are to be that red hot chili pepper to spread God's word we need to decide today what our character is going to be like on that day when we are persecuted for his name I'm not going to go into details but I know at times in my life I've thought about as a parent saying how would I react if this happened and you know one day that did happen and I was ready my brothers and sisters

God is calling us to be his ministers and we can't wait for someday to come around and Jesus has told us what we need to do during those difficult times during those times when we're cast with doubt we're struggling we focus on the cross we focus on Jesus call knowing that he is in the heavens praying for us and we focus on our character what is Jesus' character and that is the character we're called to emulate his love his joy peace patience kindness goodness gentleness faithfulness and self control those are the characters we're called to show the world and we can't wait for that day when we'll decide and we have to decide today how we will respond how will we respond no I know things are perfect no they're not today is a day of decision today as Joshua said choose you this day whom you will serve we can serve ourself and go into our own pity party or we can choose as

[33:17] Hebrews tells us choose choose choose this day to remember Christ the cross of Christ to remember his calling and remember his character because on these three things God has instilled in us and empowered us to build our foundation for our Christian walk good times and bad times no matter what happens just like that house built on a rock when the wind blows it'll stand firm it will stand firm what's that foundation made of real simple the cross Christ calling and his character let's build our house on those amen