

Don't Shrink Back

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[0:00] But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. So, after our reading appointed from Hebrews for this morning, which I happen to be preaching on, our deacon leans over to me and whispers, good luck with this one.

It hits with all the force of a sledgehammer, and I have to be honest with you, there are passages in Scripture that are hard to preach on. It's one thing to preach about the passages that make you feel good.

It's one thing to preach about the passages that encourage. That comes easily. But the Bible does not just contain passages that make you feel good, does it? The Bible doesn't just contain passages that encourage.

No, the Bible talks about things that are hard to hear. For example, the Bible talks about God's judgment. The Bible talks about hell.

[1:26] The Bible gives solemn warnings and talks seriously about the consequences of sin. And here's the thing. It doesn't matter if talking or thinking about God's judgment makes me feel good.

Here's what matters. Is it true? And if it's true, I have to preach about it if I'm going to preach the whole counsel of God. And it might seem that talking about God's judgment isn't compassionate. But Jesus was the most compassionate person who ever lived. And he talked clearly about God's judgment. And none of us or anyone else is more compassionate than Jesus.

I've heard it said rightly that Jesus talked about hell because he does not want us to go there. And if I am going to be his minister, I need to talk about God's judgment because I don't want anyone to go there either.

It's important to keep in mind as we begin in Hebrews chapter 10 verse 31 with this. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

[2:36] First, though, I want us to get a little bit of context. Immediately before our text appointed for this morning, we read solemn warnings to those who profess faith in Christ.

Warnings against abandoning their profession of faith and falling into open rebellion against God. And the message basically is this. If you think that it was bad to violate the law of Moses and to bear the penalty for that, think about what it means for fame and dishonor the blood of Jesus Christ, God's only son.

That means if we do that, we will face God's judgment and we will be condemned rightly. And that is a scary thing.

I, for one, have known people who used to profess faith in Christ who no longer do. How about you? How about you? This is why we need to be warned.

We do need to hear that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But thank the Lord our text doesn't just end with that.

[3:58] The author is confident we'll see that his hearers are not going to fall away from their confession of faith in Jesus Christ. And what the text has to say about this is relevant to us as well.

So let's dig into our text, moving into verse 32. Look there with me in your Bibles, please. Where we read, Now, we'll find it is certainly is a fearful thing to fall into God's judgment.

But what we'll see as we go on is that our text is saying that those who are hearing this, the recipients of this message, are not the sort who are going to do that.

And why does this line of thought start here? Well, because these believers are people who have already demonstrated in their lives that their faith in Jesus Christ is real.

That they trust Jesus no matter what comes. That Jesus is worth whatever affliction they might face. Whatever persecution they might face. No matter how bleak things might seem, they have demonstrated that they believe that Jesus is worth it.

[5:31] And some of us know people who have faced true persecution for the cause of Christ. Just a few days ago, I got an email from our friend Bishop Marcus Dogo in Nigeria. Trust that a number of you remember him.

I hear from him fairly often, get updates about what he is up to. And he is continuing to move forward with the work of the gospel in Nigeria.

Even though Christians in Nigeria are being killed because they are Christians, because they profess Jesus Christ. Even though the persecution and the threat of death is very real for Christians in Nigeria.

But they keep lifting up the name of Jesus Christ because they believe that the gospel is greater and is more important and is more valuable than life itself.

And that Jesus is worth dying for. Now for us, we might be saying right now, okay, so the first century Christians were persecuted.

[6:34] They were put into prison. Some were killed. And that kind of thing is happening today in other parts of the world. But what does this portion of our passage have to do with me? I've never been put in prison.

I've never been threatened with death for my faith in Jesus, after all. First of all, I would simply say that we don't have to be threatened with death to live in a way that proclaims to the world that Jesus is more important than anything else.

And it's the greatest treasure we could ever find. But beyond that, Jesus said that as the world hated him, the world will hate his disciples.

Now we might not get tossed into prison. We might not get chased from our homes. But if you are open about your Christian faith, you are going to take some heat. Some people will insult you for it. Some people will ridicule you and hate you for it. In fact, I saw that precise thing happen to a member of our congregation recently who commendably refused to back down from her allegiance to God and his word.

[7:46] Now if you hold on to your faith in Jesus Christ in the face of ridicule, or even holding on to your faith in Jesus Christ in the face of losing everything that you have, perhaps even your life, what does that say?

What is the message that sends to the world? It says this, I believe that it's worth it. So our text reads, For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

I'm reminded of what the missionary and martyr Jim Elliot once said. He said, He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.

Ever heard the phrase, You can't take it with you? Well, it's true. It's very true. Up to and including our lives in this world. We're all going to die.

We're not taking anything with us when we do. Can't keep it. But what can we keep forever?

[9:11] We can keep Jesus forever. We can keep forever the joy of knowing him and glorifying him forever. We can keep victory over death. We can keep the promise of eternal life that is found in Jesus and in him alone.

And that means that even if someone does their worst to us, they can't take our eternal joy away.

And if that's the case, what follows is clear. Don't give up. No matter what opposition arises, do not give up. No matter what temptation arises, do not give up.

No matter how hard the road may seem, do not give up. Because what is waiting for us is so wonderful that it is beyond all that we can imagine.

Our text tells us in verses 35 and 36, Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised.

[10:20] Our text goes on then to cite the prophet Habakkuk, Habakkuk in verses 37 and 38, where we read, Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay, but my righteous one shall live by faith.

And if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. Now looking at those verses, who do you think the coming one is, who will not delay?

Jesus. Yes. The coming one is, of course, Jesus. Now we read recently, back in Hebrews 9, this, just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Jesus is coming again to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. To give us new bodies that will never die, and to live with us forever, and even if we have to wait a little while for that, how does that compare to eternity?

Isn't that worth waiting for? But Jesus said he would be back for us. Don't you believe him? That is motivation to keep moving forward.

[11:53] In faith in Christ, that is motivation not to turn back. That is motivation not to shrink from our confession of the gospel, isn't it? Our passage for this morning ends with this assurance.

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. Now how can we be sure that we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed?

That's a rather important question, isn't it? As our passage tells us, we will know that we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed because we have faith.

As our text tells us, the righteous one will live by faith. Those who will not turn back and be destroyed are those who have true, living, saving faith.

And that is faith in what? Faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in his death and resurrection. Faith in his power and his faithfulness to save everyone who comes to him from mercy and salvation.

[13:07] Faith that he is coming again to save those who are eagerly awaiting him. Now, interestingly enough, it's not those who have faith in their own ability to keep on the straight and narrow.

That's a recipe for failure. It's those who have faith that Jesus will hold on to them and bring them safely home. I do not want to minimize the fact that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of divine judgment.

But if we come confessing our sins and knowing our need of God's grace, it is not a fearful thing to fall into the loving arms of Jesus Christ. Now, what's the takeaway for us this morning?

I think it depends on where we are in our Christian walk. If you're a Christian believer who is walking by faith, holding fast to your faith in Christ, what you should take away this morning is this.

Keep going. No matter what comes, trust in Jesus to carry you through. You are not of those who shrink back. On the other hand, maybe this morning you are a Christian believer who is wavering in your walk with Jesus, or who has perhaps even fallen into willful disobedience to God's will.

[14:41] And if that is you this morning, I want to plead with you to repent now. You do not want to bring dishonor on the name of Jesus Christ or to profane His precious blood.

Do not wait. Repent and bring it to the foot of the cross, trusting that there is forgiveness and restoration for you in Christ. It is a fearful thing, again, as our text tells us, to fall into the hands of the living God, to face God's righteous anger for our sins.

But the good news is that we don't have to fall into the hands of the living God, not in that sense. to be judged and condemned.

The good news is that Jesus Christ, God's only Son, took God's judgment against sin on His own shoulders when He died on the cross for sinners.

So that sinful people like you and I could have forgiveness and eternal life through faith in His blood. We didn't do anything to earn it. We didn't do anything to earn it.

[16:02] We didn't do anything to deserve it. We simply receive it as a gift by faith. And it is a gift that is far greater than all else that we have and all else that we could ever hope to have.

That is worth living for. It's even worth losing everything else for. Because He who has promised is faithful. So keep going.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen