

Don't Shrink Back!

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[0 : 00] Well, as it happened, I chose my sunflower tie to put on today. It's not often I'm coordinated, but thank you to the person who did the flowers.

They're just lovely. Well, do you remember sermons? People sometimes say to me somewhat nervously, I find I don't remember sermons very much.

I say, neither do I, and I preach them. But actually the point of a sermon is not the remembering of hearing it.

The point of a sermon is the doing of it. But actually, most of the things you know, you don't actually remember when you learnt them. Good learning doesn't always increase our surface knowledge, but it should shape our actions.

We should pray that God will write his lessons deep in our hearts, so that even unconsciously we live to serve God and do the good works for God that he loves so much.

[1 : 21] If I were to coach you to play tennis, which would be extremely unlikely, but if I did, the point of my coaching would not be that when the ball was coming your way, you stopped and thought, now what did Peter say last Sunday?

The point of the coaching would be that your reaction would be immediate, instinctive, accurate and successful. And I think preaching is a bit like coaching.

It's not always learning new things, it's being coached in the things we know and ought to do. I heard, I think it was Ian Thorpe, one of those great swimmers with big feet, talking about his daily training exercises at three in the morning, whatever it was, and he said the point of daily training is not learning new skills, it's just keeping fit.

That is, he's not learning something new, he's just keeping his body fit. And that's, I think, one of the things that we do when we hear sermons. So, let's pray that God writes his words deep in our hearts and lives.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the words you've given us in Hebrews chapter 10. Please write these, your words, deep in our hearts and lives by your Spirit, so that you change us from the inside, so that we serve you, love you, know you, and do your will.

[2 : 44] For Jesus' sake, amen. Well, Hebrews 10, the section we heard read today, has a great encouragement and a great warning.

The encouragement is, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way open for us, through the curtain that is his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with a full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

The message of Hebrews is not that we know that we are loved or that we know that God forgives us at a distance. The message of Hebrews is that we should every day and in every way draw near to God through Jesus Christ, our great high priest, with full confidence in him and his shed blood.

It's a message that we can live bravely as Christians, confidently as Christians, with full assurance that we're known and loved by God because God welcomes us into his very presence by his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And yet with the great encouragement, the great call, the great invitation comes also the great warning, verse 26, if we deliberately keep on sinning after we've received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

[4 : 24] Well, what does this encouragement and this warning mean for us? This is a very attractive diagram, just to show you my artistic ability.

Whenever we read the Bible, we have to take the journey back to the world of the text, a distant world, a world of 2,000 years ago with this particular text, different people in a different situation. We have to learn what the text meant for them. Then we can think about what the text means for us today. We do this every time we read the Bible or every time we take part in a Bible study and every time we hear a sermon.

So we need to put aside the question, what does it mean for us? And ask first of all the question, what does it mean for them? What did it mean for them? What was this sinning deliberately? What was this shrinking back? What was the sin of verse 26? We deliberately keep on sinning after we receive the knowledge of the truth.

[5 : 29] No sacrifice for sin is left, but only judgment. Well, it must be a very serious sin, isn't it? Because if you commit this sin, the sacrifice of Christ doesn't work for you.

Verse 26. And if the sacrifice of Christ doesn't work for you, then the only place to go is to meet the raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

The sin, I think, is that of renouncing Christ. It's having been a believer and then saying, I am no longer a believer. I do not believe in God.

More importantly, I do not trust in Jesus Christ for my salvation. The sin is turning away from the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

And a church which turns away from the atoning sacrifice of Christ faces the judgment of God. As an individual who turns away from the atoning sacrifice of Christ has no future, no hope, no confidence other than that of meeting God, the judge.

[6 : 50] And in verses 28 and 29, the writer warns us, anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. That's what the law required in the Old Testament.

Verse 29. How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who's trampled the Son of God underfoot, treated as an unholy thing, the blood of the covenant that sanctified them and insulted the Spirit of grace?

people often assume that God is severe in the Old Testament, but lets us off in the New Testament. Well, these two verses say exactly the opposite.

They say, well, if you broke the law of Moses and you got into trouble in the Old Testament, how much more trouble will you be in when you trample the Son of God underfoot, that is, turn away from Christ, treat His blood as an unholy thing, the blood of the covenant that sanctified you, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

And the consequence of doing this, of turning away from Christ, is judgment.

[8 : 09] Verse 30. We know Him who said, is mine to avenge, I'll repay. And again, the Lord will judge His people. It is, the writer says, a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

When I'd been Vicar of St. Jude's, for 10 years, counted up 50 people who'd been members of St. Jude's and given up Christianity.

Often they'd come to St. Jude's as their kind of last church before they gave up Christianity. They'd come from another church, come to St. Jude's and then decide, really, they were not Christians.

I don't know what's happened to them since. Of course, I've lost track of them. I hope, in God's mercy, God has brought some of them back to faith. But what's the warning for you if you turn away from the blood of Christ?

If you trample the Son of God underfoot? If you treat the blood of the covenant as an unholy thing and insult the Spirit of grace? the warning is, you fall into the hands of the living God for judgment.

[9 : 33] Now, the writer is trying to encourage people who attempted to renounce Christ not to do so. That's the great aim of these words.

So he then reminds them of how they began as Christians. Remember the earlier days, after you'd received the light, when you endured a great conflict full of suffering.

That is, when they first became Christians, they met the opposition of the world and the persecution of the world head on. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution.

persecution. At other times, when others were being persecuted, you got up and stood side by side with them. What a brave thing to do. If your neighbor was being persecuted for being a Christian, I think I'd hide under the bed.

But they got out and went out the front and said, we're believers too. We believe in Jesus Christ. So they stood with those who were being persecuted. And then, if some were sent to prison, if some

were in prison for being Christians, you've suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property.

[10:40] What an amazing thing to say. Imagine if the persecutors come to your house and were taking out your fridge and you say, well, would you like the washing machine as well? You've taken my clothes.

Well, I'll take the blankets and the beds as well. Joyfully accepting the confiscation of their property. That's what they were doing for the sake of Christ, you see. And as the writer puts it, for they knew that they had a better and lasting possession.

Have my house. I have heaven. And how sad then to think that those people who began as Christians so confidently, so bravely, so publicly, were now being tempted to turn away from Christ. It's hard to imagine, isn't it, that people who began so well would fall so far? Why would they shrink back from being Christians?

Well, I think the answer is that most of the people had been Jews, and in the Roman Empire, Judaism was an accepted public religion. Indeed, the emperor was even contributing money for the restoration of the temple in Jerusalem.

[12:05] It was okay to be a Jew, but Christians were scum. Then when you've had a proud place in the empire as a Roman citizen, with an accepted religion, publicly supported by the state, by the emperor, you don't want to be rubbish.

And yet, that's the decision they'd made, and they began so well, so joyfully, accepting the confiscation of their property. Extraordinary words. Yet even from a great height, men and women and children can fall.

No wonder when the writer gives us in chapter 11 the great list of those who died by faith, who lived by faith, he ends the chapter with those who suffered because they lived by faith.

Others were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, even chains and imprisonment. No wonder the writer points us to Jesus Christ in chapter 12.

Therefore, since we're surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us show of everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

[13:31] For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. You say, Jesus suffered, so you must suffer as well as followers of Jesus Christ.

Or again in chapter 13, Christ also suffered outside the city to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace that he bore.

Sometimes new Christians read Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 26, if we deliberately keep on sinning after we've received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, they think, well if I've kept on sinning deliberately, then I'm cast out by God.

Well let me tell you, I've many times continued sinning deliberately. The question is, what is the sin that matters? And the sin that matters is turning away from Jesus Christ and his atoning death, saying, I don't need Jesus, I don't need his death on the cross.

That's to turn away from being a believer, isn't it? So turn away from the heart of Christianity. Don't, don't shrink back.

[14:57] Don't give up. I've been in England recently giving some talks at conferences and the message I heard again and again all around the country was that Christians are facing more persecution in England for being Christians and ministers are facing more persecution in England for being Christians as well.

one young man I talked to he said when he preached the lady church warden would pick up her kneeler and hold it in front of her face so she couldn't see him. Extraordinary thing for a polite lady to do.

She was so opposed to his message she couldn't bear to see him. What a petty persecution that is. How pathetic. But I think that in Australia you know it's a funny place Australians are tolerant of everything except Christianity it seems to me.

And so imagine if on the way into church this morning you were stopped and asked for your name and address for daring to be a Christian. If you were quick you'd give somebody else's name and address.

Peter Adam he lives in I live in North Carlton that's my name. Or you might decide perhaps today was not the day to come to church but you'd go and do some gardening instead.

[16:28] Now what if there was a on the door now and they come in and they say well you announce Christ or we shoot you. What would you do?

What would you do? People say to me well you know I'm really nervous about persecution. You know will I stand firm for Christ? Well God's grace to endure under persecution will only come when we need it.

We don't feel it ahead of time you see. The best key to standing firm in the future is to stand firm now. The more you benefit from and honour the blood of Christ in private by going to God in prayer through Christ the more likely it is that you'll be willing to bear the disgrace of Jesus in public. God doesn't give his strength before we need it. We have to learn now to trust that God in his mercy will endure ensure that though we feel weak in ourselves we'll act on that day of trial in the strength that he provides when we need it.

[17:55] my mother was converted a year after I was he was 56 and she turned from being a very meek and mild and respectable lady to being a passionate evangelist.

Her two sisters and her mother criticised her and said you must be weak in the head. My mother said better than being hard in the heart and continued her ministry of evangelism.

Well here's the account of George Whitefield the great evangelist.

He went at the age of 19 to university he was a poor man so he was earning his way through college by serving other students. He wrote in his journal these words when religion began to take root in my heart and I was fully convinced my soul must totally be renewed I was visited with outward and inward trials.

I incurred the displeasure of the master of the college who threatened to expel me if I ever visited the poor again. I said if it displeased him I would not. I immediately repented and visited the poor on the next opportunity.

[19:13] Good on him. My relations counted my life madness. I daily underwent some contempt at college. Some have thrown dirt at me. Two friends forsook me. And here's his comment on what had happened on that persecution.

He said these though little were useful trials they endued me to contempt lessened self-love and taught me to die daily.

What a remarkable response to mild persecution to thank God for it and for the lessons learned. Friends if we begin to do that we might one day match this prayer request from the church in the Middle East. Their message goes like this.

This is the persecuted church in the Middle East. Please don't pray for us. please pray with us. If you pray for us you'll pray for the wrong things.

[20:17] You'll pray for safety. But if you pray with us you'll ask God to bring millions to faith in Christ. And you'll pray that when the inevitable backlash comes because of our witness we'll be faithful even if it costs us our lives.

Well it's right to care for persecuted Christians in the Middle East. A good thing to do. But please remember that persecution is not the worst thing. The worst thing is to keep quiet.

To keep our religion private. So we don't offend anybody. The negative is don't shrink back.

The positive is to enter the presence of God by the blood of Jesus. Jesus. The writer continues verse 36 you need to persevere so that when you've done the will of God you'll receive what is promised for in just little while he who's coming will come and will not delay and but my righteous one will live by faith and I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.

but we the writer says I love this we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed but to those who have faith and are saved.

[21:44] Don't shrink back from entering the presence of God by the blood of Jesus. For if you do shrink back from entering the presence of God by the blood of Jesus you'll also shrink back from bearing the disgrace of Jesus.

The positive is enter the presence of God by the blood of Jesus and publicly bear the disgrace of Jesus.

You see we won't do in public what we don't do in private. Our public actions reveal our private reality. Who you are in private will eventually be who you are in public when the time of testing comes.

The more you benefit from and honour the blood of Christ in private and in public the more likely it is that you'll bear the disgrace of Jesus in public.

Don't shrink back from entering the presence of God by the blood of Jesus. If so you'll shrink back from bearing the disgrace of Jesus. Persecution for the sake of Jesus. Positively, make sure every day you enter the presence of God by the blood of Jesus and then you'll be willing to bear the disgrace of Jesus when the time of testing comes.

[23 : 15] We do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed but to those who have faith and are saved. Let us pray.

Dear Heavenly Father, please cleanse our hearts from rebellion or apathy. Please draw us to yourself by the blood of Jesus, our great High Priest.

Lord, please help us to heed your words every day that we do not fall away from you. And please in your mercy ensure that we don't belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed but to those who have faith, enduring faith, and are saved.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.