

Pilgrim Family: Walking with God in the Community of Faith

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: 30 August 2015

Preacher: The Venerable Daniel Gifford

[0 : 00] Father, we thank you that we're gathered together as your family, and we thank you for the gift of your word. We ask that you will teach us as a family so that we are strengthened, that we stir one another up for love and good works, that we know the glory of the grace that you give to us as we gather together in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Well, this is the fifth in a series that we're doing on this journey that I was talking about with the children, and it's based on Pilgrim's Progress. And I don't know if any of you have read Pilgrim's Progress before, but of course, Pilgrim's Progress is talking about the Christian life as a journey, as a journey to heaven.

And it sounds a bit like a travel brochure, doesn't it? Journey to heaven. But this is not like a cruise ship. It's not like going on a cruise together where everything is perfect and wonderful.

Actually, I got an email this morning from good friends that are on a cruise ship right now in the Caribbean, and they're dealing with Tropical Storm Erica. So it's actually somewhat dangerous on their journey.

But Catherine and I gave Nicholas a copy of a book of Pilgrim's Progress called Dangerous Journey. And it's kind of abridged into a children's form. This is what the Sunday School has been using.

[1 : 29] And it's a great book because it has wonderful illustrations. And very vividly, it shows that there are great temptations and there are challenges on this journey.

That's why they call it the Dangerous Journey. And it's not just the ups and downs in life, but it's really all of the spiritual kinds of temptations and dangers that you go through as you walk with Jesus on this road to heaven.

And I'd like you to turn to Hebrews 10 because Hebrews, that whole book, is about that journey. It's talking about, it's addressing the dangers, the spiritual dangers of letting go of the hope we have in Jesus.

Dealing with the temptation of not standing for the faith of the living Lord Jesus. And the temptation of not growing in the love of God that he has poured out on us in Jesus Christ.

And so he says in chapter 13 at the end of this incredible letter, keep on considering Jesus so that you do not grow weary or faint-hearted in this journey that you are on.

[2 : 41] And so this is the key to persevering, Hebrews is telling us. And so what the letter of Hebrews does is it calls us, it puts before us Jesus himself.

It calls us to consider him and his glory. To consider the grace that we have in Jesus. And the striking feature of grace in Hebrews, and in fact all of scriptures, is that it is a shared grace.

It is a grace that we experience as God's family. We don't experience it primarily alone. And so you look at verses 19 through 23, it's all about shared grace.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, notice it's plural all the way through, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us, through the curtain that is through his flesh.

And since we have a great priest over the house of God, that's the family of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

[3 : 59] So you can see that God pours his grace upon people together. And those words paint a picture of Jesus as our high priest, who leads a family, the house of God, of which you and I are a part.

And that's why the writer calls the people that he's writing to, brothers and sisters, over and over again. And notice that he brings us together as a group into the very presence of God.

This is what Jesus does for us. He brings us into the throne of God together. And that's why it says we are meant to draw near as a gathering of God's people together.

And then if you jump to the end of that passage, verse 25, our reading ends with shared grace as well. It describes the day drawing near. And that's the day when Jesus comes in all his glory and gathers all his people together.

So all of the Bible leads towards the day where God will dwell with his people and they will be with him together. So that's what Bunyan calls the celestial city.

[5 : 10] Now in between those shared graces, there is a call to action. Verses 22 through 25.

And the writer says, place yourself in that shared grace. Under God's grace together, place yourself in that situation. And I call those verses, those are called salad verses.

And that's because there's three forms of let us here. Let us. When you see the writer calling to put yourself in the place of grace with others. Look at verse 23.

Let us together draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. Verse 24. Let us together hold fast the confession of our hope.

Verse 25. Let us together consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. Well you see, this is saying that we can only be fully assured of our faith.

[6 : 11] We can only hold on to the hope that we have. We can only live out the love God has given us together. In the context of a gathering of Christians.

And that we in turn bless the world and the gatherings that we have with others. Because we have experienced that grace together. You know, one of the cunning strategies of Satan is to sap the vitality out of Christians.

By convincing us very subtly that we don't need one another. That we are self-sufficient. And that we do not need God and his grace.

And so what he does is he seeks to separate us from both the small and the large groups of the church family. And this certainly happened to the people the writer to Hebrews was writing to.

Because they were going through a time of terrible persecution. Where meeting with other Christians meant that you lost your job. They lost their homes.

[7 : 16] They actually lost their freedom as well. Some even lost their life. And so they thought to themselves. It was very easy to think this way. It would make life much better if I didn't meet with other Christians.

There seemed to be little advantage to publicly living out a Christian life. And so they took on a habit of not meeting with other Christians. Well Hebrews says, no.

Don't get into that habit. Do not neglect meeting together as some have become accustomed to. And I think there's a real challenge to us in our culture right now.

Of this move to separate ourselves from the Christian community. We live in an over-scheduled culture. Where we have many opportunities to be committed to very many different things.

It is a culture of consumerism as well. Where I go into situations to see what I can get out of them. And we're formed by the world in this way. And that's why every single one of us are tempted to neglect meeting with one another.

[8 : 23] Especially if we're in a family where there are some people who might actually annoy us. Like these children were telling us as well. Or things are messy. Things are not quite exactly the way we want it to be.

I don't know if you've seen the cartoon of a man who is driving to church with his wife. And the children are in the back seat. And the man turns to his wife and says, Honey, I just really don't feel like going to church today.

I don't. I've been really busy lately. I don't feel comfortable here. There are people that annoy me. I'm just not getting enough out of going to church. And his wife answers, But you have to, dear.

You're the minister. You're preaching this morning. All of us are tempted in this way. Now you can talk to Catherine. I actually haven't had that conversation recently.

But Hebrews is calling us to something radically different from this. Radically. It is life together. Where your purpose is to encourage one another.

[9 : 27] It's not... And encourage doesn't mean patting each other on the back and saying, Take courage. It is helping each other to put your life into context. The context of Jesus Christ.

Always considering Jesus Christ. Because this is what makes us persevere. Considering what is his agenda for our lives. What is he doing in our life?

What is the grace that he has given to us? We need others to help us with this. And that's why Hebrews says, It's primarily through our gatherings that we inspire.

And strengthen each other to love sacrificially as Jesus did. And to do good works that deeply bless the world around us.

It's primarily in our gatherings this happens. We need help to lead Jesus-centered lives in our joys and in our sufferings. We need help in living as ministers of Jesus in our work, In our place where we have our friends, And also in our family as well.

[10 : 32] We need help with this. And that is what the family of God does for each other. Even the members of the family who annoy us. We truly will not grow.

We will not grow in the grace of Jesus Christ If we are not present with one another. We need people praying for one another. Loving us.

And we need people to love as well. Especially if we are to do it sacrificially. Now I'm going to close in a minute. So children, I don't know how much you've got on here.

But I've got one minute until you get there. But I want to mention at the very end that Hebrew, Hebrew says there's an urgency about all of this. At the very end.

Notice that. Because the day of the Lord is drawing near. And that, there's an urgency because we need to help each other Make sure that we finish the journey well.

[11 : 27] But not only that. It is life together that will be the life of heaven. The life of heaven is shared grace. Our destination is a very large extended family In the presence of God forever.

And this life here now is a preparation for that life in heaven. I don't know if you've heard this. This is an old illustration I heard years and years ago Of the life of hell versus the life of heaven.

And it's a picture of hell Where people have a very, very beautiful banquet in front of them. And they're sitting around this table. And it's the most incredible food you can imagine.

The catch is all of them have a fork. And you can only hold the fork at the very end. And the fork is much longer than their arm. So it's close to, you know, four or five feet long.

And so they're all trying to eat this food. And they cannot get it to their mouths. And there's a lot of angry and grumbling. People are all hungry around this incredible feast. And all they're getting are little morsels that might dribble down the end As they're trying to somehow get this food into their mouths.

[12 : 44] But then there's the picture of heaven. Same banquet. Same beautiful food. Same forks that you can only hold the very end of. But the difference is that in heaven They are all feeding one another with these long forks.

And it is messy a bit. But it is a joyous time. And they are getting full benefit from that meal. And they are learning what it means to feed one another. And there is joy in the same circumstance.

Now this is what the life that we are living with now is all about. It is saying that we need one another To feed one another in the shared grace That God has given to us in Jesus Christ.

To help one another to consider Jesus. So that we can walk that journey. And not grow weary or lose heart. We do need one another.

This is how we are lights to the world. This is how we are able to stir one another up. For love and for good works. Thank God that our life full of adventure.

[13 : 48] Which is the life of good works and love. Will continue forever and ever in the celestial city. And we practice it now with one another.

Under his grace. Amen.