

Warning and Hope

Hebrews 5:11-6:12

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Well, good morning. Good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. My name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here. And if you're a guest or a visitor, welcome. We're glad that you're with us this morning. Glad that you would join us. And if we haven't had the opportunity to meet, I would love to meet you after the service. I usually hang out by those doors or out in the gathering area. So if you have a moment to stop by and say hello, I would love to greet you formally and welcome you because we are glad that you're here. And this morning, we're going to be looking at Hebrews chapter 5 and chapter 6. So kind of the middle to the end of chapter 5 and the beginning of chapter 6. So if you have a Bible, you can turn to Hebrews 5. If you don't have a Bible, there are Bibles in the chairs, and we also project the passage, well, on this screen today, and you can follow along there if you'd like.

But this passage that's before us this morning is easily one of the most difficult passages in all the New Testament and probably the most difficult passage in the book of Hebrews. And so when we were planning out the sermon series schedule, and I was making it, I was trying to figure out a way for my vacation to line up today. I'm just kidding. I wouldn't do that to Tobias. No, but this is a difficult passage. If you're familiar with Hebrews, you know that this is the one that kind of looms out there. And because it's difficult, it would be very easy to kind of make us want to try to make it feel more palatable, to flatten it out, to explain it away, or to simply ignore it. But we can't do that. That's not being faithful to the text. And what makes this passage difficult at the end of the day really isn't exegetical nuance or subtleties, but it's really the pastoral implications of this text, because this is the passage in Hebrews that deals with apostasy. Now, apostasy is the abandoning or renouncing of the faith. And so what are we supposed to do with that? Like, how are we supposed to understand those who have once professed faith and yet walked away? That's what this passage is taking up.

And so as we approach this passage this morning, I want us to feel the weight of the warning, and I also want us to experience the relief of the hope, because there is both in this passage. There's a warning that is heavy, but there's also a hope that is offered. So with that in mind, let's read Hebrews chapter 5, beginning in verse 11.

“ About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to

repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” (ESV)

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Lord, we ask that you would lead and guide us now. We ask, Father, that you would help us, help us to hear from your word, help us to see it clearly, help us to listen attentively, so that we would grow up in maturity, and that we would have hope. We pray all this in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, it was about eight and a half years ago that my family and I moved here from St. Louis. And shortly after we moved here, we decided that we wanted to experience some of the unique things that this area, that Roanoke has to offer. And so a few weeks after moving here, we decided we were going to go on our first family hike, right? Because if you live in this area, that's what you do, right? When I was applying for the job, when I was interviewing during the Q&A time with the congregation, someone, one of y'all actually asked, do I like to hike? And at the time it was like, well, we live in St. Louis. There's not mountains. It's pretty flat. I'm open to it. Why not? You know, that was my response. So we decided, let's go do this. And my kids were young at the time. They were younger. And so we decided to hike a smaller hike, a shorter hike. And so we drove to the Jefferson National Forest and we hiked Roaring Run Falls. Y'all know this hike, some of you, right? It's pretty short. It's not very long. It's not super taxing, right? Not a lot of elevation, but there's water, there's bridges, there's a pool, there's a waterfall. It's kind of nice. And I remember this hike particularly, not because it was our first hike, not because it was strenuous, because it wasn't strenuous, but because of what we experienced on the way back at the end of the hike.

You see, after we had seen the waterfall and the pool, we were walking back to the car and as we're walking along the path, there was a sign right there. And this caught our attention because on this particular hike, there aren't very many signs. There's not a lot of direction needed. But there was a sign right there and it grabbed our attention. And what it said was warning, copperheads nesting. Okay, so there they were, hidden under the leaves, in the bushes, somewhere where we couldn't see, just off the path, copperheads. Now, as soon as I saw this sign, right, my first instinct wasn't to grab a stick and, you know, like move the leaves around or, you know, call Cole over, like, hey, let's go underneath and see what we can find, right? That was not my first instinct. It was to get on the other side of the path, right? It's like, let's get far away from these copperheads because I've never seen one in the wild and I didn't want to that day, right? So let's get on the other side and let's move very quickly. And I was thankful for that warning, right? I was thankful for that sign. Because apart from it, we could have very easily stepped off the path and we could have been stepping

into unforeseen danger. And in fact, a few weeks after that hike, someone was bit by a copperhead on that very hike. And so I was thankful for it.

The Warning

I was thankful for that because without that sign warning us, we could have easily stepped into danger. And we need warnings, don't we? We need warnings. We need warnings like copperheads nesting, like road is flooded, the bridge is icy. We need them because without them, we can enter into danger. Well, that's true on our hikes, it's true on our city streets, but we also need warnings in our spiritual life. And out of concern for us, that's what the author of Hebrews is doing this morning. He's offering us a warning. And the warning comes in two parts. The first part of the warning deals with immaturity and the second one deals with apostasy.

A) Immaturity

So the immaturity portion is found in chapter five, verse 11 through six, three. And there the author begins by saying that there are some difficult things that we need to talk about. There are some hard things that we need to talk about, but y'all aren't ready for them yet. That's what he says. Now these difficult things, I think it's in reference to Melchizedek, which we're going to get to in chapter 7, right? He just spoke at them at the end of our passage last week. He's now going to come to him in chapter 7, but he says to his hearers, you're not ready. You're not ready to hear this. And why are you not ready to hear it yet? Because you're dull of hearing. You're needing to be reminded of the basics of our faith. You're still on milk and you're not growing. You're fixated on this elementary doctrine. That's what he calls it, right? And what are these elementary doctrines? Well, he says like forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the dead, washings. And when he says this elementary doctrine, he's not disparaging the gospel, right? He's not saying that you receive grace and forgiveness from God and that once you grow, once you mature, you kind of put that away. You don't need God's grace anymore. You don't need his forgiveness anymore. That's not what he's saying. No, what he's saying is that those who know the basics and the foundational aspects of our faith, we will seek to grow in them and we will experience the ramifications of those doctrines, right? The image he gives us is that of laying a foundation. We see it in verse one, right? The laying of a foundation.

He says, we don't lay a foundation and then keep laying a foundation, right? That's not how you build anything. You don't do the foundation and then another foundation, right? You don't keep doing that. You build the foundation and then from the foundation, you build the house, you build the structure. And he's saying the foundation, the gospel of grace, it's always there. It's what we stand upon. It's what we rest upon. And it's what the house is built upon. It's what we're built upon. He's saying that those who are maturing and growing in grace, we will show our maturing by becoming skilled in the word of righteousness and discerning good and evil.

Did you see that's what he said? At the end of chapter 5, we'll be able to distinguish good and evil. So, the implication of 5 verse 13 is that the immature aren't skilled and so that the mature would be skilled. So, what he's encouraging us to do is to grow in grace, to deepen our understanding, to learn our theology and doctrine. Not so we'd be these big-headed theological know-it-alls, okay? Like that's not the goal to just like fill our heads with as much theological jargon and doctrine and so that we would become puffed up and arrogant with our knowledge. But that what we learn and what we gain would actually express itself in

righteousness. That's what he's saying. That is the life of the mature believer. That what we learn, what we grow in, what we build upon would be expressed in the word of righteousness. And that we would be able to distinguish between good and evil.

So, he's warning us, he's warning us, don't remain immature, right? High schoolers, right? High schoolers don't repeat the ABC song every morning, right? A, B, C, right? You've kind of moved on beyond that, right? Every morning at homeroom, that's not what you're doing now because you're reading literature and calculus, right? And 15-year-olds aren't still nursing, right? That would be very strange, right? That'd be very strange and really uncomfortable, right? That'd be very bizarre. But we don't expect that because what we expect a 15-year-old to be doing is to be eating meat and solid food because that is the normal maturation process. And what the author of Hebrews is saying is that is true of y'all. Spiritually, that's true of us. That we're supposed to mature. We're supposed to build upon this foundation. So, that's the first warning about immaturity.

B) Apostasy

But the second warning he offers us is about apostasy. Now, remember, I already said apostasy is the abandoning or renouncing of the faith. And this is the difficult part of the passage, right? This is the part that we're going to struggle with. Because what does he say in verses 4 through 6 of chapter 6? "It is impossible in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift and have shared in the Holy Spirit and have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come, it is impossible that when they have fallen away to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding them up to contempt." Now, if you're like me, and I think you probably are, there are all sorts of theological and pastoral implications and questions running through your minds right now. And there should be. I mean, I feel them, and my hope is that we'll deal with them and help to answer them. And so, let's look at the theological impact of this, the theological implication.

Now, as I read this, maybe there's a theological phrase that's running through your mind that you've uttered before, that you believe. The phrase is, once saved, always saved, right? Y'all have said that, some of you. You've heard me say it. I've said it before, right? It's a theological way. It's a way of formulating our theological doctrine of perseverance of the saints, right? Once saved, always saved. Those who have been saved, who truly believe their salvation can't be lost. And we derive this from passages like John 10. In John 10, Jesus says, "I give them eternal life and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand", right? I give them life. That life is sure. No one will snatch them. Or think about the assurance of pardon we heard this morning from 1 Peter 1, right? What did we hear? That we have an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, kept in heaven for you. And so, we hear these passages like John 10 and 1 Peter 1, and then we hear Hebrews, and it sounds like Hebrews is saying that this inheritance is perishable. That for some, they can be snatched, right? I mean, it sounds that way, doesn't it?

But I want us to notice a few things about this Hebrew passage to help us understand it. The first is, did you notice he doesn't refer to these people who have fallen away? He doesn't speak of them as those who believed. He never uses that language. No, what he says is they've been enlightened, they've shared, and they've tasted. It's like a sommelier. Y'all know what a sommelier is, right? A professional wine taster.

Have y'all ever seen a sommelier do their work, right? They pour a little bit of wine in the glass, and they hold it up, and they spin it around, and they're trying to discern the viscosity. I think that's what they're doing, right? I'm not a sommelier. They're trying to figure out the viscosity of the wine, and they're sticking their nose as far into the glass as they can, and they're smelling it, and they're taking in the aroma, and they're looking at it, and they're talking about it, and they put it in their mouth, and they swish it around. They say things like, you know, the soil clearly was acidic that year, you know, and it's very oaky, and, you know, I smell these berries and all this, right? And it sounds like they're making it up. I'm sure they're not, but it sounds that way, right? And through all this process, right, they put the wine in the mouth, they swish it around, and then what do they do with it? They spit it out. They spit it out. They never ingest it. They taste the goodness. They can talk about the intricacies. They can appreciate the qualities. They can speak about the ingredients, but they never ingest it. They spit it out, and that's what Hebrews is describing.

That's what these people are doing. These are the people who come to church, and they sing a song, and they maybe read a theological book, and they comment on the goodness of Jesus, and they appreciate his teaching, and they taste his goodness, and then they spit it out. They're done with it, and they never take it in, and they never ingest it. These are people who never truly believed. It's like the two of the soils. Remember, there's four soils in Jesus's parable about the seed and the sower, right? The seed falls on four different kinds of soils, and two of the soils, it looks like there's deep roots. It starts to grow, but then what happens? Life and the worries of the world and the world itself start to choke it out, and it reveals that there was never any root in the first place, or it's like Susan in the *Chronicles of Narnia*.

If y'all are familiar with that series, at the very end, the last battle, the children, these kings and queens of Narnia who have now died, and they've entered into Aslan's land, right? Into heaven, into the new heavens and the new earth. They are there, but Susan isn't with them. She was a queen of Narnia. She had seen Aslan. She had fought alongside him. She had embraced him, and held him, and heard his voice, and seen all that he had done, but when the end came, we're told that she was no longer a friend of Narnia, and it was because she became too focused on the world. Lewis described her as one who had fallen in love with lipstick and nylon. You see, to her, Aslan, this Christ figure, was just a story for children, and so she moved along.

The Hope

So we see this in the parable that Jesus gives. We hear it in some of our stories like Narnia, but we actually know this personally, don't we? We've seen this in our own lives, and in the lives of people around us, because we've seen people baptized, and who have professed faith, and who have grown up in the church, but then they walk away, right? They're friends, parents, children, siblings. We've seen them do this, to taste of the goodness, only to spit it out. So what are we to make of that? Like, what are we to do with that? What are we to make of those situations? Because we read, and here's the pastoral difficulty, we read it's impossible for those who have fallen away to be restored. And so we think of our children, and of our friends, and of others. I mean, is this passage saying that every person who ever professed faith, and then walked away, is irredeemable? It's impossible for them to be—is that what the passage is telling us? Well, I actually think the text is inviting us to qualify that.

It's inviting a qualification. You see, if we look closely at verse 6, we're told that those who are not restored are those who are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm, and holding him up to contempt. So that word contempt, it's a Greek word that means public

shaming, or disgracing someone publicly. And the author of Hebrews says that these people are holding Jesus in contempt, they're crucifying him again. And so let's remind ourselves what Jesus's crucifixion was like, right? Jesus was crucified. He hung on the cross for our sins so that forgiveness would come. He took the wrath of God upon himself. And if that wasn't enough, do you remember there were people at the foot of the cross, and what were they doing? They were showing him contempt. They were mocking him and jeering at him. Do you remember they said, if you are the Son of God, come down from that cross and show us. This one who saved others, can he not save himself? Right? They mocked him and jeered at him. Even one of the thieves on the cross, right, did that. Mocked him. Publicly showed contempt. You see, that's what the author of Hebrews says.

You see, there's a difference between the person who says, "I went to church, I tasted of the goodness, and the gospel is absurd. That God is a vindictive deity. That Jesus is a false teacher. That I despise him and his people." There's that, and there's a difference between that and the person who says, "I grew up in the church. I don't know what I believe. I tasted of the goodness, and there is some good, but it has no impact on my life." There is the difference between contempt and disbelief. And yet, even one who has contempt, I want to say that there is still hope. You see, they are irredeemable so long as they remain in their contempt. And the reason I say this is because of the example of Peter. So, think about Peter. Peter walked with Jesus. He talked with Jesus. I mean, he went to the Mount of Transfiguration. He saw Jesus in all his glory. He tasted of the goodness. He heard of his teaching. He experienced the wonders, and then he publicly denied him. Right? He denied Jesus so vehemently so that he invoked a curse upon himself. That sounds like contempt to me. And yet, he was restored. He didn't remain in his contempt. And so, we have to say it's impossible so long as they remain in their contempt.

And so, what do we do with those loved ones? What do we do with those who have walked away? Well, we don't stop hoping. And we don't stop praying. And we're not to be quick to assign them the category of those who disdain, who are showing contempt for Jesus. And we're careful not to put ourselves in the place of God, assuming we know the end. We pray for them. We don't presume upon God's grace. Right? We don't say, "well, they went to church. They were baptized. They've heard the gospel. They walked the aisle. They grew up in Christian schools. And so, of course, God will restore them." We don't say that. We don't presume on God's grace. And yet, we ask for it. We hope for it. We plead with him and ask him to soften hearts.

Okay, but what about us? What about us? Because Hebrews is warning us about this. And it's inviting us to ask those of us who have tasted and have sampled, have we ingested? Or are we in danger of just spitting it all out? You see, what's interesting about this passage, if you look really closely, the pronouns change. The pronouns change. So, when the author of Hebrews is talking about immaturity, he's talking in the first person. He's talking directly to his hearers, this is who you are. And then he returns to the first person pronoun in verse 9. But in the warning passage, it's all third person. He's not saying this is who you are. He's saying, be careful that you don't become like this. You see, he's warning them. And he's saying to his hearers, do not turn away. Right? Do not turn away. He's warning them about this. In fact, when he speaks about them and their experience, yes, he says they're immature. He says they need warning. But he actually gives them hope. He gives them hope. Did you see it in verse 9? He turns the pronouns back. "Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things - things that belong to salvation."

This is beautiful. Because this is the only time in the book of Hebrews that he uses that word, beloved. And so, do you hear his pastor's heart? His love for these people? They've just heard an incredibly heavy and weighty warning. And probably many who heard that are feeling unsure and insecure and concerned. But he says to them, beloved, beloved, we are sure of better things for you. In your case, those who have trusted, who have believed, who have not only tasted but ingested, who have taken in the goodness of Jesus, we are sure of better things, things that belong to salvation. The warning is real, but so is your salvation. And he can be so sure because he sees the way their salvation plays out. Right? They have work and love and service for the saints. This isn't them earning their salvation. It is a demonstration of the reality of their salvation. And so, he encourages them not to become sluggish, not to remain dull in their hearing, but he ensures them of the hope that is theirs until the end.

So, what will this hope look like? It's amazing what he does, right? He says, look at those who have gone before us. If you want to see what true hope is, enduring hope, lasting hope, look at those who have gone before us and imitate their faith. Right? That's what he says. Look at those who through faith inherited life. And throughout Hebrews, the rest of Hebrews, he's going to do this. He's going to point out Abraham and Moses and David, right? And he's saying to them, look at their faith. Look at their faith. Look how they trusted, right? And believe. Imitate them. And we can look to James and John and Paul and others, but we don't have to look that far back. We can look at one another. We can look at one another because the author of Hebrews is saying, this is what I see in you, in his hearer, in the church, love and faith and service for the saints. We can look to Abraham and Moses and Paul and Peter, but we can look at one another because beloved, this is what we see in one another, isn't it? We look at one another and see love and faith and service for the saints. And as we see those things playing out, well, we imitate that. We imitate that. We see the ways that others love, maybe in ways that we don't, or in ways that we can't, or serve in ways, and we imitate it. We see the gospel at work in one another, and we follow that. We trust in Jesus and hold fast to the belief that we see in others. You see, he's warned us about stagnation. He's warned us about not maturing. But he's also given us hope. Hope that those who have believed in Christ, who have been growing in faith, who are trusting in the Lord, that for them, that for us, that for the beloved, there is eternal life. Amen. Let's pray.

Father, we do thank you. Thank you that you have given hope to your people. We thank you that you have warned us as well that, Father, the warning is real and it is true. And so I pray that we would take it to heart and that we would turn to Jesus, that we would follow after him, that we would cling to him, that we would build upon the foundation of grace, and that we would seek to live lives of righteousness, and that we would do so for your glory and for our good. And so we pray, Father, help us. Help us to hold fast to Christ, to take him in, to taste of the goodness, to ingest and not spit it out, but to live as your people, followers of the Lord, those who have great hope. We pray this in Christ's name and God's people said together. Amen.