

The Better Suffering

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[0:00] Hey everybody, my name is Donnie, and I'm one of the pastors here, and again, if you're just visiting with us, we're so glad that you would come and hang out with us this Sunday. Maybe your mom or your grandma forced you, bribed you, I don't know, guilted you, whatever. We're glad that you're here, and thanks for sharing this Sunday with us.

We are in the middle of a series through the book of Hebrews, which is really a sermon that a preacher, we don't know who it was, but he wrote this sermon, and he sent it to this church. And they are a community that was drifting off course. They had sort of lost the meaning of what it was to be together. They got distracted. They were getting divided. They were getting pulled apart, and so the preacher, he preaches this sermon to them, and what he does to kind of bring them back together is he holds out how good Jesus is again and again and again and again.

And so it's a phenomenal, if you've ever kind of spending time reading Hebrews, it is just absolutely amazing from front to back. But we've been looking at it because, you know, for us, kind of in our moment that we're all living through here, there has been a lot that's sought to distract us and sought to divide us, and it's been a very hard season to live through.

It's been a really complicated season to live through, and so in that, we just thought this was a great sermon to look at, a great sort of book of the Bible to look at, because, you know, they didn't just need to see how good Jesus, you know, was. We needed to.

[1:34] And when we see that, it helps bring us back together. It helps us remember that the most important thing about us is not all these other things that seek to define us, that actually divide us.

And so we've been looking at it. Now, this letter has got, you know, because they're drifting off course, he says some really hard things, right? Imagine that, you know, a kid is riding out on a bike into a busy street. You know, the parent's not going to be like, you know, I don't want to be pushy, but if you want, you can come back over here.

You know, just a thought. I don't want to get off in your space. You know, like, you be you, you know. So, no, like, that parent is screaming, right? He or she is, like, shouting at this kid to turn around.

That happens through this letter. I mean, when you understand the context, you start to get the point. You guys are drifting off course. You're heading off into a dangerous place. I'm going to shout at you.

I'm going to warn you, like, severely because I want you to come back. But those are hard passages. And, you know, I've been gone some the last little bit. I apologize for that. I'm back around for a while.

[2:45] But somehow, coincidentally, all the really hard ones, all those really big shouty moments have come my way. And I just, you know, Brian Hart, where are you? You're not here. You're not even here today.

Wouldn't even be here, right? Not even in the room. Now, here I am by myself up here on Mother's Day. And this is a hard one. So, we're going to get at it. I think it's going to be really helpful and good.

But it is a difficult passage. And that's why I give you a little bit of context. So, when you read it, you're like, ugh. This doesn't feel like a warm, sort of cuddly hug. That's not what this letter is. This letter is a, hey, guys, come on. Get back over here. Come back over this way, right? So, let's jump into it. Hebrews chapter 10, verses 26 through 39.

So, he starts off. He says, For if we go on sinning deliberately, that's, you're choosing to carry on in sin. You know right, but you're choosing wrong. After receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire that will

consume the adversaries.

[3:51] Happy Mother's Day, right? Anyone who set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. So, he's jumping back in the Old Testament. We'll kind of look at that here in a minute. How much worse punishment?

If that's what it was back then, how much worse do you think will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

For we know him who said, Vengeance is mine, and I will repay. And again, the Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

But, recall the former days. When after you were enlightened, like after your eyes were opened to see Jesus for who he really was, to see what the cross meant, all that.

Recall that. Look how you endured a hard struggle with suffering, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, sometimes being partners with those who so treated, for you had compassion on those in prison.

[4:55] And you, listen to this one, you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property. That's what it was like for you at the beginning. Since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

Therefore, because of all that, do not throw away your confidence, which has great reward, for you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised for 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. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve our souls.

Okay. Again, if you're new to One Harbor, what a Sunday to pick. We do go through books of the Bible pretty much exclusively. Every now and again, we'll stop and do something kind of topical. But the commitment that made sort of 12 years ago to go through books of the Bible means that we're going to hit stuff like this.

And it comes with a challenge, and we don't just skip over it, right? Because it's God's word, and it has something to say to us. So we're not going to skip it, but I do want to just acknowledge this passage and others like it can be really hard to understand.

[6:07] So what is this passage? Like, what is this we're reading? What is this? Well, it's a double-edged warning to Christians and to those considering Christianity. It's like a double-edged sword.

It kind of cuts both ways, whether you're already a follower of Jesus or whether you're considering being a follower of Jesus. Again, it's been misunderstood a lot. There was a period in church history where people thought this passage was referring to if you sinned after baptism, you would forfeit your salvation.

And so what it led to was, you guessed it, nobody wanted to get baptized. We're like, oh, okay, cool. So we just won't get baptized until right before we die. They were all freaked out by that. Now, we tend to have the total opposite response in our day.

The idea of a God who has wrath, who takes sin seriously, is like sort of way out of our minds. So for them, they wouldn't even get baptized because they were so scared of what would happen. For us, this stuff never even crosses our mind, right? This passage, again, it's like a double-edged warning. There's a specific warning, and this is for those who are like, it seems like they're in Christian community, they're around Christians, they're hearing the gospel, they're thinking about all this, they're starting to receive the blessings of Christian community, they're tasting of all this, and then they just say, no thanks.

[7:23] They turn around and reject it. It's a specific warning to them. And we see this kind of come up in other places, 2 Peter 3, 9. Look, the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise. His son counts slowness. He's not forgotten about all this coming back and judging the world stuff.

He is patient towards you. He's not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. And 2 Corinthians 6, Paul says, we appeal, we get on our knees and beg you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

Don't hear the gospel, get around Christian community and just say, oh no, no thanks. Don't do that. He says, it says in a favorable time, I listen to you. In a day of salvation, I've helped you.

And he says, look, now, in case you're wondering, well, whenever that comes, I'll be ready. No, it's right now, he says. Right now is the favorable time. Today is the day of salvation. These warnings for that group of people are, don't take God's grace for granted.

Don't take it for granted. But it's not just for those who aren't yet followers of Jesus. This is a severe, strong warning for those of us who already are. And the warning to us is a general warning.

[8:28] Hey, look, you're gonna face trials. Don't just abandon Jesus in the face of trials. Now, in the Old Testament, which these guys would have been familiar with, so when he talks about Moses or he talks about the law or he talks about anything, this group of people would have totally understood all of that.

We don't have that, they would have. But in that, these laws, the law of Moses, there was a sin sacrifice that was there if you just like, man, I didn't even know that was a sin. Like, you get pulled over and the cop says, this is what you did wrong.

You're like, I didn't even know that was a rule. Like, there was a sacrifice for that. But there was severe consequences if you knew the law and you sinned anyway. There's no real sacrifice for that. In fact, if you go back and look at these really hard passages throughout Leviticus and Numbers, and you see, I mean, just harsh, like cut off from the community, totally kicked out, alienated, even in some places stoned to death.

They knew this background and the preacher's saying, hey, look, that's how bad the situation is. Like, do you want to go back? Do you want to go back to that world where there remain no sacrifice for you?

[9:34] There remain no sacrifice. Do you want to live like there's no sacrifice for your sin? Because that's what you'd be doing. And on your way back, you'd be trampling under your feet the Son of God. You'd be stepping on Jesus on your way back.

You'd be, in that process, you'd be profaning the blood that he shed. You'd be outraging the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of grace to you, who's brought you all this way.

This is a warning to followers of Jesus. Hey, look, know that when you face trials, there can be this temptation to want to go backwards, but think about what that looks like and means.

So it's a warning both, basically, remember who you're dealing with is what this preacher's saying. Think about, consider seriously who it is you're dealing with. I mean, verse 30, he says it like this, we know him who said, vengeance is mine, I will repay.

It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. N.T. Wright, speaking of this, says the living God to whom everyone will render account is neither to be trifled with or presumed upon.

[10:35] So for Christians, it's this general warning, hey, watch out for this whole thing of suffering wanting to pull you out, and certainly we've all faced a lot of that. You know, watch out for these things, church, is what he's saying.

And for those considering Christianity, hey, consider carefully how you respond to Jesus because rejecting him is really tragic, okay? So that's what this is. It's a general warning. And the point of both really seems to be, it seems like rejection, like the point of rejection seems to hinge around when things get hard.

Like when things get hard or difficult or there's suffering or there's consequences, like that's when both of these groups of people are tempted to sort of turn tail and run. Everyone likes the idea of following Jesus when things are good.

In fact, we've seen this in America. Like if you get up every Sunday and talk about how Jesus makes your teeth whiter and everyone drives the Benz and everything's gonna be great. Like if you do that, man, you are guaranteed to make a lot of money.

Like people will love that. They will be stoked about that. Like these passages don't get read a lot in those kinds of churches. Like that's a kind of Christianity that we've really seen a lot in America, tragically.

[11:45] Everyone likes the idea of following Jesus when things are always good. But I mean, even like if you look at like Jesus, the days before he was crucified, those same crowds were bowing to him and cheering for him.

Like they thought he was about to make all of their dreams come true, give all of them their way.

Like that was, everyone wanted to be a follower of Jesus in that moment.

And then all of a sudden, just the crowd turned in a moment. It's suffering. It's hard times. Those are the things that cause us to consider abandoning Jesus for someone or something else.

So if that's like even part of like following Jesus is suffering, like I think a good question is, why even follow Jesus in the first place? If there's gonna be suffering. And I think this is a great sort of segue, you know, especially with Mother's Day.

It's good to talk about how no one likes to suffer, but we happily suffer for love. Right? Moms, I'll just say it, your job's harder. Your job's harder.

[12:46] And dads, that would have been a great amen moment. And you blew it. So, I have watched my wife Jill be pregnant through two really hot summers.

Some of you have strategically planned your pregnancies over the winter. That's great for you. We did not pull that off. And so Jill was out there in August. God bless her soul.

I've been there, obviously, when both our boys were born. Made the mistake of looking both times. That is insane. Like, it is crazy. I mean, you know, like you imagine someone saying, hey, look, hey, I've got this, I've got this deal for you.

So I'll just tell you how it starts. It's gonna be awesome. First, you throw up all the time. But don't worry, that only lasts like, what, six, eight weeks. And then quickly, you move on to the place where you, fingers crossed, might be so big, you can barely move.

And the moms are like, stop right there. Where do I sign? Right? That, like that, like you know how hard it's gonna be. Everyone gets sick. Everyone gets bigger. Like, you know how hard it's gonna be.

[13:56] And still you do it. Why? Because of love. That's why. Because of love. And what happens when this baby comes out after this insanely painful, like period?

What happens when this baby comes out? What do they say? Give me my baby. Let me see my baby. Let me kiss my baby. Don't take away my baby. What, this little thing that made you throw up all the time, that made your back hurt really bad, like, and everything else?

Like this, you want this thing? They're like, yes, I want that right now. That's my baby, right?

Because of love. No one likes to suffer just to suffer, but for love, we'll happily suffer.

However, it's not just maternal love. It's romantic love. It's all kinds of love, right? What about that, you know, ain't no mountain high, ain't no valley low, ain't no river wide enough, baby? I mean, what's that about? Hey, I'm willing to suffer for you.

If the song was like, I'm willing to go there unless there's a mountain, unless there's a valley, unless there's a river, I don't think it would have been the same kind of hit. You know, like it would have been like, I don't know this dude really loves her.

[14:54] I don't know. Something feels off. It's that suffering, that the willingness to suffer for the one you love is a kind of proof that you have love for them. And the same is true for us who follow Jesus, that willingness to happily suffer is a kind of proof of the love.

We can't earn anything in that, but it's a kind of proof of our love for him. All that to say, it's a really strange thing when Christians run from suffering for Jesus, the one who suffered and died for us. It's a really strange thing. And so that means for those of us who are Christians who struggle a little bit with that suffering thing, that struggle with an endurance like through suffering, he says you have to endure. Well, if your problem is first, if it's like an endurance thing, it's not really first an endurance thing.

It's first a love thing, right? It's first a love problem, not an endurance problem. Like what should have been happening as they heard, you would trample under your feet Jesus, the Son of God. You would be stomping on him on your way out. And in that, you would be profaning the blood that he shed for you. And on the sidelines is the spirit of grace who's outraged. We should hear that and our hearts should swell up and like, no, not Jesus.

[16:09] I would never want to do that to Jesus. That's my Jesus. That's my Savior. Love wells up. Whoa, this is hard, but I would never want to do that to him. Do you feel that?

That's what this is supposed to feel like. Like, he's Jesus. That blood was for me. I couldn't do that. That love is supposed to swell up.

The preacher has just said in the previous passage, the easier one that I didn't get, you know, his blood has made a way for us. He is our great high priest. He who promised is faithful.

Like it's again, it's so beautiful. It's so big. It's so amazing. He's appealing to them. Remember this Jesus. That's the Son of God who loves you and you're going to act like, you would act like that just because things got hard.

Remembering is powerful. In fact, he calls them to do so. He says in verse 32, recall the former days when after you were enlightened, you endured hard struggle and suffering. You had compassion on people in prison.

[17:10] You joyfully accepted your property being plundered. And why? Because you knew yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. He doesn't just say, do better and try harder.

Now he does say, you guys need to do better at enduring. You need to get a little tougher. But he doesn't just say, get tougher now. Come on. No, he says, let me help you with a really good way to endure, right, is to remember.

The way to fix that problem if it's a problem you have like they had, like I sometimes have, is by remembering. Go down memory lane. Go back and remember what it was like before. Go back and remember what Jesus has done for you, right?

Remember what Jesus has done for you. Recall. Look back. Remember, just take a moment even to think right now. What was it like before? Remember what it was like for those of us who are followers of Jesus when you first realized this was for you.

When you first realized he was willing to take all of your sins, past, present, future, he knew all that. Like when you realized he knew all of that and he still loved you and he still gave himself for you.

[18:17] Remember what that felt like. Remember how you lived back then. I mean, a lot of us, we tell those stories of, you know, you kind of swing the pendulum so far, like you're just so extreme because of your love, right?

You endured public suffering. He said, even public suffering. Like, not just someone said something mean about you on Facebook. No, like you, these people had, like they endured harsh suffering. He says, and that you had compassion on those who were in prison. Like you were suffering but you were mindful of other people who were suffering. That's pretty, that's pretty amazing. And he says, you even joyfully accepted your property being stolen.

I mean, it's like a crazy person. Now it's someone in love. That's what you act like. You, you, you just become a different person when you, when you get overtaken by love.

Why? He says, you knew you, you, you had something better and it wasn't going anywhere. You were confident of his love for you and the permanence of it. When like, when you, when you first encounter love, it just, it just transforms you.

[19:26] Even the toughest, like manliest, most whatever, like Marlboro man kind of like, becomes like elf. You know, like I'm in love, I'm in love, I don't care who knows it, like spinning around. Like, it just transforms you.

Everything could be falling apart around you, suffering, all your stuff could be stolen and you were like, fine with it. Because you were convinced of love, not just in your head, but in your heart. It's powerful to look back and to remember those early days. So he says, do that, but he doesn't say just look back, he says, look forward, look, look, look forward. He says, look in a little while, the coming one will come, he will not delay.

What's he saying? Remember that this season won't last forever. Remember, remember like this Jesus and all he's done for you and remember that this little season here is not going to last forever. He's going to come back.

Engagement doesn't last forever. Pregnancy doesn't last forever. The ability to wait even when it's hard is easier when you remember it is almost over. It won't be very much longer. It's a beautiful thing.

[20:34] Times may be tough, things may be brutal, but we have a better and lasting world awaiting us, one that cannot be taken away from us. This life that we live on as hard as it may get, 2020 was like the treadmill just kept getting steeper and steeper and steeper and steeper and by the end we're all like hanging on like just legs dangling by the, you know, it can get like that, but actually this world is not a treadmill.

This life is not a treadmill. There is an end. There is finish line to be crossed. A day will come when he'll say enough. He will wipe every tear from our eyes.

He will make all things new. He will come back and we are called in this passage and all over the place in the New Testament to think about that day, to think about it like a finish line, like the tape that we're going to cross one day where we enter into rest, where we make it our aim to kind of live like what Paul says in 2 Timothy 4, 7.

Imagine like all of us being able to say this. I have fought the good fight, he says. Timothy, I finished the race. I've kept the faith. We remember that there's a finish line to the race and we're better at fighting that fight, we're better at keeping the faith.

This remembering is powerful but it's not just sentimental. It's powerfully catalytic in how we live our lives. And I think this could mean something maybe more so for us than ever in our lives before.

[22:09] As everything is so chaotic around us, the preacher is calling them and he's calling us into a different kind of Christianity. Not just where we keep the rules to be nice people, to go to church and jump through the hoops and check the boxes.

No, there's something different here. Verse 38, 39, he says, they'll live by faith. Not the kinds that would shrink back and are destroyed.

No, those who have faith and preserve their souls. What do we see here lastly? We don't just hunker down and keep the faith. No, we, in this world full of suffering, this chaotic world full of suffering, we live by faith.

We live by faith. This live by faith motto originally comes from the book of Habakkuk. It pops up again in Galatians and other spots in the New Testament. But what it meant was, in every one of those moments, it meant when everything all around seems to be turning upside down.

This is N.T. Wright's version of explaining this. When everything kind of all around you seems like it's turning upside down and inside out, when all that was happening, God's true people would shine forward.

[23:24] They would hold on. They would keep the faith. They would walk by faith. They would hold on and last the course. That as things got crazy and hard, far from just turning tail and running, like far from that, like we wouldn't, far from that, and far from just like, okay, I'm just gonna stay right here then.

No, we would, in the face of crazy, chaotic everything, that we would keep living for Him, keep making much of Him. No matter how bad things got, our faith in Him would just keep pushing us forward.

Our world is and has turned upside down in a lot of ways. How are you and I responding? The call here is to hold the line, don't go backwards, and also keep moving forwards.

Walk by faith, keep trusting in Him. Friends, even when we can't understand, even when we're war slam out, we carry on because we trust in Him.

My prayer for us is that He would write the same to us. You are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed. Friends, I don't want that to be us.

[24:41] We refuse to shrink back. We refuse to walk away. We refuse to turn our backs and in the process trample under our feet this Jesus. We refuse to do it.

God's too good. His mission's too big. We keep moving on. As we look to respond, one last little question, I think, is why do we always misunderstand passages like this?

I mean, why is it that when we read these passages, because when we look at the context, it's pretty clear in the context what these things mean, but we still struggle with these passages. I think one of the reasons that we struggle is because God's love seems too good to be true.

God's love seems too good to be true. I think we're always waiting to be cast aside. We're always waiting to be kicked to the curb. We're always waiting to just be told, no, not you.

We've been conditioned to disappointment because the world we live in always disappoints. Things and people never fully live up to their promises. Never.

[25:45] People and things never, ever, ever fully live up to their promises. Anything that says it will is lying. It doesn't. And that leaves us doubtful that anyone ever could.

Friends, this Jesus, he loves you because he loves you because he loves you. The whole sermon to the Hebrews that encapsulates this passage just gushes with his love for you.

And so I just want to say to you who are like, who would read this and sort of easily get like, oh, I guess he doesn't love me. He loves you. Our whole sermon is like, he loves you, he loves you, loves you. So hey, let's endure, let's keep going because remember, he loves you.

Look what he's done for you again and again and again and again. If you're here or you're watching this and you're not yet a follower of Jesus, remember this is a specific warning to you not to reject him, not to wait, not to take his grace for granted, ah, maybe next time, maybe next Sunday, maybe next Easter.

No, now is the day, now is the moment where you just say, okay, Jesus, I surrender to you. If you're here or you're watching this and you're already a follower of Jesus, remember this is a warning to us as well.

[26:57] this last season has indeed been marked with a lot of testing, a lot of hard things. Let it, let it, let it reveal in us as we look back on this season.

Like things will get easier again and then it'll get hard again and it'll get easier again. Like, let's look back and say, man, God, what we saw in there revealed a deep love and an unshakable faith in you.

Like, look back and go, well, that was the, that was definitely the time period where if I was gonna turn tail and run, I would've, but you know what, Jesus, I just remember how good you were. Let that be what wells up in you right now.

This Jesus, this faithful one, the son of God who loves us to the end, who promises to return for us and one day make all things new. And if you, like me, like all of us, are grieving how you've lived over this past season, this is where we get to come to the table of grace and mercy, not the table of guilt and condemnation.

We come to a table of grace and mercy. We take that little cup and that juice and we remember this meal is a meal we don't deserve. If you're feeling like I don't deserve it, yeah, you're right, but it's been paid for you anyway and it's been paid for me too.

[28:20] Come to the meal that we don't deserve, that's been prepared and Jesus said it would awaken us, it would remind us of him, it would awaken our memory of his love for us.

My friends, feast on his goodness to you and then ask his Holy Spirit to help you to endure, to help you to keep moving forward, to help you to keep walking by faith.

We pray for us. Jesus, thank you for your incredible love for us and your commitment to us. This has been a hard time. It continues to be hard in so many ways, but you are worth it.

And everything wants to distract us and divide us and pull us off to the side and cause us to throw our hands up in the air and cause us to walk away, but you are worth it.

Awaken again in our hearts fresh love for you. Your love for us has not changed a bit. Nowhere is that being called into question. But our love grows cold.

[29:23] We can fall out of love with you. So, Lord, recapture our hearts this morning. The mere thought of trampling you underfoot, profaning this blood that you've shed for us, outraging the Holy Spirit of grace.

God, help us. Warn us. Call us back. In Jesus' name, amen.