DCF 301022 **Enduring to the End**

Prayer: When you come to listen to a sermon, the major responsibility is yours, to open your heart to listen to God. Luke 11:13 **If you then, being evil, know how to give** **good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”**

***2 Thess 2:1-3  Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.  Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, …***

We are living in an era when our nation, our culture and the church are visibly falling away.

But this happens regularly, in our lives. In the very same chapter in Matt 16, and so possibly the same day, Peter is congratulated for recognizing that ***Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God V16;*** and scolded by Jesus in v23: ***But He (Jesus) turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”*** Peter was refusing to accept the warning that Jesus would ***suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed, and be raised the third day. V21***. Satan was using a best friend to try to get Jesus to avoid a path of pain.This is why we must review our day, before we shut our eyes, and confess our sins. Refusing to accept the leading of the Holy Spirit leads to a hardened heart. Peter learns from his mistake and by Acts 2, he stands boldly before the rulers and elders, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaiming the resurrection.

God’s righteous anger is an expected response to people’s hardness of heart. In Mark 3:5 after Jesus saw the hardness of religious leaders who sought to accuse Him, we read “***He (Jesus) had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts.”*** We MUST deliberately practise repentance daily. The gospel message begins with repentance. ***Mark 6:12 So they went out and preached that people should repent.*** People do not like to repent. Just as gratitude stifles covetousness and jealousy, so too, repentance suffocates pride. Stupidly, we ignore it, and reserve it for just major sins like murder or adultery.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews warns us that we need to take our walk very seriously. Believers are cautioned to aim at perfection. We know from this warning and our own lives that it is very easy to fall. We must mature in our faith. Paul teaches us in Rom 1:17 that ***the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.*** Each step we take in our walk with God, makes us stronger to dive deeper in our relationship to Him. In that deepening we must also expect to be pruned. ***John 15: 2 … every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*** This usually hurts. Have we surrendered our pride, finances, health and plans to God?

Heb ***6: 1  Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. 3And this we will do if God permits. 4For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.***

Interestingly, we see in this passage, the characteristics of the believer. The believer:

* Experiences enlightenment. So, the experience of seeing the difference between flesh and spirit has happened, and continues to happen and deepen as we walk with God.
* Tastes the heavenly gift which must begin with knowing we are forgiven. We have continually confessed our sins and found peace in the confidence that our heavenly Father totally removes our sins.
* We have lived daily, walking and talking with the Holy Spirit. We have shared our gratitude, our confession, our desire to do something for God and our requests with Him.
* We have tasted the good Word of God. We have prayed for a voracious appetite to read and study God’s Word. We are continually overcome with the privilege of knowing the heart and mind of God.
* As we prayed “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done’, we have seen prayers answered. We have become co-builders of the kingdom of God. We look out for the lost, lonely and hurt to guide, console and encourage them.

When a believer has experienced this walk with God, if they fall away, they become an insult to Jesus ***and put Him to an open shame***. Jesus teaches us to build our appetite to serve Him. If we stop looking for ways to serve Him, we will lose wisdom and grow dull.

***Matt 13:12 12For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. … ‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; 15for the hearts of this people have grown dull.***

We do not understand the ways of God primarily by intelligence. The primary organ of understanding is our heart. It is in our heart that the Holy Spirit begins to impart understanding to us. A child knows the love of his or her mother at a very early age, because of heart. The question that we need to ask God continually, is ‘what can I do for You today?’.
Part of the fruit and richness of our walk with God is the appetite for more. That is relationship. God gave us romantic love so that we understand passion. It is no accident, that the church is called the Bride. Revelation 3 talks about the first love to the Laodicean church. If we lose this passion, we can easily slip away so that we become neutral. ***Matt 12:30 30He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.***

For a believer to resist any falling away we need to be very aware of the battle we are in. There is sometimes a mentality that we always win. This is not true. ***1 Thess 2:18 … we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us***. Paul wanted to come to the church at Thessalonica, but satan stopped him. ***But we know that all things work together for good to those who love God. Rom 8:28.*** God can turn defeat into victory.

So, what do you do when it feels like you are losing the fight? The Bible has many narratives of people who share this experience. Worship songs are an excellent tactic. If you feel abandoned and lost, kneel in prayer and pour out your heart to God. Issues concerning health, family, finance or ministry are common batterings. Often our worries seem so slight to others, but the last straw often crushes people. We must continue to bring our petitions before God. ***Heb 4:16 16Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*** And ***Phil 4:6 6Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*** This daily action of coming to God, with the problems that batter our heart, is essential for the Father -child relationship. The early church in ***Acts 1:14 …continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.***

In Matt 25, the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, we see that all the girls started with oil, when they went to meet the bridegroom. But in Matt 25:8 we read: ***And the foolish said to the wise, ’Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’***  They had started well, but not kept it up. The oil refers to the anointing of the Holy Spirit. It is a constant gift, which is given to us as we walk with God. It is the evidence of our unbroken relationship with God. We are warned not to rely on yesterday’s experience. ‘Today’, is what matters.

Paul writing to the fellow Christian workers in Corinth reminds them that ***“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” 2 Cor 6:2.*** Relationships deepen when we experience a constant ‘now’ experience. That is why the 4 tasks before you shut your eyes are vital. Satan does not want you to be grateful, or humble, or praying ‘Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done’; and so setting a goal to please and serve God. Pouring out our heart to God, is vital and the last thing the enemy wants us to do.

Jesus warns us of these end times in ***Matt 24:9 9“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. 10And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. 11Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. 12And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. 13But he who endures to the end shall be saved.***

Acts 8:1 tells us: ***At that time a great persecution arose against the church.*** In the west we ignore persecution a lot. I encourage you to get the Barnabas Fund, Voice of the Martyrs, Gatestone Institute and Open Doors email updates. On March 7 2022, OD writes:**360 million Christians last year lived in countries where persecution was “significant.” Roughly 5,600 Christians were murdered, more than 6,000 were detained or imprisoned, and another 4,000-plus were kidnapped. In addition, more than 5,000 churches and other religious facilities were destroyed.**

**… Last year 11 nations were guilty of “extreme persecution.”**

**In the past year, … 1 in 7 believers around the world, suffered significant persecution for their faith. Every day in 2021, an average of more than 16 believers were killed for following Jesus. … 2021 saw a 24% increase in Christians killed for the faith.**

Even if this rate continues, without increasing, the number of Christians killed in 7 years’ time would rise to 6000 x 1.247 = 27,046. But sadly, this rate is increasing.

**An estimated 50,000 to 70,000 Christians are currently imprisoned in North Korea’s prison and labor camps, according to Open Doors. “Life for Christians in North Korea is a constant cauldron of pressure; capture or death is only a mistake away,” the report said.**

**Despite having more than 98 million Christians in the country, Nigeria is the deadliest nation for believers, where Christians face the most violence and the greatest number of abductions. The African nation was home to nearly 80% of all Christians killed for their faith last year (4,650).**

I have listed these details because it is so easy to have no appreciation of what Jesus is talking about when He says: ***they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake.*** In Australia I expect to see an increase of attacks on the church, believers dying for their faith, and Christians being hated. Our government has recently brought a curse on us by rejecting God’s choice of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Finally, there will be a judgement and a reward. [2 Cor 5:10](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Corinthians%205%3A10&version=NKJV) ***For we must all appear***  ***before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.***

Paul is writing to believers. He includes himself – no one is excused. It is inevitable – MUST. The judgement of God is part of His authority and character. He delights in it. If we know God and understand Him, we glory in His character. ***Jer 9:24 But let him who glories glory in this,
That he understands and knows Me, That I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgement, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,” says the Lord.*** Jesus teaches in ***John 9:39 For judgement I have come into this world.***

# Jesus tells us in *Matthew 6:19-21 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

We are given savings accounts in banks, so that we understand the value of laying up treasures in heaven.

So, how do we prepare for such hard times?

1. We look out for false teaching. To spot the lie, we must be soaked in the Bible.
2. Rules and discipline are there as a guide. Also, outsiders observe the behaviour of Christians. So, we must behave wisely. Look behind the rules to see the heart of God and listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
3. We look to see how Jesus prepares Himself for the crucifixion. He prays.
4. We look for barriers that Satan has built, to block us heeding the Holy Spirit. We break those barriers. For the God-haters, we pray for their salvation. But we pray too that every weapon used by them for satan, is smashed. Whether it be their finance, health, friendships, sleep, possessions or whatever. Whatever is being used to stop people coming to Christ is evil, and must be cursed and destroyed. This is war.

***1 Thess 5:19 Do not quench the Spirit.***

You saw in the homework that a believer whose good works are pathetic and superficial will not be rewarded. ***1 Cor 3:14 14If anyone’s work which he has built on it (***the foundation)***endures, he will receive a reward. 15If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*** So, take the battle seriously.

Closing Thought: ***2 Chron 7:14 If My people who are called by My name and humble themselves and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, THEN I will hear from heaven, and forgive their sins and HEAL their land.*** The destiny of our land lies in the hands of the church. It starts with us. We must HUMBLE ourselves and pray.

The very first requirement for healing is humility in prayer. When we search our day for confession, the honesty required demands humility. When we seek the face of God, we seek to bring our petitions in line with His will and His kingdom. So many of our petitions are for our kingdom and our will. That is why the Bible is essential reading. We are so blessed to be able to share the heart and the mind of God. I strongly encourage you to have alone time – in your study, your bedroom, on your walk, jog or ride, whenever you can. Program it into your daily schedule. And the fourth requirement for healing, is we must turn from our wicked ways. As we practice confession, we realise that wickedness can be quite subtle. Any habit that shuts out Jesus is wicked. It can be grumpiness, sloth, unforgiveness, or just putting the things of God into second place.

So, people, God wants us to ***humble ourselves and pray and seek His face, and turn from our wicked ways, so that He will hear from heaven, and forgive our sins and HEAL Australia.***

Amen.

**Homework**

The sermon coming up on 30 Oct is on enduring to the end, despite the great falling away of the church.

As part of our preparation for the coming of Jesus, we need to eradicate any complacency in our lives.

The Bible teaches us many times that there will be a final judgement for all of us.

***Rev 22:12 12“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.***

***Rom 2:1 2 Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. 2But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. 3And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? 4Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? 5But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6who “will render to each one according to his deeds”: 7eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; 8but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, 9tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; 10but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 11For there is no partiality with God.***

***Heb 10:16 16“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,” 17then He adds, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”***

***Matt 16:27 27For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.***

***1 Cor 3:10 But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 11For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. 14If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.***

There are several other passages, confirming the judgement of God. For most Christians this is NOT a favourite topic. But my question to each of us is what impact are these Scriptures having on our daily walk with God?

* What triggers the ‘once saved always saved, so I can do what I like’ thought?
* How do we pray for prodigals who have rejected the faith?
* How do we tune our minds to serve God?
* How do we build the kingdom of God?
* What skills has God given you, to build His kingdom?
* Who have you tried to encourage in their walk with God?
* Who has God put in your heart daily, to pray for their growth in Christ?
* Have you undervalued your forgiveness? If so, how do we correct this?
* What are the works that God has given you to do for Him?
* Some older teens have left the church, because they resented being ‘forced’ to go to church when they were younger. How do you prevent and overcome and fix this?
* Our government approves of LGBTQ and abortion and recently denied God’s choice of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. How do we stop this erosion of vales in Australia?

The Final Hymn is an old one:

1 Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?
Are you fully trusting in His grace this hour?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

Chorus:
Are you washed in the blood,
In the soul cleansing blood of the Lamb?
Are your garments spotless?
Are they white as snow?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

2 Are you walking daily by the Savior's side?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?
Do you rest each moment in the Crucified?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? [Chorus]

3 When the Bridegroom cometh will your robes be white?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?
Will your soul be ready for the mansions bright,
And be washed in the blood of the Lamb? [Chorus]

4 Lay aside the garments that are stained with sin,
And be washed in the blood of the Lamb;
There's a fountain flowing for the soul unclean,
O be washed in the blood of the Lamb! [Chorus]

Source: [Baptist Hymnal 2008 #229](https://hymnary.org/hymn/BH2008/229)

As part of your preparation for the service, answer before God the questions asked in the first 3 verses.

Hymns are more than just words to music. Let the Spirit guide you into action. Lay aside the garments that are stained with sin,…

Pray for the anointing of the Holy Spirit to speak to you and someone else this Sunday.