

Sermon Transcript - August 9, 2020

Pastor Chad 0:04

When I was little, I was riding my bicycle around my home there on the farm. And I kept going over jumps and different doing different kinds of things. And what, at some point I guess I must have been wearing jeans that were a little too baggy or maybe a little bit too long but at some point my jeans got stuck in the front sprocket. Who else has ever had that happen to them right? Like that is the most frustrating thing in the world. And now I kind of know how to handle it. It's not that hard actually to get it up. But at that point, I didn't know my jeans were stuck, my bike would move I was, I couldn't get off of the thing and when I finally did I didn't know how to get anywhere and what I decided I'm just gonna have to try to go home and try to find my dad and maybe he could help me out the problem was, I was quite a long ways from home. I wasn't like a mile or anything like that but it was across our yard or yard was 10 acres or something like that i was i was a long ways away from home, and I was down in behind my trees right behind our shelter belt because we have these rows of trees to guard us from the wind I grew up in southern Alberta after all, and down those roads of course where some jumps and bumps and that's where I was and that's where I got stranded so I started to haul my bike, and then had tried to get off of it this way and then I was hauling my bike and walk away and I was getting more and more frustrated and I was yelling and hollering for someone to come and help me but my parents apparently couldn't hear me I think we had, I think we had friends over at the time. Anyway, so that's why I went out for bicycle ride, to get away from all the people that were there. And at one point I've never really sat down and if I didn't start crying. I sure felt like it. It was just so difficult. It was so hard I couldn't get these stupid things out, they were some of my favorite jeans so I didn't want to wreck them. I didn't know what was going on. I didn't know how to solve this problem. I distinctly remember, I mean that's like 30 some years ago, probably, I distinctly remember, realizing and thinking, alright. If I need. If I want this problem solved. I'm gonna have to get up and make my way to death. I learned right there in that moment that sometimes there's things you just have to do. And I remember that moment I think back on that moment, often.

I remember when I had to shovel out the bunks full of snow we'd have a spring snowstorm and they would get full like a foot and a half of this wet heavy snow you know the kind of snow that you dig, and you pick it up and it looks blue from all of the moisture that's in it. Like to clean up all of the bunks in our feedlot before the, the guy would come along and dump the feed in the bunks, because if you didn't pull the cows would be to eat it and it would get moldy and all kinds of things would happen so I had to go around and clean out all of these bunks, I just remember there was like miles of bunks. And I remember thinking, I don't, I don't want to I can't I'm gonna be too tired, this isn't gonna work for me. But at some point I stood and I leaned on my shovel and I said you know what, I can complain all I want. But this has to get done I'm just going to have to endure it. And so I did I got those things done and there are other moments when I was cleaning our driveway in PEI after the fifth snowstorm had left a foot on our driveway and buried my car the fourth time over like it was just there were moments, there's moments in our lives when we just we just have to endure. We just have to kind of pick ourselves up or say something to ourselves or realize look forward to something and I remember shoveling it was always I was looking forward to a good warm cup of coffee afterwards when I was done and I could strip off all of the clothes that had gotten me all wet to talk as well but then I could sit down with a nice cup nice cup of coffee in the winter I could let my snow melt out of my beard and then I could enjoy that cup of coffee looking at a clean driveway or empty bunks, actually bunks full of food.

There are moments in our lives and I think life, kind of feels like that life just feels like it's something to endure and there might be a season in our life, when we go through various kinds of treatments. We go through a surgery, let's say, and the surgery is so painful and we don't, we don't want to we don't want to go through that pain anymore but there's nothing we can do about it all we have to do is just endure and no go by the promise and our doctors and others and from from God and from those who are around us that this will. This will pass this too shall pass it won't last forever We just have to endure it.

For some of us it's fear now in this COVID time there's all kinds of little decisions that we have to make and now when we have to figure out what we're going to be doing for school in the fall and there's all kinds of decisions things we have to weigh around that and and maybe if you're a child and you're thinking about

going back to school, you don't know what this is going to look like. You don't know if your friends are going to be staying home and more of them are going to be homeschooling than before you know what you're going to have to wear a mask or how much you're going to have to wear the mask is we are going to have to wear masks but not really sure how much or how often and not sure yet exactly what all the details are going to look like what it's gonna feel like to be there when you have to be distant, you can have your friends and hang out with them and you're a business owner and you don't know when the demand is going to pick up again hopefully there's some pent up demand there so that you can get rolling again but maybe they've moved on to something else.

It's just, there's so much and sometimes for some of us and as we get older, maybe yours, you're a senior and you've lost so many of your friends, maybe your spouse has passed away too and. And every day feels like something to endure. Just to get through until it's late enough that it would be okay to go to bed so you can start the next day the same way.

Maybe there's a moment in your life or things are frustrating with your, your parents at home and they're just so annoying and they continue to keep restrictions on you that you do not think are fair and maybe they are more than, then you thought of other places and maybe there's places that you come and inhabit, often that aren't opening up the same way that other people are your friend gets to do this, your parents say you're not allowed to do that, or this other place is doing this but we're not doing that and.

And it's hard to just endure and you know this is, this is kind of what the people in the Hebrews, are doing, and we've talked about this plenty how they're going through different kinds of problems and difficulties. They've chosen to follow Jesus and that has alienated them from the Jewish community and from the Gentile community. And they also know that things are going, not so well in the Jewish community. There's starting to be rumors of if not act of rebellion against the Romans at this time the book was probably written close to AD 70 we're not exactly sure when. AD 70 is when Jerusalem was finally overrun and the temple was destroyed. And it would seem that this writer would have mentioned that if it had happened already, but we know it's also one of the later books which somewhere around there. Maybe the rebellion has already happened maybe the

Romans have already surrounded and encamped themselves around the city of Jerusalem and they cut off all of the supplies into that city and things are going from bad to worse there. Maybe even at that time they've seen some of their family members who were caught after trying to leave Jerusalem and they were crucified on thousands of crosses that were set up around the city of Jerusalem, so that the Romans could show their might and power over these people and say, We are the ones, Caesar is Lord and you will bow to us in the middle of that the Christians are saying no. Jesus is Lord.

But it's causing them more and more problems. So here the writer is just telling them to endure to run the race with perseverance. This last section of the book of Hebrews follows on that therefore and Hebrews chapter 12. 12 verse 1: Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses these ordinary people who God used to do extraordinary things because they trusted in him. Let us then throw off everything that hinders, the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race that is marked up for us fixing our eyes on Jesus, the perfecter, and the pioneer of our faith. The writer knows that it is hard at times.

So this section is full of encouragement and warning. Warnings that we shouldn't. We shouldn't walk away from these things we shouldn't ignore the stories that are here, these are good mornings for us to hear as well, particularly in this time. I know it's easy in summertime to kind of drift away from our usual practice of church attendance and from doing our own daily devotions from paying attention to where God is from being connected to him and his community on a regular basis, and especially now with all of these other restrictions that are going on it's just so easy to stay at home and maybe watch the service online or maybe not it's just so easy to kind of lose our focus, to focus on other things to argue about other things, pay attention to other things.

The writer says no, we need to focus on him it's the only thing that will see us through. In this section, he reveals a contrast. Now we've talked a lot in this book about how Jesus is better than everything that has come before and here as an encouragement he raises up what he calls, two mountains and the section in the NIV says it's a mountain of fear and a mountain of joy.

The mountain of fear starts in verse 18, he says you have not come to a mountain that can be touched. And that is burning with fire to darkness to gloom and to storm, to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begs that no further word be spoken to them because they could not bear what was being commanded. If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death was one of the commandments The site was so terrifying, that even Moses, this one who was so close to God who had encountered God in the burning bush who had been sent back to Egypt to set the people free who had been an instrument of God and all those plagues and in the release of the people from Egypt he too was scared.

Now there's so much going on here we'll talk about a couple of different interpretations or a couple of different things that this is reflecting on Mount Sinai, but it starts, of course with Exodus 19, this is the first time that the people of Israel, really encountered god they're at Mount Sinai. Now remember, at this point in the story the people of Israel have already been released from Egypt they've been brought out of, out of slavery they've been brought to Mount Sinai, which is a fulfillment of a promise made to Moses so he knows what's going on here but the people really don't. And the people have already been promised by God, that they will be his people, if they follow and trust in Him and the people themselves have already committed as well. I mean who wouldn't right, you were a slave in Egypt, now you've suddenly been set free by this God who does all these incredible powers, shows he's way more powerful than the biggest military superpower in that timeframe. So of course they say yes, if you want to be our God yes we will do anything you say. So then they set aside three days to purify themselves to get themselves ready to meet with this God and this is how Exodus says.

This is Exodus 19 verses 16 and following. On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning with a thick cloud over the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in a camp trembled, that Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God and they stood at the foot of the mountain. I want you to picture this in your mind's eye if it's easier for you to picture stuff with your eyes closed, then do so but just picture what this must have been like you've got hundreds of thousands of people a mixed multitude actually it's not only Jewish people there's also some Egyptians and others who had seen the

power of God and allied themselves with him, they're all gathering around the base of this mountain, and they're looking up. And it's covered with smoke, because the Lord Yahweh had descended on it in fire, smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace the whole mountain trembled violently as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder and Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.

Here at the base of that mountain they get a glimpse of the God who has rescued them. And because what they know is that power is used to control through the threat of violence, they are terrified. They see how powerful this God is and they say, we do not want to hear from him. we are not worthy or we are not able to stand in his presence because they were afraid that they were going to be punished for the ways in which they failed. This actually is how Moses describes his own fear and Deuteronomy, he says, I tremble with fear before God because I was afraid of him because of the ways in which you had walked away from him. He says he was afraid of God, after they had made the golden calf, so if you remember, the people had gone. Moses gone up to the mountain he ends up there for 40 days in the meantime the people were like we don't know where it goes is when we don't know where this God is, we need something we can see we can touch we can feel something, maybe we can manipulate ourselves. So, Aaron made some took the gold from them and made golden calf set it up and said, this is your god that made you out of Egypt and Moses, of course, learned about this God sent it down and he was angry he broke the stone tablets and. And then he went back up and he pleaded with God to forgive them and Moses says, At that moment, at that moment he was terrified because he realized he thought. power leads to control, which leads to punishment, when people get out of line. The description of this first mountain brings fear for them.

Now there's also ways in which this this story changes and shifts slightly throughout the Old Testament as God reveals himself to be a forgiving God a loving God a God who is patient to kind of God who says yes, I'm going to send you into exile because this is not working you in this land you just keep going other places, but then we see in Ezekiel, that God actually goes ahead of them into exile and promises to still be with them there and promises to pull them out to take them out of that as well. And also brings to mind for me at least this

description brings to mind the event that happened with Elijah. And Elijah also met God on Mount Sinai, you can find that in 1 Kings chapter 19. Now this story comes on the heels of Elijah's great success against the prophets of Baal remember they were up there on the mountain and on the mountain, he had said to the prophets there was over 400 of them here we'll make a test. I'll set up an altar and you set up an altar, you put a bowl on it I believe and I'll put a bowl on it as well. And then we'll see which God is the real God but God answers with fire is the real one. The prophets of Baal worked themselves into a frenzy trying to get Baal to respond to them, and Elijah. When they had failed, pours water all over the altar, and then God responds, it burns up the altar. At that moments that people realize that Baal is wrong, and all the prophets of Baal are killed for leading people astray. But, Elijah. At this moment in which should be kind of success fears for his life, because Ahab & Jezebel, the queen who loves and follows Baal is false god I don't understand why but whatever decides that she will not rest until Elijah is dead. So Elijah runs, he runs into the wilderness. And at one point he falls down he goes to sleep under a broom tree and he prays that God would just take his life because he can't make it anymore an angel shows up gives him some food for the journey and says here, you need this then rest does this a couple of times and then Elijah continues his journey in the wilderness. He shows up on Mount Sinai This is First Kings 19 verse 10. The Lord asks, Elijah What are you doing here, Elijah replies I have been very zealous I've done a lot for you for the Lord God Almighty the Israelites have rejected your covenants torn down your olders put your prophets to death with a sword and I am the only one left and now they are trying to kill me too, there's this sense in which God I don't know what you're doing, I don't know what's going on in this world. I don't know why these things are happening and feels as though I'm the only one here, that is actually following you, that is actually doing the things you're asking me to that actually cares about the people that are around them that actually wants them to follow is love you and. And here, here it's only gotten me trouble and now I'm the one that's gonna be next so I don't get this I don't understand what's going on. I think we're there sometimes people I know I am right now, particularly I don't know what's going on with all of this I don't know where God is sometimes it seems to be silent to my pleas and he's, he's ignoring my prayers.

Covid is one thing but then you hear this bombing in Lebanon where they're still sifting through the ashes to see how many people are dead. And we know that thousands have been injured there. What's going on? The Lord says go and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord for the Lord is about to pass by this is also something that happens to Moses on Mount Sinai, that a great and powerful wind tore through the mountains they tore them apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake and the Lord was not in the earthquake after the earthquake came off fire. But the Lord was not in the fire. After the fire came a gentle whisper. So here we get an image of God, who is the all mighty powerful God. But here to remind you, he's not showing him as a powerful God that can control him and can make him do things. He's the gentle. God that cares for him.

After the fire came a gentle whisper and when Elijah heard it. He pulled his cloak over his face and he went out to the stood at the mouth of the cave and then a voice said to him, what are you doing here?, Elijah, and he replies again I have been very zealous for the Lord it lights up rejected your covenant torn down your shoulders, put your profits to death and I'm the only one left and other trying to kill me too and the Lord says to him, and this this frustrates me, quite honestly about the way that God interacts with us he's always answer our questions in our please and these are these are legitimate pleas and legitimate questions and petitions against God but God doesn't answer he says to Elijah:

Go back the way you came. Now remember this is a gentle whisper it's God shows up here. Go to the desert of Damascus. When you get there anoint Hazael king over air. Also annoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel and annoyed Elisha, son of Shephath from Abel-Mahalo to succeed you as prophet.

Go back. Elijah, God says. You are not alone. Your work will continue. Because I am not done, God says. And further, this is verse, 18. I reserved 7000 in Israel, all whose knees have not back down to Baal or whose mouths, have not kissed him You are not alone. Your work is not done because I am not done so go back, Elijah I will be with you. I will help you endure the things that you need to endure. He still runs into all kinds of problems later, he still has all kinds of issues later. But you're not alone. And these are the things that are evoked by this description of the first mountain, this mountain with fire and wind and

earthquake and trumpets. One of a God that is both almighty powerful and also speaks in a gentle whisper, one who calls us to be his people who shows us that he can and will do what he has said he is going to do, and the one who quietly encourages us along so that we can persevere, so that we can endure the life that is set before us.

But of course the story doesn't end simply with an encouragement from God to endure. As amazing as that message is, and as amazing as the things it inspired were right. If we even just stop there that could be amazingly inspiring for us, that can help us to do and continue in the ways that God has gone before us in the ways in which he is calling us we are not alone. Our work is not done. And God is with us, and He will continue his work through us. that is amazing, but beyond that the writer of the Hebrews says there is more, because we no longer approach this mountain of fear, we now approach a mountain of joy because mount Zion or Mount Sinai has been replaced with mountain Zion, the mountain of fear and trembling and this worry that this powerful God is going to crush us if we do not follow him has been replaced with the knowledge that this new this new revelation of God that has come through in Jesus where we see exactly who God is has brought all kinds of freedom for us because the covenant is renewed in him in a way that he cannot be revoked from us.

And so what is a mountain of joy. You see this in verse 22, You have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, not a mountain that can be touched this full of all of these things, but to the heavenly Jerusalem, not just the Jerusalem that is there in the holy lands, the one that is maybe at the time or the writers being being attacked by the Romans, but a heavenly one. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly. you have come to a place where the angels aren't just bringing out messages about how we should live but they're now telling us joyfully that our lives have real purpose that we are loved and cherished by God that we are forgiven for all the ways that we have fallen short and that we are given them the power to live the new life that he is calling us something that we can love our neighbors that ourselves that we can love our enemies that we can disagree with others without saying that they're the worst people in the world that we can live a life that shows just how incredible God is because of the joy that he brings us. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels and joyful assembly you come to a party.

A party. To the church of the firstborn the firstborn of the dead. It takes away all of the power of those who say that they are powerful. Those who claim, make claims our lives and say, You must obey me or else I will put you to death. Or I will make things hard for you all of that is gone because now Jesus has gone through death to new life, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, to the judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect. You have come to a place where you can already taste the completeness that God offers, as he comes and lives and dwells within a particular group of people, and those who have gone before you have been made complete. And they are urging you on, they're encouraging you in your race, They are helping you endure, whatever it is you need to go through.

Exodus lead to a place where the people understood that God had a claim on them, and Mount Zion brings us to a place where we know only the God has a claim on our life, because he is powerful, that it's true that God has a claim on our life because He loves us, because we are His children. And he wants what's best for us. God has come in Jesus in a much more meaningful and effective way in the way he came to Moses and Elijah. Because through Him, we have been invited to a party to a joyful celebration. And while it might not always seem like that now and while we wrestle and struggle with the reality of life, as we wait for that final time and for the party to come. As we maybe carry our bicycles, knowing that when we get to a place, it will be fixed for us. For us, we can trust that it will be fixed. And it will be good. Yes, sometimes we have to sit and relax, rest, because it's the journey is difficult sometimes we scream and we cry out against God because because it seems as though he's making the journey difficult sometimes there were moments when I was yelling on the top of my lungs for someone to come and help me and no one did until the time when I got to the place where he could help. Through Him we have been invited to a joyful celebration and there are times when we simply have to endure and we simply have to get up and keep moving putting one foot in front of the other continuing to reflect on the stories of these people who have come before this hall of faith, who have who have been and gone through amazing things who can encourage us and who are cheering us on because we are not alone. Our work is not done because God is not done yet. Amen.

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