May the Lord Jesus lift you today by His presence.

*When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, “Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You.”*

 Luke 2:48

Have you ever lost your child in a grocery or department store? Perhaps in an amusement park or festival that was crowded with so many strangers? After just perhaps a moment or minute of panic and searching, you find them. You want to hug them and paddle them at the same time.

Joseph and Mary lost Jesus in Jerusalem. For three days. In Mary’s question, you can hear the panic, anxiety, desperation, relief, and anger.

They did not understand. They didn’t yet fully comprehend who Jesus was; to Whom He really belonged. They didn’t understand that His rightful place was in the house of the Living God.

We mustn’t be too hard on them. They were fragile humans, just like we are. How often do we panic when we can’t find God? Life becomes rough and it seems as if God has left us and doesn’t even care about us.

But what did Jesus tell us? “*Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*.” This is a promise from the lips of Jesus and relayed to us in the holy word of God, made to each of us who accept Him as our Saviour. It is true and is from the unchanging God – so it will always be true.

If we can’t find God, it is simply time to remember that He is right here with us and has not forsaken us. We hold His presence in faith, knowing that He has us in His hands.

In Christ’s love

John

 2-12-23

Hebrews 12:1-17 (2)

Last week we began a study of this passage which focuses on discipline. We concentrated on the first two verses and the practice of self-discipline. We are encouraged by lots of examples in the Bible and in our own experience, of those who never gave up the struggle to live Godly lives. For us in our Christian lives, we must discipline ourselves to the activities of prayer, Bible reading, and Christian fellowship. We do our best to joyously follow the commands of Christ. And we are constantly on guard, so that we avoid being entangled in sin, which will derail our Christian walk and the walk of those around us.

The rest of our passage looks at that discipline which is administered by God Himself. None of us likes the idea of being disciplined. For one thing, it tends to be painful. For another, it restricts us from what we naturally want to do. And, especially in our fallen human condition, we don’t like it when we don’t get to do what we want to do. But, by the grace of God and by the gift of the Holy Spirit, a Christian comes to understand what the discipline of God is all about. With this understanding, we can be at peace with God’s discipline and praise Him for it.

To begin, let’s consider what discipline means in the context of our passage. We tend to think of discipline as being punishment for wrongdoing. And it is. That meaning is definitely included in this context. But it includes much more. Keep in mind that God’s aim in discipline is much like that of a good father with his children; it is ultimately for their benefit.

God’s discipline includes training. As we go through life, if we apply Biblical truths to what we experience, we are trained in how to deal with whatever comes our way. Training involves actually going through things as opposed to just hearing about it. The experience tends to stick with us better. Along with that is instruction. As we go through God’s discipline, we are instructed, we learn. God’s goal is to develop our holiness, so He trains us and instructs us.

Part of God’s discipline is for guidance. We are constantly asking God for guidance in so many areas of our lives. Usually, what we mean when we ask for guidance is to have the answer to our problem suddenly and miraculously come to our mind. But that’s not the way it tends to work. Our guidance comes though the discipline of experience and suffering. We learn to apply the things we have already gone through to what we are facing in a way that we know is pleasing to God.

This does not mean that we don’t have real help from the Holy Spirit or from the good providence of God. Left entirely on our own, we would flounder and perish. But just as a wise parent might let his child learn something the hard way; he will still offer advice or intervene if the child is in over their head.

And of course, God will correct us if we start to stray from the proper path of His righteousness. The correction might be in the form of mild rebuke all the way to outright punishment. But here is the main thing to keep in mind: Our merciful Lord God is perfect in His giving discipline and it is always for our ultimate benefit. He never disciplines out of spite or anger or because He is having a bad day. In Jesus Christ, we are truly and in reality His sons and daughters. He will do what it takes to bring us to holiness so that we may live with Him forever.

Think about that for a while. God, really wants for us, to live with Him forever.

Because God is beyond our comprehension, the Bible often compares Him or what He does with things we are familiar with, so that we might understand. In this passage, the author of the letter to the Hebrews compares the disciplinary actions of God with that of earthly fathers. This comparison is to help us understand and is not to be pressed too far. Obviously, earthly fathers are far from perfect while God is absolutely perfect.

While the focus here is on fathers training and correcting their sons, it is certain from the Bible that both parents are responsible for the discipline of children and that children are to respect their parents. But with that, in the Biblical framework of the family, the father has the primary role in the discipline of the children. And in particular, of training the sons to be godly men. The image carries out further because God is our Father, so we picture Him acting to bring about our proper Christian upbringing.

As human-beings, we tend to apply the attributes of our dads to God. This may or may not be good. Again, this is a fallen world. The best of dads make mistakes and some don’t even try to fulfill their God ordained responsibilities. It can be difficult for us to lay aside poor examples or even just mistakes from our dads. But, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we must come to an understanding that God loves us beyond what we can imagine. Once we become His children through Jesus Christ, He will not allow anything to happen to us that will lead to our destruction. He will bring us to Himself in joyous perfection, to be with Him forever.

Time and again, the Bible calls us to perseverance. This means to stick with your conviction that Jesus Christ is your salvation, no matter what is going on in life or what it may cost you. James 1:12 says, “*Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*” Being approved means making it through to the end. Perseverance is a lifelong process. And, if everything was easy, we would not have to persevere. We must persevere because we suffer.

And all the suffering of a Christian is God’s discipline. Whether it is aggravation with a slow checkout person at Walmart or a terminal disease diagnosis, before it comes to you it is allowed by God for your discipline: be it training or correction. And it is perfectly what you need at that point in your life.

When faced with difficulty in your life, it is good to examine your life to see if there is something that is not good. Have you slipped into laxness in your devotion to God; is there some sin that you have allowed to creep into your life that has taken up residence; are you dwelling on thoughts that will eventually lead to sin? Search your heart to know if anything displeasing to God is building that will encumber your Christian race in this life.

Perhaps you won’t find anything. If this is the case, then know that the Lord has something to teach you and out of His deep love for you, this is the way you will learn. We may wonder why we suffer discipline even if there really isn’t anything we are blatantly doing wrong. Remember Genesis 6:5; *Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* Unfortunately, because of our fallen nature, we are always in need of discipline. Just praise God that He mercifully corrects us rather than simply letting us suffer eternity in hell as we deserve.

In verse 3, we are given encouragement by being reminded to look at Jesus. Consider all that He suffered in His life at the hands of sinners: Constant arguing and heckling, culminating in the hideous crucifixion. And He suffered all this even though He was innocent.

We will never suffer as Jesus did; we may suffer some of the same things He did, but He simultaneously endured brutal physical, mental, and emotional torment; and He suffered the wrath of God that none of us who are saved by Him will experience. He was content in doing the Father’s will and looked forward to the glory He would inherit: the same should be sufficient for us.

What the writer said in verse 4 applies to us here in the United States very well: We have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood. This is not to say that each person here has not suffered, I know better. But in our stand for Christ, we have not faced the trials that many face in other parts of the world. In Hebrews 10:34, the recipients of the letter are complemented: *For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one*.

If it ever comes to the confiscation of your property due to your stand for Christ, will you endure? Will you do so joyfully?

The writer turns to Job, Proverbs, and Psalms in verses 5 and 6 to admonish, encourage, and warn us. First, if the Lord disciplines you, pay attention. He has something for you and He is your loving Father. Whatever you go through will be rewarded many times over. It is tempting to become angry with God when we go through hard times and turn from Him. If we are Christian and do this, our lives will be sad and wearisome, and we will enter heaven with no treasure. If we had not truly turned to Christ, we will become apostate and eternally lost.

Nor let discipline discourage you. It doesn’t come because God hates you or is even mad at you; It comes because He loves you and is bringing you safely home to be with Him. If we did not belong to Him, He would let us go our own way, happy in this life, damned in the next.

The second part of verse 6 is tough, but it is still tempered with the love of God. *And He scourges every son whom He receives.* The discipline of the Lord can be far more than a slap on the wrist. Recall that a scourging is what Jesus endured before going to the cross. A scourge is a sort of whip that has several leather thongs. Each one has bits of metal, glass, and/or bone in it. As it strikes, it tears the skin and flesh.

This is an apt description of what each of us here have been through at some point or points in our lives. This is a diagnosis of a serious medical condition that may require much arduous treatment or even be terminal. This is a spouse or loved one who has passed on from this life. This is betrayal by someone we love and cherish and would gladly give our lives for. This is a family member who desperately needs reconciliation, either to other family or to the Lord.

All of these and others are scourges. The Lord calls us to endure them. We are to trust Him in these things, knowing that He is God and that He will be glorified in them; they are part of His divine plan to have a people to Himself; and that it will work for our good. Think of Job and all he suffered. Yet he remained faithful to God and satan was handed a defeat. Any time we remain faithful to God in adversity, satan is defeated and God is glorified.

Now in considering all this, we must not lose sight of the first part of verse 11, because it is profound and important. *All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful*. Our perseverance and faithfulness are necessary; but the reality is, that suffering is painful; discipline in whatever form, hurts. And our Lord God understands this.

He gives us His word, so that we can see what is happening to us and why. It is, again, a comfort to us and a means for the Holy Spirit to give us peace during trial. By having God’s word, we have an understanding about suffering that completely escapes the rest of the world. We at least have the knowledge that our discipline is for our good. *For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a lifetime; Weeping may last for the night, But a shout of joy comes in the morning*. (Psalm 30:5)

God has given us the gift of prayer. So many times in the Psalms we hear David or others of God’s people cry out to Him for relief. When we face difficulties, we can pray to God for relief. It is right to ask Him to remove our trials. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked that His trial be removed. We are not called to stoicism; we are not called to silently endure whatever we face, shrugging it off with “God’s will”. It may be God’s will, but we are to seek Him throughout; and He hears us.

It may be that God simply wanted for us to cry to Him for the end of our suffering, just so we would praise Him when it was over. He may have us endure for a while and then bring relief at the proper time. He may not bring relief, but give the strength and grace needed to get through. Ask God for an end to your suffering, but then accept His answer and praise Him for His goodness and wisdom.

Because God loves us and feels for us in our suffering He provides His word and prayer; but God often works through others and so He provides for fellowship. This is why being in church is so important; it gives us other Christians to support us in time of need. This is part of being a Christian, of being part of the body of Christ; that we help each other in crises. Galatians 6:2, *Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ*. This is part of our Christian responsibility.

As fallen people, we tend to mean well but say the wrong things. Don’t tell someone to hurry up and figure out what the Lord has for them to learn, so the suffering can be over with. That’s not helpful and the Lord has the timing already worked out. Don’t be like Job’s lousy friends and tell them they must have done something wrong and are being punished. Don’t glibly say “it’s God’s will” as if they shouldn’t be hurting; don’t tell them to suck it up since it’s for their good. If they have lost a loved one, don’t say that God wanted a beautiful flower for His garden. If God takes someone home, He has much better reasons for doing so. Their work was done and it was time for their rest and reward.

When a fellow Christian hurts, hurt with them. *Weep with those who weep*. (Rom 12:15) Hold their hand, sit with them, let them talk. Pray with them. We may have the knowledge that it is for our good, but the pain needs to be worked though; the simple comfort of having someone who simply cares is a great blessing.

God is good. All the time. He cares for you and He loves you and He will discipline you when you need it. Praise Him that He has seen fit to call you His child.

Prayer

God of all power and might, You who are wise and all-knowing; how blessed we are that You would make us Your children through Your only begotten Son, Jesus, our Christ. We turned away from Your goodness and our spirits were dead in sin, yet in Your great mercy, You reached down to us, and gave us new life.

As children, You discipline us. You provide for our training and instruction; You rebuke us when it is needed. You perfectly apply the scourge in due time. How painful these things are. Yet You apply the healing, and the scars left behind build us up into a holy temple; a place where Your Spirit dwells.

I lift up to You now, each one here, who has endured or is enduring the heavy hand of Your discipline. I ask that You would lighten the weight; that You would lift the burden; that we may praise You for Your mercy. If in Your wisdom it is better for the burden to remain, then I ask You for Your grace to sustain them; and we will praise You because You are God.

In Jesus’ name

Amen