

Do Not Neglect to Do Good

August 28, 2022

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All right, so it is the last Sunday of the month and Pastor John says I get to preach on those Sundays. So, thank you for being here to encourage me in this new endeavor that I call pastoring! I'm going to be reading this morning out of Hebrews, chapter 13, verses 1 through 8, and then we're going to skip down to verses 15 and 16. Now before I get started, Pastor John this week said, "There's nothing that Aaron does that he doesn't do with a certain air of intensity." And that is true. In fact, my wife often reminds me before I preach, "Aaron, don't forget not to scowl." And I'm feeling a little bit of intensity this morning, so I can't promise that I won't scowl. I only promise that I won't curse! If you can, would you please stand with me for the reading of God's Word: Hebrews 13, verses 1 through 8 and then 15 and 16.

Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unaware. Remember those who are in prison as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.

Let marriage be held in honor among all and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and the adulterous. Keep your life free from love of money and be content with what you have, for He has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper. I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

(And down to verse 15.)

Through Him, then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God that is the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

This is God's word and we are grateful for it. Please be seated.

Now, in the army you train and you train and you train and you train until you get the word that you're going to go and do it for real. And then as soon as you get the word that you're going to do it for real, you go and realize, "Perhaps I should have trained some more!" One of my favorite trainings was called Mirror Image Training, and for two weeks we were going to simulate life in an insurgent training camp. When I got there, they took away all of my books, took away all of my devices, and they gave me a new name. I was to be called Abu Ibrahim. In the mornings we would take a class or hear from a guest speaker. We learned the meaning and significance of the Islamic call to prayer. We learned insurgent tactics, techniques and procedures: how they did the things that they did. We became familiar with their weapons from pistols to rifles to mortars and even the rocket-propelled grenade launcher, also known as the RPG7, for you Call of Duty players. We heard the story and gained insights from a former member of the Irish Republican Army, among other guest speakers, and actual operational insights from people who had conducted insurgencies themselves. In the afternoon we executed the missions that we had planned the night before, every operation conducted with Simunition: not paint balls per se, but paint shot from actual weapons designed to create the illusion that you were being shot at by actual weapons. We conducted assassinations from the back of four-wheelers. It turns out that shooting somebody from

the back of a motorcycle is a lot more difficult than you would imagine! We kidnapped a local dignitary. We ambushed his security team and pulled him out of his car somewhere between his house and vacation destination. He expected it because he was a trainer but, man, was he surprised where we hit him! The two weeks culminated in the planned and executed assassination of an opposition mayor in the midst of a town-hall-style meeting. Which student was in charge rotated for each mission and this was my mission. If you want to hear more about this mission, man, do I have stories to tell! In the evenings we met with the local insurgent council, the shadow form of the local village council, to discuss our plans and to receive our next assignments. The whole thing was designed to get intelligence officers and leaders inside the mindset of those who we were working to predict, and it was profound in a surprising way. One of our guest speakers was a guy by the name of Michael Scheuer. He was and is a veteran of the CIA with more than 20 years of service. He served as the chief of the Bin Laden unit at the Counterterrorism Center. He has since resigned and moved into academia where he's the adjunct professor of Security Studies at Georgetown. We had intriguing conversations. However, the thing that was most important for me personally, is he brought a book that I could buy and read while I was stuck in this insurgent camp. And that book was called, "Through Our Enemies' Eyes," and it was about Osama bin Laden. And the thesis of the book was, if a person believed the things to be true that Osama believed, they would become more and more like Osama bin Laden. And it was intriguing because it got me thinking: If I believe what I believe is true, what do I become like?

Today we're going to look at three essential practices that I believe flow from the kernel of our belief, three practices that flow from our own precepts. And if we believe what we believe is really true, then we will practice these three practices more and more every day. Number one: Remember you are in God's care. Number two: Consider those who have gone before you. And number three: Offer pleasing sacrifices.

So, let's look at practice number one: Remember you are in God's care. The context of verses 5 and 6 are a series of practical exhortations. The first five of these verses provide common general guidelines: show hospitality, remember those who are persecuted, hold marriage in honor, avoid the love of money, be content. The seven that fill out the section from verses 7 to 19 concern the community's relationship with their leaders. However, the overall context is that of contentment. This contentment is the basis for any sacrifice, and its foundation rests on God's willingness to sacrifice on our behalf.

In the former Soviet Union, the peasant farmers often told stories to one another in which the government usually came out on the bottom side. In one case, a government official came to a farmer and inquired, "How did this year's potato crop go?" And the farmer responded, "Oh, it's wonderful. It was so big, it reached up to the very foot of God." Of course the Communist official scowled and he said, "Beware, comrade, this is a communist state and we are atheists. You must not forget that there is no God." "That's my point," the farmer replied. "No God, no potatoes!"

Well, we believers can easily recognize that all we have is given to us by God. This does not separate the Christian worldview from any other theistic worldview. In fact, it could have been easily as said, "No Allah, no potatoes," or, "No Great Spirit, no potatoes." Any creator that created all of creation has given us potatoes, and Christianity is no different in that respect from those worldviews. But there is one need

for which God had to sacrifice of Himself, and that is your need for redemption. Hebrews, chapter 9, verses 11 and 12, reads: "When Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, He entered once for all into the Holy Place; not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of His own blood, thus securing your eternal redemption." The writer of Hebrews is building on that thought all the way through the letter. And he's echoing Paul in Romans when Paul writes: "What, then, shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all--how will He not also, with Him, graciously give us all things?" Do you believe this? Those who went before us, those who brought us the very news of our redemption, they believed this.

And that brings us to practice number two: Consider those who have gone before you. Corrie ten Boom was a prisoner in the notorious Ravensbruck concentration camp. Under Hitler's reign, the Ravensbruck concentration camp was the largest concentration camp for women in the German Reich. In the concentration camp system, it was second in size only to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Corrie and her sister Betsie were housed at Ravensbruck and this is what she remembers of their arrival there: "Fleas!" I cried. "Betsie, the place is swarming with them!" We scrambled across the intervening platforms, heads low to avoid another bump, dropped down to the aisle, and edged our way to a patch of light. "Here! And here another one!" I wailed. "Betsie, how can we live in such a place!" "Show us. Show us how." It was said so matter of factly it took me seconds to realize that she was praying. More and more the distinction between prayer and the rest of life seemed to vanish. "Corrie!" she said excitedly. "He's given the answer before we asked, as He always does! In the Bible this morning. Where was it? Read that part again!" I glanced down the long dim aisle to make sure no guard was in sight, then drew the Bible from its pouch. "It was in First Thessalonians," I said. We were on our third complete reading of the New Testament since leaving Scheveningen. In the feeble light I turned the pages. "Here it is: 'Comfort the frightened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all...'" It seemed expressly written to us in Ravensbruck. "Go on," said Betsie. "That wasn't all." "Oh yes: '... to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus—'" "That's it, Corrie! That's His answer. 'Give thanks in all circumstances!' That's what we can do. We can start right now to thank God for every single thing about this new barracks!" I looked down at the Bible. "Yes! Thank You, dear Lord, that there was no inspection when we entered here! Thank You for all the women, here in this room, who will meet You in these pages." "Yes," said Betsie. "Thank You for the very crowding, and thank You for the jammed, crammed, stuffed, packed, suffocating crowds. Thank You for the fleas."

The writer of Hebrews was pointing his readers to those Christians who brought the Word of God to them, those who lived to get good, to do good. They were faithful to their God and His cause. They suffered persecution and, for the testimony of Jesus, died a violent death. God never left them. No, He never forsook them, so that they were happy in their afflictions and glorious in their death. What was the outcome of their lives? It was perseverance first, and saved souls second. We are to carefully consider them, act as they did, keep the faith, and God will keep you. But how had God kept Corrie ten Boom? What provision had He provided for her? The answer, oddly enough, was fleas. She writes again: One evening I got back to the barracks late from a wood-gathering foray outside the walls. Betsie was waiting for me, as always, so that we could walk through the food line together. Her eyes were twinkling. "You're looking

extraordinarily pleased with yourself," I told her. "You know, we've never understood why we had so much freedom in the big room," she said. "Well, I've found out." That afternoon, she said, there'd been confusion in her knitting group about sock sizes and they'd asked the supervisor to come and settle it. "But the supervisor wouldn't come. She wouldn't step through the door and neither would the guards. And you know why? Because of the fleas! That's what she said, 'The place was crawling with fleas!'" Hundreds of women came to know their Savior in the moments before the end of their lives because of a Bible study that no guards were present to put a stop to. Hundreds of women were encouraged to perseverance because of a Bible study that no guards were present to put a stop to. Later, some of those very guards would come to know the forgiveness of God because of a Bible study that no guards were present to put a stop to.

How often do we consider the person or people who brought the good news to our ears? How often do we consider the sacrifices that they made, so that they could bring that good news to our ears? If we consider carefully the outcome of their lives, we discover that our faith is the outcome of their lives. They knew God's provision, and out of that provision they shared with you. That provision has not changed. It's the same yesterday and today. Jesus Christ is that provision.

Practice three: We're to offer pleasing sacrifices. Now there's a double entendre here. The Israelites of this time were waiting for a Messiah and they knew that after that Messiah came, it would be a time of pleasing sacrifices. The writer of Hebrews is writing that we are in the times of the Messiah, the times in which we are supposed to offer pleasing sacrifices. Adam Clarke writes: "In the time of the Messiah, all sacrifice shall cease except the sacrifice of praise. This was, in effect, quoting the authority of one of the Jews' own maxims that now was the time of the Messiah, that Jesus was that Messiah, that the Jewish sacrificial system was now abolished, and that no sacrifice would now be accepted of God, except the sacrifice of praise for the gift of His Son."

There is, first, a gratefulness that comes from recognizing God's greatest provision in His own sacrifice, what He did for you. If you do not understand that, I would encourage you to dig and dig and dig into God's word. And as soon as you understand it, there's a level of gratefulness that you cannot comprehend until you find yourself in that moment. Second, out of that gratefulness for God's sacrifice comes a desire to sacrifice on His behalf. Did you hear that? A desire to sacrifice on His behalf should be a result of the sacrifice that you recognize that He has done for you. And this is not works-based faith. Any act that is intended to earn you merit toward entrance into heaven does not follow from gratefulness. Any act that is intended solely to make you feel good about doing good so that you can feel like a good person, falls into the same category. No, a pleasing sacrifice must be a sacrifice that flows from a gratefulness to and for God's provision. And it is a sacrifice! How many of you have received a free cup of coffee at Starbucks because you were in line behind somebody that paid for your coffee? What was the sacrifice there? Now, don't get me wrong, it's a good act. But what was the sacrifice there? Paul again, encouraging the Romans in chapter 12, writes: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect." And we are to be living sacrifices towards that that is good, acceptable and perfect. The

exhortation: "Do not neglect..." is connected to hospitality and suggests that some effort is needed if we are to avoid neglecting that responsibility.

From the time Tim Burke could remember, his dream was to be a professional baseball player. He worked hard and sacrificed for that goal and became a successful professional pitcher, playing for the Montreal Expos starting in 1985, the New York Mets in 1991, and the New York Yankees in 1992. In the midst of his success, he and his wife discovered that they could not become pregnant to start a family. Right now, you're thinking, "Oh, I'm excited! Aaron's a baseball fan!" It turns out this story spoke to me because of this moment: they could not become pregnant to start a family. Prayerfully, they decided to adopt four special needs international children. This led to one of the most difficult decisions in Tim's life. He discovered that his life on the road conflicted with his ability to be a quality husband and dad. Over time, it became clear that he couldn't do a good job at both. After more prayer and soul searching, he made what many considered an unbelievable decision. He decided to give up professional baseball. You could argue that there's a sacrifice there. When he left the stadium for the last time, reporters wanted to know why he was retiring. He said, "Baseball is going to do just fine without me. It's not going to miss a beat. But I'm the only father my children have, I'm the only husband my wife has, and they need me a lot more than baseball does." Our God made the most profound sacrifice for you because He is good. And out of that goodness came a love for you that culminated in a sacrifice. What sacrifices do good men have to make to be good men? What sacrifices do good fathers have to make to be good fathers? What sacrifices do good husbands have to make to be good husbands? Now, I chose good men, fathers, husbands, because a good sermon first preaches to the preacher. I'm not very good at this. I want to be a good man, a good father, and a good husband, because a good God loved and loves me, but it applies equally to women, mothers, wives, sons and daughters, soldiers, politicians, businessmen, businesswomen, and stay-at-home parents. In fact, we have to ask the question: where do we draw the line? Our immediate families, our extended families, our friends, our relatives? Or should we sacrifice for our co-workers and, dare I say it, even the ones we don't like? No, God's provision is so vast that our inheritance will never be diminished by what we give here and what we sacrifice here.

As Christians, we believe that the deity, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ secured our eternal redemption. What follows from that belief? Who do you become when you hold securely to this truth? First, you become a person who trusts in the provision and care of God. Second, you become a person who is grateful for the good news and those who brought it to them. And finally, but probably most importantly, you become a person ready to make the sacrifices necessary to do good, knowing how much good has been done for you. I would remind you this morning that there is nothing keeping you from getting back on track with God. There isn't a selfish act that cannot be repented of and for which God does not stand ready to offer forgiveness. He has already made the sacrifice. He only waits for your humble return. Remember what He did for you. Confess your disobedience and begin today to offer those pleasing sacrifices worthy of your citizenship in God's kingdom, not because you have to earn that citizenship, but because you are already a citizen of one of the most wealthy nations in all of creation. Let's pray.

Lord, You set the example. You gave of Yourself so that we could give of ourselves. There's a world of darkness out there, Lord, that needs Your light. Lord, may we make the sacrifices that are necessary to bring Your light to that world.