

Title: Last Words before the Storm
Text: Hebrews 13.22-25
Theme: The sufficient grace of God
Series: Hebrews #64
Prop Stmtnt: In spite of the headwinds of this world, we progress by the wind God at our backs.
Aim: I aim to help my people take an inventory of their life and spiritual progress in light of having been entrusted with the book of Hebrews.

Several years ago when we took Bobby to college, I remember having a sense of regret, even a bit of panic as I began to think of all of the things that I wanted him to know and master before he left home. Did I teach him? Did he get it? What should I have done differently? Some of that same angst is present with me this morning as we come to the end of our study of Hebrews. I wonder if I taught it properly. I wonder if you have really heard me. More importantly, I wonder if you have really grasped the truths of this book. Soon, I will give an account to God for how I have presented his Word. Soon, you will give an account to God for you have responded to his Word. When I consider the weight of preaching it is daunting. When we consider the gravity of hearing and then obeying, it is equally sobering.

Jesus concluded his famed “Sermon on the Mount” with a story about the wise man and the foolish man, both of whom built homes. The wise man was the man who heard the words of Christ and obeyed it. He was the guy who built his house upon a rock. When the hurricane crashed, his house didn’t. The foolish man was the man who too heard the words of Christ. But that was it. He heard but did not obey. Was he distracted by other things? Did he not take it seriously? Did he make excuses? Did he intend to obey, but sort of forgot? Did he think that listening, (like attending church) was the point, and was good enough? Jesus said that he was a fool. Let that sink in. Jesus said he was a fool who built his house on sand. When the storm crashed, so did his life. The wise man was protected by the Word of God. He made God his shelter. He trusted God. His trust in God was not simply words. It was true belief. The trueness, the evidence of his belief was seen in his obedience. Trust and obey – there is no other way. Trust-driven, faith-driven obedience is the evidence of authentic Christianity.

Do you know what Hebrews is about? In many ways, it is a reflection of the story line of the Bible. The Bible tells us over and over and over that all of the storms of life are pointing to the big one, when the whole thing crashes. It is all coming down. Every kingdom, nation, empire and culture will crash. The only thing that will last is the real King and His Kingdom. The author of Hebrews knows this. He is writing to a people who are at ground zero of the world’s superpower of its day. They were in Rome. The evidences of power and authority were all around them. The colossal Roman Empire looked unbeatable. And they were increasingly being viewed as enemies of Rome. Some of them had already endured a storm. Some of them were in another storm and the all of them were about to go through another. Hebrews is all about the King. The author of Hebrews is showing them (and us) why he is the King and why he is worthy of our trust, why after the storm comes and everything else is leveled to the ground, reduced to dust,

blown away by the wind, will the King and the Kingdom, and only the King and the Kingdom remain. His focus is not on the storm, but on the Savior. He is not only the only Savior, but he is the Glorious Savior! I have preached Hebrews to you so that you are ready for the storms that come in your life and so that we are ready for the storm that is coming that will take everything down. I want you to know Christ. I want you to be safe in Christ. When the storm comes, we will stand then the way we live now; on Christ. If you are not standing now, don't kid yourself and think that you will stand then. Beloved, it is no game. Listen to the word.

Read Text:

Read these verses again and as you do, try to answer this question; what one word summarizes this text?

Observations from the Text:

1. This is very personal. (22)

We see again, how much this writer loves these people. There is a care, an affection, a trust, a concern, and a commitment, that is evident. Look at all of the words that he uses that reflect that.

The point that I really want to keep pressing upon us is how close our relationships are to be within the body of Christ. Many of you know that and you enjoy that and benefit from it. But some of you look at the church like you would a movie theater. What are they showing right now? Does it appeal to me? Are the show times convenient? Can I sneak it in before I do something else? Or, when is it free popcorn night? If one theater doesn't have what you want, you simply find one that does, and that is fine if you are talking about a movie theater, but not church. Church is family. We are brothers and sisters who are related together forever. That is what the word "brothers" (v.22) speaks to.

Notice the word "appeal" (v.22). This is translated from the Gk. word *parakaleo*. (*verb form*) *Parakaleo* can mean several things. It is actually a compound word (screen) that has many uses and is the same word that is translated as "exhortation" (noun form) in the same verse. Para = alongside of, kaleo = to call. That is why the word "appeal" is such a good translation. The author of Hebrews is coming alongside of these people that he dearly loves and has invested himself into and from his heart is pleading with them to take seriously what he has written. Then he describes what he has written as "my word of exhortation" that is "my word of coming alongside of you."

He has kept this letter brief for their sakes. He really wants them to grasp the points that he has made and I think by making this statement he recognizes that while he has made some detailed arguments, that he could actually have said even more, but for their sakes wanted them to get his points.

Beloved, I share his heart. Preaching, teaching and exhorting may be part of my job description and to that extent it is my job, but sermons are so much more than writing and delivering on a task that is expected of me in order to keep employment. My goal has not been to get through Hebrews, but to see the truths of Hebrews get through you. I know, like the author of Hebrews knew for these people that our greatest and ultimate hope is Christ. He alone possesses the status of the eternal Son of God. He alone is the one whom angels worship, whose throne has been established forever ever, whose scepter is righteousness. He alone is the One who sits at the right hand of the Father, until his enemies are made a footstool for his feet. He is the One crowned with glory and honor because he suffered and died and in his dying tasted death for everyone. He is the one for whom and by whom all things exist who is bringing many sons to glory. He is the one who became flesh and blood so that he could take upon himself our sins and our death, which he did. And when he died, he broke the power of the one who had the power of death and Christ delivered all those who through the fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. His suffering enabled him to be a perfect priest for those who suffer. His death enabled him to be a perfect offering for those who sin. His resurrection enabled him to be the eternal king for those who are born into his kingdom. And because he reigns eternally supreme, when he speaks, his word is final, his promise is sure, and we can stand upon it with confidence. He is greater than Moses, greater than the angels, greater than David, greater than Melchizedek, greater than Abraham for he is the founder and completer of the new and final covenant. Because his offering for sin is once and for all complete, we have full confidence to enter the holy place. We are commanded by God himself to come boldly into his presence. Bold access is granted because of a bold faith in a perfect Savior. We are to enter in. We are to hold fast together our confession of hope without wavering because God is faithful. We are to consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. We are not to neglect meeting together, but instead encourage one another all the more as the day (storm) approaches. I know that Christ is your firm and final hope. That is the confidence and excitement that I have for you. So, yes, this is personal. Hebrews is written in the eye of the storm, but it focuses upon the glorious shelter that we have in Christ. And yet, evidence of the storm is present.

2. **This is urgent.** (23)

Timothy has just been released from prison. I assume that this is the same Timothy that Paul wrote about and to. I say that because I believe that based on v.24, this book was written to believers in Rome and the believers in Rome knew Timothy (Romans 16.21). As an aside, I believe that this letter was around 65 – 67 AD and that 2 Timothy was written a little bit before this. In 2 Timothy, Paul was encouraging Timothy to be strong in the face of the coming adversity. If this is the same Timothy, then we find out that he was imprisoned and the author of Hebrews is saying, that he has now been released and may be coming to see them shortly. That little phrase about Timothy only underscores the urgency of this letter. Believers lived under the threat of imprisonment and death. Would you come to church if you knew that government officials were doing surveillance in the parking lot this morning and were reporting all of our names to local officials for harassment, questioning and possible detainment? Some of us may not face that, but

based on the current political and cultural trajectory, it is very likely that many of our children will. The storm is coming.

3. **Your life and our church matter.** (24)

Verse 24 speaks, not only of the relationship between the writer and the people, but he is passing along greetings from the people who are with him, who know them. This is an illustration of the principle in 12.1-2. There are people who you do not see on a regular basis who are impacted by your faithfulness. Throughout this book the author of Hebrews is appealing to these people to press on with joy. Now we read that there were people with him who obviously had a relationship with these people and cared about them.

Cornerstone, you and I are often tempted by the evil one to think that our faithfulness does not matter. And there are times when we fade in and out of people's lives and they do with us to a certain extent. But your faithfulness adds to the collective testimony of this church. Our faithfulness to the gospel and our faithfulness to the Word, and to each other is an encouragement to our missionaries, some of whom could not stay in ministry without us.

Most of you have not heard of Ogletown Baptist Church in Newark, Delaware. But the pastor there is a friend of mine, younger in age, and therefore younger in tenure. He is seeking to be a faithful pastor. We talk by phone on a regular basis as I do with a number of other pastors. We pray for each other and I get to share in his joys and he in mine. I tell him stories of God's faithfulness through you. Someday, maybe not til heaven, you will meet him and the flock that he pastored, but you matter to them in ways that you don't even realize. I love to tell people about you. I love for you to see and grasp the value of the body of Christ all over this world.

4. **This is a summary and a reminder.** (25)

"Grace be with all of you." What a fitting final statement! What is the concern of the writer? He is demonstrating why it would be a colossal mistake for them to go back to Judaism. Grace is being credited with Christ's righteousness that I do not deserve because his life and death in my place. Faith alone in Christ alone is the only means by which you, or anyone can receive this grace. Saving grace is how we begin the Christian journey. Sanctifying grace is how we continue. Judaism, however, had been turned into a vain attempt to please God by Jewishness and by obeying the law. Judaism was a forfeiture of grace. Judaism had become an idol that replaced the true God it was originally designed to worship. So, when the author of Hebrews says, "Grace be with all of you" He is summarizing the point of this book and reminding us of what we have through Christ. Grace is what is supposed to define our relationships, conversations, reactions and motives. Grace is to be seen in our care and concern. Grace is the grease that eliminates the friction of life. Grace is how you press on with joy in spite of the coming storm. Grace is realizing that what I have in Christ means that no matter what, I am better than I deserve. Grace is the foundation for joy. Grace is the foundation for

laughing the laugh of faith even in the valley. “Grace be with all of you”, really says it all.

Truths to consider:

1. How seriously do I value Christ?

Here is a very personal question. Is there anything or anyone that at this moment you say, “I cannot live without.” Now some people joke about that being chocolate or football, but I’m serious. In your heart of hearts, is there a person, a status, a possession or position that if it were taken away from you, you would say, “I don’t want to live.” Whatever “that” is, it is your god. If that person, status, possession or position is anything other than Christ, then you are serving an idol that cannot save you. Hebrews goes into great detail as to why Christ is to be treasured and valued above all. Do you treasure Him? Do you really, in your heart of hearts believe that you could not live without Christ? Does Christ, does His Word, does his gospel grip you, thrill you, truly comfort you, define you, drive you, hold you, fill you, and direct you? We treasure him when we love his commands and take them to heart and obey them by faith and with joy.

2. How seriously do I value the church?

Do you see your life the way God does? Do you realize that we are, first and foremost over everything else, followers of Christ, citizens of His kingdom, partners in ministry, part of the bride? The church is not something I simply attend. When you become a follower of Christ, the church becomes ground zero for our lives. So, ask yourself, what am I doing to strengthen her, to encourage others, to minister, to serve, to support the spreading of the gospel, to be stretched, to be uncomfortable?

3. Am I being lulled asleep by the culture?

Today, the eastern seaboard of this country is being pounded by Hurricane Irene. For over a week the news has alerted the millions of people to take necessary steps because a major storm is coming. Beloved, this world is facing a storm, the likes of which it has never seen. At some point, everything is coming down. Every kingdom, every nation, every government, every human sense of protection is coming down. God has said it. The stone cut out without hands has hit the base of the kingdoms, they are coming down. Are you ready? Are you ready for it all to come down? Are you okay with that? Are you looking for the King to come?

4. Do I realize how much my life affects others?

We studied chapter eleven and were sobered by the reality that we stand on the shoulders of faithful men and women who came before us. We stand now because they did not fall. We stand now because they did NOT say, “it doesn’t matter how I live, someone else will take my place.” They stood, so that we will stand. We stand, we remain, we press on with joy, so that our children, grandchildren, and other believers will see a witness and learn

from an example of faithfulness. But think about what you have in your hand. Other than this comment about Timothy, no person in that church or associated with that church is named in this entire letter, not even the author. And yet, their presence and their faithfulness under pressure was the occasion for this book that is fed our souls and encouraged our hearts. So, what happened to the believers in Rome? Did “it” work? Did they take to heart these truths?

Diognetus was a tutor to Marcus Aurelius, emperor of Rome from 161 to 180 AD. For 100 years Roman officials were perplexed by the Christian question. What do we do with these followers of Christ? A follower of Christ, possibly (likely) from Rome wrote a letter to Diognetus, defending Christians by attempting to explain Christianity to him. The letter has 12 sections to it. I am quoting from the 5th section known as “The Manners of the Christians.”

“Christians are not different because of their country or the language they speak or the way they dress. They do not isolate themselves in their cities nor use a private language; even the life they lead has nothing strange. Their doctrine does not originate from the elaborate disquisitions of intellectuals, nor do they follow, as many do, philosophical systems, which are the fruit of human thinking. They live in Greek or in barbarian (foreign) cities, as the case may be, and adapt themselves to local traditions in dress, food and all usage. Yet they testify to a way, which, in the opinion of the many, has something extraordinary about it.

They live in their own countries and are strangers. They loyally fulfill their duties as citizens, but are treated as foreigners. Every foreign land is for them a fatherland and every fatherland, foreign. They marry like everyone, they have children, but they do not abandon their newborn. They have the table in common, but not the bed. They are in the flesh, but do not live according to the flesh (2 Cor 10.3; Rom 8.12-15). They dwell on earth, but are citizens of heaven. They obey the laws of the state, but in their lives they go beyond the law. They love everyone, yet are persecuted by everyone. No one really knows them, but all condemn them. They are killed, but go on living. They are poor, but enrich many (2 Cor 6,9-10). They have nothing, but abound in everything. But in that contempt they find glory before God. Their honor is insulted, while their justice is acknowledged. When they are cursed, they bless. When they are insulted, they answer with kind words (1 Cor 4.12-13). They do good to others and are punished like evildoers. When they are punished, they rejoice, as if they were given life. The Jews make war against them as if they were a foreign race. The Greek persecute them, but those who hate them, cannot tell the reason for their hatred.”

Today, there is no Roman Empire. But the gospel cannot be stopped. Today, who would you rather be? Nero, or one of these unnamed Hebrew believers in Rome? “Grace be with all of you.”