

Title: Take your best shot!
Text: Hebrews 13.6
Theme: Living with no fear
Series: Hebrews #56
Prop Stmt: When we rightfully fear God we fear nothing else.
Aim: I aim to help lead my people into fully trusting God for everything.

Read Text:

Now, the reason why the author of Hebrews wrote this would have been very clear to the original audience of this letter. They had endured one round of persecution and were about to face another. In order to escape the persecution, all that one had to do was to agree that “Caesar ha Kurios” (Caesar is Lord). That’s it! A mere formality, a simple statement that everybody knows is not really true, but is required by Roman law for all Roman citizens to affirm. Of course, if you don’t sign the statement, you could lose your job, your home, your possessions, and perhaps be sent away to hard labor and who knows what would happen to your family. So, do you see how important this truth is?

But, that wouldn’t happen here, would it? After all, we are one nation under God. We sing “God Bless America” at the 7th inning of our baseball games. We have “In God we Trust” printed on our money. Beloved, there is an agenda of radical liberalism that is hell bent on demanding that God’s view of marriage and God’s view of the family, and the Bible’s teaching on homosexuality be accepted and promoted by all.

Julea Ward was majoring in Counseling at Eastern Michigan University. The school demanded that she accept their view of human sexuality, which meant that she had to give up the biblical view of human sexuality. What do you do? After all, it’s just a formality – right? If you don’t agree, you can get thrown out of the degree program, you can lose credits, you can get marked, you can jeopardize your graduation, you can lose out on scholarship dollars, graduate school placement, references and of course, job opportunities. Julea had every human reason to quietly affirm a statement that she did not believe. Who will you fear? Will you fear the officials? Will you be intimidated by those who “control your future” or “control your job” or have “power over you and what is precious to you”? You will not stand up for Christ in the big areas, if you do not stand up for him in the little areas. Julea refused to bow her knee before Baal and when she didn’t, she was thrown out of the program. Her case is before the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. It will be interesting to see how this plays out. Elaine Huguenin is a photographer who declined to photograph the “commitment ceremony” for two women and was ordered by the New Mexico human rights commission to pay almost \$7,000 to the women for their legal fees after they brought suit against her.

I tell you these things because I sincerely believe that you and I will pay a cost for our beliefs and you need to be ready for it. Proposition 8 is the marriage statement approved by the citizens of California. It is being challenged in court. The city of San

Francisco used the positional statements of the Southern Baptist Convention, (which is beautifully written and biblically based) as an example of hatred against people who practice homosexuality. The day is coming when your membership in this church will most likely be used against you in your effort to foster or adopt children, to work in certain social services jobs, and that is just the beginning. How you respond to that pressure will depend on who you really trust.

This morning we are concentrating our time on verse 6, but verse 6 is part of a flow of thought. When you place your confidence in money, then your affections, attention, and concern goes to either protecting what you have, or figuring out some way to get more. When you do that, you fail to really appreciate and take joy in what you already have (contentment). But think of this. God made us with the capacity to be satisfied. He made us with needs and those needs and desire for satisfaction and contentment drive us. Now, God designed us that way so that we will seek Him as the fountain, who alone can fully satisfy. However, a person without Christ still tries to find satisfaction, but he is left trying to find contentment in something that will not last.

1. **God's Promise of His Presence** – “I will never leave you nor forsake you”

When you look at verse 5 you see that the command to be content is linked to the promise of God who said, regarding his children, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” That is an incredible promise. Would you not love to be able to make that promise? It is the stuff that songs are made of, you know, the ones that are performed at weddings or used in the backdrop of the pictures. The problem is, we cannot guarantee that we can fulfill it. If I get sick and die, I can't carry out my promise to always “be there.” We are at the mercy of this body. We are at the mercy of our cars. We may promise someone that we will be there, but when you get stuck in traffic, or you get caught unexpectedly by a problem at work, or when you just, flat out – forget, you reveal your frailty.

But when God says, “I will never leave you, nor forsake you.” It is rock-solid. Fact is, when we take oaths, we invoke the name of God (“so help me God” or “God is my witness” or even put our hands on the Bible) as a sign of solemn commitment. We appeal to God because God is a promise-making, promise-keeping God. When you look at the Bible, you can summarize the Old Testament with the phrase – “promises made.” You can summarize the New Testament with the phrase – “promises kept.” So, when this promise-making, promise-keeping God who cannot lie, cannot be stopped, cannot be thwarted, cannot get sick and cannot die says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you”, you can bank on it. You can endure anything, even with joy.

But let's explore this a bit. What does it mean, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” When you look at what our response is to be to this promise, then it is obvious that this promise is profoundly significant. What is it about this promise that beckons us to bank so much upon it?

The reason why this promise is so gratifying and so encouraging and so compelling is because not only will God never leave his children, God cannot leave his children. Try to get your mind around this. God cannot leave you. I say that based upon the Bible's teaching of our union with Christ.

Consider this:

Ephesians 1.4 [God] "chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world."

That means, when in eternity past God chose to create us and then set his love upon us he did so with a view toward us belonging to Christ. God determined from the beginning a plan for our salvation by which we would forever belong to Christ. Because of that, when Christ came to this earth, God saw us in the obedience of Christ. When Christ obeyed God viewed it as Him obeying for us. As Romans 5.19 says, "...by the one's man obedience the many will be made righteous." Christ is our righteousness. As Romans goes on to explain, that not only when Christ lived, you lived, but when Christ died, you died. When Christ arose, you arose, and when Christ ascended, you ascended. This is difficult for us to grasp because we think in terms of time, but God thinks in terms of position. All of this having been accomplished for us by Christ, is activated, applied, and experienced in real time when we by faith trust in Christ as our Savior. His life, his death, his burial, his resurrection, and his ascension are all ours!

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us IN CHRIST JESUS."
(Ephesians 2.4-7)

We are in Christ and Christ is in us. "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." (Galatians 2.20a) "Christ in you the hope of glory." (Colossians 1.27b) So, we are in Christ, Christ is in us, we are like Christ, we are with Christ and Christ is with us because we are in him and he is in us. Where he is, we are and where we are, he is. Which means, that not only will he not leave us nor forsake us, he cannot leave us or forsake us.

Do you remember when Christ hijacked Saul on the road to Damascus? (Acts 9) What did Christ say to Saul? "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Every person that Saul imprisoned or tormented or even killed was a direct action against Christ himself. So, because of this glorious truth, what are we to think?

2. Our Confession of Faith

Verse 6 is like a confession of faith. Here God is telling us (excitedly it seems) what our heart-response is to this truth. He does not promise protection from cancer, or

from accidents, or from job loss, or from relational difficulties. He promises that even though you will face that and more, that you will not face it alone. And his presence is such a game-changer that you can respond with confidence. “So we can confidently say” (sounds like preaching to one another doesn’t it?)

A. The LORD is my helper (6a) (say it aloud)

This phrase comes from Psalm 118. This Psalm begins by repeating four times, the phrase, “his steadfast love endures forever.” Later the Psalmist writes (v.7), “The LORD is on my side as my helper;” Now, this is helpful because in this Psalm the psalmist speaks of being persecuted (5), being hated (7), being in need of trust and hope (8-9), meaning, just because the Lord was at his side, did not protect him from difficulty.

So, how are we to take this phrase? This promise is not a promise of escape from difficulties, but is a promise of presence and help through the difficulties.

“When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, my grace all sufficient shall be thy supply. The flame shall not hurt thee, I only design, thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.”

John Flavel was a faithful Puritan pastor (300 years ago) who asked this wonderful question. “How is it imaginable that God should withhold, after this, spirituals or temporals from his people? How shall he not call them effectually, justify them freely, sanctify them thoroughly, and glorify them eternally? How shall he not clothe them, feed them, protect and deliver them? Surely if he would not spare his own Son one stroke, one tear, one groan, one sigh, one circumstance of misery, it can never be imagined that ever he should, after this, deny or withhold from his people, for whose sakes all this was suffered, any mercies, any comforts, any privilege, spiritual or temporal, which is good for them.”

B. I will not fear (6b) (say it aloud)

Wow! I will not fear the loss of income because I stand for the gospel. I will not fear the loss of my home and possessions because I identify myself with the people of God. I will not fear the personal hardship and persecution because I claim to be loyal to Christ. I will not fear.

Now, most of us are not facing that level of pressure – yet. But, you are facing pressure that God is using to get you ready to face that. Some of you cannot imagine standing tall on that day because you are so vulnerable to the opinions of others. Some of you may not live in bondage to money, but you live in bondage to the opinions of others. You live in fear of what others think. Now, how does that work – huh? Your Father is the KING and you are a slave to the master of people’s opinions. Does that make any sense? You live in fear that others may hurt you, that others

may threaten your esteem, that you may lose a friendship, or lose the respect of others, or lose some comforts.

Let me ask you some questions:

- How do you respond to criticism? Do you dwell on it forever until it drives you into the ground?
- Do you worry about what people think of you? Do you act like you don't because you really do?
- Would you rather sin than be rejected by people?
- Do you base your value upon the approval others?
- Do you try really hard to make a good impression on people you meet for the first time?
- Does the fear of being hurt keep you from being close to people?
- Do you avoid certain people?

Now, here is why I bring this up. Most relationships in this world are based on performance. Athletes are loved and adored and cheered as long as they perform. Coaches are loved and adored and cheered as long as they follow the NCAA rules (or don't get caught). Students are applauded and lauded as long as they get good grades. So, how does that translate into religion? Most religions are works-based. If I do the ritual, I will be affirmed and told that I am a good _____. Meaning, if I perform and obey, then I am accepted. How much is good enough? But, if I ever mess up, then I am not accepted. Most of you live with the fear of failure. You fear messing up because you fear that in messing up you will face the disapproval of others and you cannot handle that. And the fact is, our world is cruel. We crush the weak, mock the vulnerable, and belittle those who do not perform up to our standards. We say grace but we tend to live law. And this is why the gospel is so difficult to grasp, even though it is simple, it is difficult to grasp. Your acceptance and approval by God is not based upon your obedience. Your acceptance and approval by God is based upon the obedience of his Son, in your place! It is not, "if I obey then I am accepted." It is, "Since Christ obeyed in my place by living for me and dying for me, then I am accepted because I get credit for his life and death. I am free to live for him without the fear that when I stumble that I am going to get kicked out of the family. Because he will never leave me nor forsake me then I need to ask myself:

Can anyone take away your inheritance? No! And if your inheritance is certain and the kingdom that you are receiving cannot be shaken, then how should you view money? How should you view life?

C. What can man do to me? (6c) (say it aloud)

What can man do to you? Well, the truth is, man can do a lot to you. But what man does is not greater than God. Can man take my job? Yes, but he can't touch my soul. Can man take my family, my home, my possessions, my church? Yes, but nothing can

touch me that doesn't first go through God. So, if someone wants to do something to me, they are taking on someone (not me) that they should not mess with.

We stand on the shoulders of men and women who paid with their lives the cost of defending the gospel that it might be handed down to us in purity. I read again this week the stories of martyrs like Polycarp and Jon Huss. At his trial, Polycarp was threatened with death by lions if he did not repent of his unwillingness to declare Caesar as Lord. His response was that he feared repenting of that which was true infinitely more than lions. The prosecutor then threatened him with death by fire to which Polycarp (86 years old by the way) said, that death by fire would last but a short time, but the fire of judgment would last forever. In other words, whatever threat you throw at me has no power over me. "No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck him from his hand." So, we can say to the world, go ahead, take your best shot. The Lord is my helper. I will not fear. What can man do to me? When you, because of your confidence in the gospel, are free from temporal power of money, free from the fear of man, free from the clutches of things, you are free to serve others without concern of the cost of reputation or cost of position. That is what the AH is calling them and us to. Because when we do, we make much of Christ.

Greatest example of this is found in John 19.10-11. Pilate threatens Christ by saying, "Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above." What could Pilate do to Christ – nothing, except what the Father permitted. And what Pilate did sinfully, and with full responsibility, God used as the means to our salvation. Christ surrendered himself to the plan of his Father. That plan included his death in which he, Christ was God forsaken by God, so that we would never be. So, while God may call us, like he called some of these believers to go through some deep waters and fiery trials, they went through knowing that they were not home yet. Here, we have no lasting city (14). The freedom that comes from not being bound to this world enables us to minister to people even at great cost, which from eternity's perspective is no cost at all.