

Sermon Transcript

08.30.2026

Hebrews 12:12-17

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- Good morning. Hebrews 12.
- As you make your way there, I want to tell you another story from the Olympics. You may recall we talked about Michael Phelps and Usain Bolt a couple of weeks back because Hebrews 12 has a lot of athletic imagery, but today I want to tell you the story of someone less well known, Derek Redmond, a British athlete who was one of the favorites in the 1992 Barcelona games.
- You may not remember his name, but you might be familiar with his story.
- Redmond was a European and world champion in the 400 meter dash so hopes were high for the 92 games. He posted the best time in the first round and won his quarter final match, but things took a turn for the worse in the semi-finals.
- He started well, but as he reached about the halfway point, he ground to a stop and fell to the ground in anguish, having torn his hamstring.
- Medical professionals approached with a stretcher, but he waved them off as he wanted to finish the race. So he got up and started hobbling to the finish in obvious pain. Seeing his son in such agony, Derek's dad came out of the stands, pushed his way past security and helped his son limp across the finish line as the crowd gave him a standing ovation.
- That's the image that I have when I think of this passage. The Hebrews readers are tired and disheartened. They've faced persecution, they've suffered. That suffering needs to be understood against the backdrop of God's loving discipline as we saw last week, but discipline is painful. If it doesn't hurt, it doesn't work.
- So the author tells them to keep running. Yes, it's painful. But keep going. Keep going because it's worth it. Because Jesus is better. Because there is a goal, a good to be pursued.
- That's a message we need to remember in the midst of our suffering. When our marriages seem to be falling apart, when we get that terrifying diagnosis, when the economy crashes or our culture crumbles and everything in us wants to quit, give up, give in.
- We need to remember to keep going. Further up and further in. Rather than running from Christ, we run toward Him. Like the disciples said to Jesus, where else would we go? Only He has the words of eternal life.
- But we don't pursue it alone. Like Redmond's father helping his son, so the church community is to help each other to run the race with endurance as we'll see in the text. We have communal obligations toward one another, deep and covenantal responsibilities to make sure that none are left behind.
- Unlike the individualistic and privatized caricature of Christianity that we often assume, the biblical picture is far from atomistic. We are saved not only out of sin, but also into relationship not only with God, but others.
- So let's pray for our time together and we'll dive in.
- Self, others, me.

- Christ is better. By now that might sound cliché, but I can assure you it is not.
- Every single challenge you face in life is solved by the supremacy of Christ...whether in this life or the next.
- In Hebrews, that superiority is aimed at the Mosaic Law. Christ is a better priest who has offered a better sacrifice in a better tabernacle on the basis of a better covenant built on better promises of better rewards.
- And because Christ is better, we should press on, endure, persevere rather than fall back. If the substance is better than the shadow, why would we retreat to the shadows?
- And in our context, we face a similar temptation to drift. So we can fall back in myriad ways. We fall back anytime we fail to obey Christ's word, anytime believe the lie of sin's supremacy, anytime we reject the implications of our discipleship, anytime we compromise in the face of fear, we are drifting.
- That's the image that the author uses. Drifting. Drifting is natural and inevitable unless effort is expended to swim against the tide. So that's the metaphor the author uses for the Christian life.
- And the danger of drifting should be obvious. Imagine getting caught in undertow at the beach and drifting out to sea. Eventually you reach a point of no return, a point at which the fatigue is too strong. That's how apostasy functions in Hebrews, it isn't a sudden cataclysmic decision, it's cultivated in a prolonged season of tiny compromises that compound over time.
- Though the Bible teaches that the elect will not and cannot ultimately apostatize it also holds out a warning against apostasy so we need to hear and heed the warning even if we can't fully understand how to logically hold those two theological strains together.
- Rather than drifting or falling back, we are to endure in belief.
- What belief entails was what chapter 11 was all about, but then we transitioned in Hebrews 12 to the implications of faith.
- As we've mentioned the past couple of weeks chapters 1-11 are mostly indicatives, that is statements of what God has done, statements of reality. But in chapter 12, we see a shift in emphasis from indicative to imperative, that is what we are to do in light of what God has done.
- How then shall we live is what this latter portion of the book concerns.
- Because of Christ's supremacy, we are to therefore throw aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely as we read two weeks ago and embrace God's discipline as we read last week. And we are to do all the things that today's verse will commend. Let's begin in vss. 12-13.

Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. (Hebrews 12:12-13)

- We see here the author continue the athletic imagery from the previous verses.
- Remember last week. Pain is productive. Rather than evidence of God's abandonment, discipline is a sign of His love. And therefore, that should change your disposition to suffering as today's verse says. As sore muscles after a workout signal growth so pain is, as CS Lewis said, God's megaphone to rouse us from indifference or apathy or outright disobedience.
- Just picture a long distance runner nearing the end of his race, his hands are drooping, knees weaker than when he started. Yet he keeps going because he has a purpose, passion & prize.
- So the readers are pictured as runners whose hands are beginning to drop, whose knees are beginning to buckle as their energy and will is being zapped by the relentless and recurring waves of suffering and persecution.
- And this imagery is actually a reference to Isaiah 35:3-4 which says:

- *Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you."* (Isaiah 35:3–4)
- Now, our impulse is to read this through a very individualistic lens, but notice how the larger text helps to correct that. We are to encourage those with an anxious heart for example.
- So to understand Hebrews 12, we need to remember that the Bible describes the members of the church using the imagery of members of the body.
- For instance, look at 1 Corinthians 12:14-15
 - *For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.* (1 Corinthians 12:14–15)
- The metaphor extends even further in 1 Corinthians 12, but you get the idea.
- And this is important to note because the passage isn't only saying, you lift your individual drooping hands, but also, lift up your brother. As Aaron and Miriam **[misspoke: should be Aaron and Hur]** helped hold up Moses' arms when he got tired, or as Jim Redmond helped his son limp down the track, so we have a responsibility to help each other battle through the exhaustion and pain.
- You'll see that in more explicit detail as the passage develops, but I wanted to at least mention it for now.
- Remember how we've seen breadcrumbs of this communal responsibility throughout the book:
 - *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.* (Hebrews 3:12–13)
 - *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* (Hebrews 10:24–25)
- So many Christians claim to love Christ, but don't love the Church, but there is no way to love Christ without loving the Church since Christ calls us to love the church and love for Christ means obeying what He commands.
- Let me say that again another way. If you claim to love Christ, then you will obey Him. After all, 1 John 5:3 says:
 - *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.* (1 John 5:3)
- So if you love Jesus, you will love and obey His commands.
- So what does He command when it comes to community? Well, as we just read, that we exhort one another, that we take care lest any fall away, that we try to keep each other from being hardened by sin, that we stir up one another to love and good works. Elsewhere in Scripture, that we love one another, serve one another, bear one another's burdens, and some 50 something other one anothers.
- And those reciprocal responsibilities assume that we actually know one another and are committed to one another.
- So if you claim to love Christ, but don't love the Church, then you don't understand what it means to love Christ.
- And when I say the Church, I don't just mean the universal Church. Its all too easy for us to claim some sort of generic ethereal love for the universal Church while neglecting the local

church whereas the biblical picture is of an embodied love, a localized love, a love that is instantiated within a particular people.

- So, yes, this passage is an exhortation to you to lift your own drooping hands, to be encouraged by the gospel and to keep moving forward, but it is also an exhortation to be that for those whom God has united in a common body.
- So are you drifting? Are you discouraged? If so, make that known. Reach out to others for help. Or do you notice others drifting into discouragement or disobedience? Do you notice friends who've stopped attending or seem to be distant? If you see something, say something. Reach out. Offer rebuke and encouragement.
- As 1 Thessalonians 5:14 says:
 - *And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.* (1 Thessalonians 5:14)
- Notice that applying this means being able to distinguish between who is idle and who is fainthearted and who is weak and that takes time, that takes relationship. That can't be accomplished by a casual greeting every once in a while.
- Moving on in our passage, next the author says to make straight paths for your feet so that what we lame may not be put out of joint.
- This is pretty similar in the Greek to the LXX version of Proverbs 4:26 which says:
 - *Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure.* (Proverbs 4:26)
- Clear the way of obstacles. We talked two weeks ago about laying aside sin and weight, but now, the image is clearing the path.
- Imagine running a race on a track that is littered with marbles and lego. You're definitely rolling an ankle.
- Or picture the process of walking through your lawn to make sure that you don't have any loose rocks that you might run over in your lawn mower. The idea is to make the conditions as amenable as possible for obedience. Clear the path of impediments.
- Unlike the wilderness generation of Israel who were described as always going astray, we are to run in a straight line. Now straight line there is a metaphor.
- That word straight in Greek is orthos which is where we get the words orthopedic and orthodontist. And straight also connotes what is right and true as when someone says, "shoot me straight" so we see the same root in orthodoxy, which means right or true thinking. So a straight path is the right path, the good path, the true path. The path of morality and ethics and virtue and righteousness.
- Whereas the opposite is that you may be put out of joint. That word often means to turn aside which is another metaphor that functions like drifting. The same way that someone drifting might eventually drift too far, so someone who leaves the right path might find themselves completely lost and thus disabled or dislocated.
- Let's keep going. Vs. 14.

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.
(Hebrews 12:14)

- Now you can see more clearly where we get the communal aspect to this passage as the author commends striving for peace with everyone. Everyone here almost certainly means everyone within the covenant community.
- And the word strive is very vivid. It connotes a sense of intentionality and urgency.
- In fact, its most commonly translated as persecute. It means to move rapidly and purposefully toward an intended target.

- And so we see the verb used in reference to the church community a few times in Scripture. In addition to Hebrews 12, there is also
 - *So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.* (Romans 14:19)
 - *See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.* (1 Thessalonians 5:15)
- So, this is not a casual commitment. This is an intense longing, a passionate pursuit that is commanded here. Its impossible to half-heartedly strive. The very sense of the verb connotes intensity and intentionality.
- What is it that destroys churches and families and nations? Disunity. Discord. Dissension.
- But that often begins with apathy and indifference. Long before we attack the church, we begin to ignore it, drift from it, treat it lightly.
- So the author says, take that seriously. Strive for peace. Chase after peace. Seek it out. Passionately, intentionally.
- You have a responsibility, an obligation, a mandate to seek the common good. As we've said before, the Greek word translated as church in the NT is *ekklesia* which literally means assembly and when it comes to the church some assembly is required. There is no such thing as a pre-formed church in a box. God expects us to build the church by building each other up.
- You hear gossip, call it out. You have a frustration with someone, work it out. You're offended, don't nurse it—address it. You make a mistake, own it. You hurt someone, apologize. Someone repents, forgive them. Someone sins against you, go TO them, not around them. You have a concern, ask before assuming. You feel bitterness or resentment growing, don't let it take root. You don't like someone, love them until you do. You see someone drifting, go after them. You notice someone weaker than you, strengthen rather than criticize. If someone stumbles, restore them rather than expose them. You have a frustration with the church, help us fix it rather than complaining or leaving.
- Be humble enough to recognize that you need community. The Church is God's prescribed antidote to backsliding.
- How do I know that I won't fall away? Well, I can say I know it because I've exegeted Romans 8 and John 6 and other passages that teach perseverance, but I know that God works those promises out in His people through the use of means. And the means that He has provided to keep us from falling include not only the word, but also the church.
- So how do I know that I won't fall away? Because God has given me a community that won't let me drift. That won't let me fall. I have friends who are watching my back. Not hoping I will fail, but there to hold me accountable if I do.
- I know so many people whose lives were ruined because they attended a church that refused to hold them or their spouse accountable just as we all know kids who have been spoiled by laxity.
- And so if the church functions with such serious and sober responsibility, then we have an obligation to know and be known by the body.
- And speaking of the body, think of the image of cancer in which uncontrolled division destroys the body. That's the image we should have of division in the body of Christ.
- The same way we wouldn't be cavalier with cancer, so we shouldn't be cavalier with division in the body. With unresolved conflict, bitterness, resentment, gossip, slander, frustration, unfounded accusations and assumptions.
- So don't be careless with division. Don't be content with apathy.
- Strive for peace. Strive for unity.
- And in doing so, strive against sin and therefore for holiness.
- As we saw a couple of weeks back, we are to lay aside every weight and sin.

- Put it to death.
- The author is here playing on that already, but not yet nature of the gospel that we've often spoken about.
- Hebrews has stressed the finished nature of our sanctification.
 - *And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.* (Hebrews 10:10)
 - We have been sanctified. Once for all. It is finished. Tetelestai.
- But then a few verses later, we read that sanctification is an ongoing progressive process.
 - *For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.* (Hebrews 10:14)
- So we are sanctified and are being sanctified.
- Therefore it makes sense to tell us now to strive for holiness.
- We see this same pattern show up in Romans 6 which says both that we have died to sin and also that we are to consider ourselves dead to sin. In other words, it isn't an either/or, but a both/and. We are both already dead to sin and also in the process of putting sin to death.
- We are becoming who we already are.
- Likewise in Hebrews. We who are sanctified already should strive for sanctification. That isn't a contradiction, but the mystery of the gospel applied to our lives in the already, but not yet.
- So we are to strive for holiness.
- We do that through both mortification and vivification. Mortification means putting to death the deeds of the flesh whereas vivification refers to making alive the things of the spirit.
- We are to crucify vice and cultivate virtue. To put off unrighteousness and put on righteousness.
- Why? Because without it we will not see the Lord.
- And remember how that fits into the larger concern of the book.
- Chapters 7-10 are about how Christ is superior to the Levitical and Aaronic priesthood and the tabernacle. That tabernacle was marked by a very distinct limitation, namely, it rendered God inaccessible. It was divided by courtyards and curtains and guarded by cherubim to all symbolize that God was unapproachable.
- And that's sad & ironic since the temple was supposed to represent not only the dwelling place of God, but where God & man meet, where heaven & earth overlap. IOW, man was forbidden to enter the very place that was supposed to symbolize man's relationship with His Creator.
- And yet, in Christ, we are not only allowed, but commanded to draw near.
- As 4:16 says:
 - *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* (Hebrews 4:16)
- And again in chapter 10
 - *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.* (Hebrews 10:19-22)
- So we are to draw near and in doing so we have a privilege that was forbidden under the Old Covenant, that is the privilege of seeing God.
- Even Moses, when asking to see God was told he would see but the fringes of His glory.
- And yet, because of Christ's superiority priesthood, because of the supremacy of the Son, we now have hope of seeing God.

- But what do we do with the passages of the Bible that say that no one can see God? Indeed many passages say that He is invisible.
- Look at John 1:18
 - *No one has ever seen God; God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.* (John 1:18)
- In other words, we don't see the Father, but we do see the Son who is the image of the invisible God as Colossians 1 says or the exact imprint of His nature as we read in Hebrews 1.
- And that's the goal, the telos. That we would see the Lord. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God as the beatitudes say. Or in Revelation 22, at the consummation of all things, it says that we will see the Lord and his name will be written on us.
- But that privilege is only communicated to those who are holy. As it was only for the high priest to enter the sanctuary to meet with God and only after elaborate consecration, so it is only for those who have been made holy to approach the throne to see the king in the age to come.
- But with the caveat that because of Christ, we are all holy, we are all priests. We all draw near.
- So become what we already are. Strive for the holiness which has already been credited to you.
- Let's keep going. Vs. 15

See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled... (Hebrews 12:15)

- Again, we see the communal implications of the text. We are to see to it that not only ourselves, but no one else fails to obtain the grace of God.
- And that repeats an idea from earlier in the book. Look at Hebrews 4:1
 - *Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.* (Hebrews 4:1)
- Failed to reach it is the same Greek verb as fails to obtain here in chapter 12.
- As we talked about then, the image was Israel in the wilderness. That first generation failed to enter the promised land because of disbelief so the author says we shouldn't be like them. After all, the entire community suffered the consequences of their disobedience. And one way to avoid this danger is to exhort and encourage one another.
- And in particular to see to it that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble.
- Notice how root of bitterness is in quotes. That is because its alluding to Dt 29 which says this:
 - *Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the Lord our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.' This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike.* (Deuteronomy 29:18-19)
- You've probably heard the saying that "Bitterness is the only poison we drink hoping someone else will die."
- All of the sins we listed before such as gossip, slander, lack of forgiveness, unfounded accusations, all of those are like stirring up a big pot of poison that we ourselves drink.
- And though it does destroy us, as resentment eats away at our love for others, it also has social consequences. It doesn't just hurt us, but others. It causes trouble and defiles many.
- In other words, bitterness is contagious. Think of how often you've vented to someone, only for your frustration to spread to someone else until gradually the entire community is infected. And this type of infection eats away at the bonds of the church, weakening them over time.

- The same way that you would try to avoid intentionally sneezing or vomiting on a friend in order to protect their health, so we should guard our hearts and mouths in order to avoid spreading the contagion of our cynicism and frustration.
- In the case of Cain and Abel, bitterness literally led to murder. For the sons of Jacob, bitterness drove them to abandon and forsake their own brother. For Saul, his resentment cost him the kingdom and many men's lives, including his own and his sons. Absalom, Haman, Herod and Herodias, the Sanhedrin, the Bible is full of living examples of the bitter fruit of bitterness.
- The more that we disregard our relationship to God and the pursuit of holiness, the more we will disregard our relationship with God's people as apostasy from Christ begins with alienation and conflict with the church.
- We started this morning with a story from the 1992 Olympics and I want to return to those Olympics. Anyone know what was most memorable about that year? That was the year of the Dream Team.
- Four years prior, David Robinson was on a US team that won the bronze medal in Seoul, which was quite a disappointment. But in 92 he was back with the Olympic team although this time rather than playing with a bunch of college players, he was with Jordan, Magic, Bird, and Barkley.
- And you remember the story. They dominated the 92 Olympics with an average margin of victory of 44 points and the closest game being the 32 point victory in the gold medal match.
- What changed for David Robinson wasn't just 4 years of maturity, but the team around him.
- No matter who would have been on that court, they weren't winning gold without a team. And the same is true of us. No matter how gifted or godly, we need the church. And not just the church generic, but a church, a body to which we belong, a people to whom we are accountable, and a people to whom we are committed.
- So we are to look out for one another, see to it no one falls short. That phrase see to it is the verb episkopeo from which we get the word episcopal, referring to an overseer. Although only some are called to exercise oversight as officers of the church, every single member of the body has a responsibility to oversee the church in a sense.
- We each have an obligation to watch each other's backs, to look out for each other, and to watch our own hearts for signs of frustration, resentment, bitterness, anger, exasperation.
- We have a responsibility to crucify vice and vivify virtue to seek and pursue peace and strive for holiness.
- The Bible doesn't merely tell us to not be bitter, but to watch out for any roots of bitterness. As untreated weeds can take over a yard and choke out the grass, so unaddressed resentment will take over a church and choke out its fruit.
- Let's keep going. Vss. 16-17.

that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. (Hebrews 12:16-17)

- So, we are to pursue sanctification or holiness and that means not being unholy.
- That word unholy means pointless, worthless, or worldly – literally it refers to one who is barred from the temple or tabernacle so again you can see how this relates to the idea of drawing near and seeing God.
- As an example of unholiness, the author mentions Esau.

- Like in chapter 11, it can be difficult to understand why of all people, he chose him as the embodiment of his concern, but he does. We'll get to why shortly.
- He's talked about division and bitterness so now he mentions sexual immorality, but it's hard to figure out why he reads that onto Esau. There are three main theories.
- First, was the fact that Esau married a foreign woman. In the OT, that was a no no so that could be what the author means.
- Second, according to Jewish tradition, Esau was guilty of adultery, but we don't have that in Scripture. It is at least possible that the author is here relying on that tradition.
- Third, some think that sexual immorality here is just functioning as a metaphor for spiritual infidelity as we often see in the OT.
- Regardless, the real concern with Esau is the selling of his birthright and look at how the author describes it – for a single meal. He emphasizes the horrible trade.
- This is worse than Luka for Anthony Davis in all time bad trades.
- Perhaps you remember the story. Abraham's son, Isaac, has two sons. Esau and Jacob who are twins, but Esau is the older twin. As such he has the right of primogeniture, the right of the firstborn. He would be the primary heir to the blessing and birthright.
- And yet read what happens in Genesis 25:
 - *Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. And Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!" (Therefore his name was called Edom.) Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright now." Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" Jacob said, "Swear to me now." So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright. (Genesis 25:29–34)*
- So he despises the birthright. That's what selling it entails.
- You'll sometimes hear about how someone purchases some priceless artifact at Goodwill or in an auction because whomever sold it didn't realize how valuable it was. That's what Esau seems to do and yet he should have known better. He should have known the value of God's blessing.
- And so should we. Every time we sin, we're despising our inheritance; trading a birthright for a bowl of soup, trading paradise for forbidden fruit, a fountain of living waters for broken cisterns that can hold no water.
- But Esau found no place for repentance. Now, that doesn't mean that Esau wanted to repent. I think it most likely that Esau experienced attrition vs. contrition. What's the difference?
- Well, attrition is sorrow over the consequences of your sin whereas contrition is sorrow over the sin itself.
- We see something of this distinction in 2 Corinthians 7:10 which says:
 - *For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. (2 Corinthians 7:10)*
- In other words, I don't think that what Esau sought with tears was repentance, but rather the lost blessing. Remember the story of when Jacob tricks Isaac and gets the blessing. And what is Esau's response when he hears?
 - *As soon as Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry and said to his father, "Bless me, even me also, O my father!" (Genesis 27:34)*
- Later in the text, it says that he lifted up his voice and wept.
- There is no recognition of his own failure, there is no repentance, only regret at what he lost.

- Now, why does the author think that Esau is an apropos illustration?
- Well, consider what he does. He forsakes the birthright which has permanent meaning, for the sake of a single meal. In other words, he puts his immediate comfort and wants above a more permanent blessing and need.
- And that is exactly what the Hebrews were facing in the midst of their suffering. If only they would recant, if only they would leave the church and return to the synagogue, the pain will stop.
- But doing so is to despise the birthright, to trade an infinite treasure for a trinket.
- Yes, they might be losing possessions as their goods are plundered. Yes, they might suffer hunger and humiliation as they are imprisoned, but the inheritance that is theirs in Christ is worth it because Christ is better.
- Esau is a picture of a man who trades a permanent promise to relieve temporal discomfort. Well, likewise, the church might be tempted to trade their promise for some temporary relief.
- Remember what we saw in chapter 11 where godly men risked their lives for the sake of faith. Well, Esau risked his faith for the sake of his life. In essence, he is the antithesis of the faith that marked the saints. He is a living embodiment of Christ's warning that those who seek to save their life will lose it.
- And that's the tragedy of Esau's life. Because he despised his birthright, he was unable to repent which coincides with what we read in chapter 6 about how there could come a point at which even repentance is impossible, where our calloused response to sin has left us so hardened that we no longer hear God's voice and thus He no longer hears us.
- As we saw in chapter 6
 - *For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. (Hebrews 6:4-6)*
- As we said then, if your understanding of grace, forgiveness, or eternal security leads you to conclude that you can sin with impunity, you've fundamentally misunderstood the gospel. Yes, Christ forgives, but He forgives those who repent, those who are contrite.
- God will not be mocked.
- So as we read back in chapter 3, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.
- Don't harden your hearts by allowing bitterness to grow, by pursuing sexual immorality, by despising the promises of God, or by neglecting the church community.
- Don't trade the substance for the shadow, a treasure for a trinket.
- Rather, stir yourself and each other up with the promises that are ours in Christ.
- Because Christ is better.
- Let's pray.

Communion

- Fence table
- Given the communal nature of the text, I want to focus this morning on the communal nature of the table.
- Communion certainly symbolizes our vertical communion with God. Its a reminder that Christ's body and blood have reconciled us to God.

- But communion also has a horizontal dimension. It represents our communion with each other. We have been reconciled not only to God, but also each other and we neglect that to our disgrace and danger.
- That is why the Lord instituted one loaf and a common cup. As 1 Corinthians 10 says:
 - *Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.* (1 Corinthians 10:17)
- So I want us to cultivate an appreciation for this aspect of communion today by spending a bit of time looking around at the body. Don't just make a casual glance, but see to it. Oversee. Look carefully. Make eye contact.
- Don't be weird and wink, but actually think about the faces of men and women who have been brought together in God's sovereignty for our common good.
- Go ahead and look around.
- If you see a member not taking communion, you might ask them if everything is okay. If you see a visitor, you might make a mental note to say hi after services.
- Now, having done that, take a second and repent of any lingering bitterness or conflict and commit to the Lord to seek understanding and reconciliation. Then take a minute and just thank the Lord for providing a body and ask for a greater love for not just people in general, but this people, this body, this church.
- I'll give you a minute or so and then we'll partake.
- On the night...
- Look around