

“A Faith Persuaded”

Fixing Our Eyes Upon Jesus, Our High Priest

Hebrews 10:32-39

Dr. Jeff Stivason

February 1, 2019

Jeff: Our precious heavenly Father, we thank You for this day. And despite the conditions outside, we realize that in You we have peace and we have comfort, and we have the warmth of grace. And Father, as we come to you this morning, we are thankful for that.

But Father, as we come before You in prayer, we can't help but think of the heaviness of the morning when we remember what the Carlucci family is experiencing in their loss. And they have been experiencing pain and suffering for some weeks now. But Father, this morning brings about the finale of that suffering. It brings about the climax of that hurt and that pain, to lose a mother and a wife and a friend. And Lord, we pray for this family, for not only the family but the friends, friends like Sig and his wife and others. And we ask that You will not only comfort them, but we pray that You will use their comfort to comfort this family. And we pray that the comfort that they receive in the Lord Jesus Christ might be used even beyond them. Father, we pray that You will minister to this family in a way that only You can. The depth of loss is often unbearable. We feel like it leaves a void that cannot be filled. And we feel as though even when there is Christ in the midst that the pain lingers. And so, Father, we pray that You will overcome. We pray that You will give them the anticipation and the hope that death's sting will not last forever. But in this moment, in this short time, it will be eclipsed by the hope of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Father, we also pray for Terri. We're thankful for her life. We're thankful for the good progress she's making. We pray that she would continue to make more.

Father, as we come before You today, we're thankful that You are a God who heals. And You are a God who heals through the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we pray, Father, for not only those folks down in North Carolina who have experienced that atrocity so many years ago now, but also the folks in Pittsburgh who experienced this one as of late. And Father, we ask that Your hand would be upon them. And Father, we pray that You will bring more than superficial healing. We pray, Father, for what Sig mentioned earlier, that is, for the gospel of Jesus Christ to have its way, to be like a leaven in the mind of these Jewish folks, so that they understand that they are not giving up who they are, but that they are recognizing who came to fulfill all that was given to them as a people.

Father, we ask and pray that You will bless us today as we gather around Your word. And we pray that You will bless our hearts and our minds. And we pray that having done so that we will be different people, even when we gather here this morning, because Your Holy Spirit has taken that word and brought it to bear upon our lives in such a living and active way, for indeed it is a living and active Word, for we pray these things in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Jeff: All right. Well, why don't we turn to Hebrews chapter 10, looking at verses 32-39. Don, have we given you enough time to get settled in?

“A Faith Persuaded”

Don: Oh, yes.

Jeff: Well why don't you read 32-39 for us?

Don: Okay.

Jeff: Thank you.

Don: “*But recall the former days, when after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and to afflictions, and sometimes being a partner to those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For yet a little while, and the coming One will come and will not delay. But ‘My righteous one shall live by faith. And if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.’ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.*” This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Jeff: All right. Well, let's get started today. And I want to think with you about *the art of persuasion* in terms of an introduction. I want to think about that as our topic. I want to think about an experiential component to that, an ecclesiastical component to it, and then a biblical component, all as we see them unfolded in the Scriptures this morning.

Well, you know as well as I do that all you have to do is think back in your life, maybe even to yesterday, to that time when you were trying to persuade someone of something. I could think back all the way to the time when I was a little guy. And I was trying to persuade my dad to get me that Honda 80. You know what I mean? It didn't work. I got a go-cart instead. *(Laughter)* But anyway, my mom was always afraid of the two-wheels. She was okay with the four. But anyway, I digress.

When you try to persuade someone of something, that probably has been something that characterizes or has characterized your life at any given point. It could have been as a father trying to persuade your child that what you were trying to tell him to do and could force him to do was actually the wise thing that he could do, and you needed to persuade him of it. So really the question I have for you today is this. How do you persuade someone to do something?

Now that word *persuasion* comes right over, carried almost wholesale from the Latin. What does it mean? Well, it means to induce. I feel like I want to get away from this microphone. Can you hear me if I just kind of—all right. So it means to induce.

Now I know what you men are thinking. *(Laughter)* That's about the only time you hear the word *induce* today, right? Like when your wife needs induced to go into labor. But what does that word mean?

Well, we see it in other places. “*We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church*”, and so on, from the Westminster Confession 1:5. What does the word *induced* mean? Well, it means to be led into.

Now I want you to think about that for a minute. We're not talking here about style or technique. We're not talking about how it is that we win friends and influence people.

“A Faith Persuaded”

We’re not talking about how it is that you pick up that book in the bookstore so that you can get people to do what you want them to do because you’ve wowed them with your technique. That’s not what we’re talking about here. We’re actually talking about how we get people to want to do what they ought to want to do anyway, which is often the most difficult thing in the world to do. How do you get people to do that?

Well, you may have the answer to that. You may know exactly how you get people to do what you want them to do. But I want you to know something. To me this is the absolute pastoral challenge. As a pastor I know what Paul says. He says, *“Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men.”* And when I think about that I think to myself that Paul had the same challenge. He had to persuade people to do the very thing they ought to want to do.

But I want you to know that is an absolute challenge. And I know some people who have actually gone in a direction that is very unhelpful. They’ve tried to insinuate, or tried to adopt the posture that the pastorate—and I’m talking about the pastorate now,—that the pastorate is like the magistrate, that the pastor has the power to do or to make his congregation do what they ought to want to do, as if a magistrate had the power to make his people do what they ought to do as citizens.

Now I want you to think about this for a minute. When you think about the ancient pastoral texts, one of the things that I absolutely love about them is that they correct us because they’re so old that they speak into our world in a way that is not often the case with the newer books. The newer books kind of capitulate to our world and to the problems of our world, and they don’t really speak to us in a way that the older texts do. And one of the older texts, one of the oldest texts about pastoral care is one by Gregory of Nazianzus. It’s called *Oration 2*. But that text was only about thirty pages long. It’s a sermon. And I’ll tell you more about that some other time.

But that text gave rise to another text within the church about fifty years later. And it was written by a guy by the name of John Chrysostom. And it had this crazy title, *On the Six Books of the Priesthood*. And you may think to yourself, wow! I’m not sure that’s a bestseller. But it actually has stood the test of time throughout the church. And it’s actually one of two great historic pastoral texts. And it’s a wonderful text. I have all my interns in my church read Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom’s works, because they’re just absolutely fabulous.

Now I’ve got a quote that I want to read to you from Chrysostom’s *On the Six Books of the Priesthood*. And it addresses this very thing. How does a pastor get people to do what they ought to want to do? Now this is a question that you have. But as you can see, we’re actually moving in the direction of thinking of how does a pastor get the people to do what they ought to want to do, because that’s the case here in this text. This pastor is writing to this congregation. And the question is how do we get them to do what they ought to want to do? Well, let me have John Chrysostom speak into our moment here with this quote. It says this. I realize it’s small, so let me read it to you.

It says, *“For Christians above all men are forbidden to correct the stumbling of sinners by force. When secular judges convict wrongdoers under the law, they show that their authority is complete and compel men, whether they will or no, to submit to their*

“A Faith Persuaded”

methods. But in the case we are considering it is necessary to make a man better not by force but by persuasion. We neither have authority granted to us by law to restrain sinners, nor, if it were, should we know how to use it, since God gives the crown to those who are kept from evil not by force, but by choice. For this reason a lot of tact is needed so that the sick may be persuaded of their own accord to submit to the treatment, and be grateful for the cure.”

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: Now I think that’s an absolutely profound statement. And you can’t believe how often, when a young guy reads that who is going into the ministry that he feels almost bound in some ways, because he says, “Well then, how am I going to help people to do the very thing they ought to want to do?” And my answer is Chrysostom’s answer. And his answer was Paul’s answer. And that is that you, *“knowing the fear of the Lord, persuade men.”*

Now I want to make one qualification. Chrysostom commends church discipline. He commends church discipline. He’s not talking about church discipline.

Now what’s the distinction that needs to be made here when we think about persuasion versus church discipline? Well, church discipline corrects and tries to retrieve. It corrects and tries to retrieve.

So for instance, let’s think about ancient church history. One of the things that used to be applied is the withholding of Communion from an offender, from somebody who had sinned grievously. And what did you do in withholding Communion from that person? Well, what you were saying to them was, “Look. If you love Christ as much as you say you love Christ, then when we withhold Christ from you in the form of the communion, then you’ll long for Him so that you’ll repent of your so in, forsake your idolatry and want Him again.” In other words, the church has always said, “Look, if we withhold Christ from you, and you say you love Him so much, then you’ll forsake the thing that has gotten between you and Christ, and you’ll return to Him in repentance.”

Now that’s correction with an eye to transformation. That’s what church discipline is. And Chrysostom is saying, “Look, I’m not against that. But what I am against is, for instance, the pastor taking the role of the magistrate and trying to browbeat people to do the very thing they ought to want to do to begin with. Instead he ought to persuade them.”

I mean, think about a teenage child. Think about your teenage son. You know, you can make your teenage child do something. You can make him do it. And, worst-case scenario, you can actually make him do it by force. But isn’t it better to persuade him to do the very thing that he ought to want to do? And that’s the idea. How do we do that without force, especially in this case when we’re not permitted to use force?

You know, I’ll never forget. I probably shouldn’t tell you guys this. But I’ll never forget. I was 18 years old. I don’t think I graduated from high school yet, but it was about 11:30 at night. And I went over to the coat closet, got my coat out and put my coat on. My dad was sitting in the chair. And he said, “Where are you going?”

I said, “Well, it’s Friday night. I’m going to go out.”

And he said, “It’s 11:30 at night, Jeff.”

I said, “I know.”

“A Faith Persuaded”

And he said, “Don’t go out tonight. It’s 11:30, Friday night. Nothing good is going to happen now. It’s too late. Your friends are all home already. Put your coat away and come and sit down and watch TV with me.”

I said, “No, I’m going out.”

He said, “Jeff, don’t go out.”

I said, “I’m going out, Dad.” I went to walk by his chair and the next thing I knew, I was looking up. (*Laughter*) And somehow my dad had gotten on top of me. And I said, “All you had to do was ask.” (*Laughter*)

And he said, “I thought you would see it my way.” (*Laughter*)

Now we could persuade that way as fathers. And sometimes we must. (*Laughter*) but how much better is it if we can persuade someone to do what they ought to want to do to begin with, and get them to see our point! And you see, the Pastor doesn’t have it available for him to put his congregation on the floor as my dad had the opportunity to put me on the floor. (*Laughter*) He’s got to persuade them. How do you do that?

Well let me ask a clarifying question. Of what is he attempting to persuade them? That’s probably helpful in this particular instance. What is he trying to persuade them to do? Well, we see it in verses 32 and 36. He is attempting to persuade them to endure.

And you remember the situation. The situation was that they were wanting to defect. They were wanting to go back to Judaism. And he as a pastor is trying to convince them, to compel them to do what they ought to want to do and stay, to remain in the church, to stay with the church. And they’re wanting to defect and go back. And so he’s trying to persuade them to stay. He’s trying to induce them to stay. And what is he trying to do? He’s trying to get them to endure.

Well I want us to walk through this. And I’m not giving you an ABC format to compel people, to induce people, to persuade people. You’re not going to come out of this saying, “Now I can persuade anybody,” because this isn’t about technique. What I want to do is that I want to identify for you what’s going on in the text so that you can see the key critical points that the Pastor believes will help persuade Christian people to do the very thing they ought to want to do. In other words, if you leave here saying, “I know the crucial things that need to be in play in order to persuade people,” then I think you’ve gotten what the text is trying to communicate to us at this point. If you leave here saying, “I’ve got a sure-fire way to communicate and persuade,” then you’ve missed the whole point, unless you’re going to persuade like my dad persuaded me. And that’s a pretty sure-fire way. But I digress. (*Laughter*)

Well, let’s talk for a minute about *the experiential component* that’s here. Now I want you to know that there is an emotional component, an experiential component. I don’t think that we can disregard emotions. I think that in the context of the church that we’re living in today that’s oftentimes what has been the case, if you have listened to evangelical Biblical counselors or psychologists. One of the things is that I remember listening to James Dobson a lot when I was going to seminary back in the ‘90s. He was on the radio program and I’d listen to him. And one of the things that he said was don’t trust your emotions. Emotions are bad. It was almost as if we could just strip our emotions from us, we would be better off.

“A Faith Persuaded”

And I have come to believe over time and after studying the doctrine of man from the Scriptures that this is just a wrong view. You can't do anything without your emotions coming into play. I've said to you before that I can't talk to you without being emotional.

Transcriber's Note: Jeff speaks in a monotone.

Jeff: Even if I talk to you like this, I'm talking with emotion, probably emotion that you can't stand, and neither can I. So I don't do that! (*Laughter*) But you see what I'm doing. I am emotional in some way or other. You can parse them out. And that goes back to the fact that we are not fragmented dispositional complexes. In other words, we've got a mind, we've got a will, we've got emotions. And we can't parse those out and say, "Well, I'm going to put my emotions on hold for right now, and I'm just going to deal with this rationally." You can never do that. When you deal with something rationally, you deal with it emotionally because that's the unitary dispositional complex that you are. You have to be. That's the way you were created. And so I want you to think about this emotional aspect of it.

Now this emotional aspect of it comes across to us in a very interesting way. If you look at verse 32, he says this: "*after being enlightened.*" Now "after being enlightened" is a theological concept. And you say that we've automatically moved away from the emotional. Now we're in theological categories. And there's a sense in which you might say that's true. But I want you to understand something here. I want you to understand that you can't think theologically without thinking emotionally.

I want to give you a for instance. I want you to look at 2 Corinthians 4:6, and I'll throw it up here on the screen. It says this. "*For God who said, 'Light shall shine out of the darkness' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*"

Now I want you to think about that. You can think about this theologically and rationally. You can say, "Well, regeneration precedes faith, and regeneration has a subconscious element to it," which means that there is something that happens to us brought about by God's Spirit in us that affects us before we realize that there's any effect on us. And we can talk about it in a sort of very theologically precise way. We could be clear in our knowledge and that sort of thing.

But I want you to understand the way Paul is really persuading us to think about it. How is he persuading us to think about it? He's saying this. The effulgence of the gospel's glory has dawned upon the darkness of your heart.

Now if you just take a minute and think about that, if you just take two seconds to think about that imagery, that the glory of the gospel rose to dawn its light upon your heart, that's another way of thinking about enlightenment! You know, all of a sudden I see things differently! And I believe now that things are wrong that I once believed were right, or at least I was indifferent to them. I see my family in a different way. I see the lost in a different way. And all of a sudden I am coming to grips with what it means for the gospel light to have dawned upon my life. Now that's an emotional experiential element that we cannot miss when we look at this text.

“A Faith Persuaded”

Now let me ask you a question. That’s just an aside. But let me ask you a question. Where have we heard this before? Where have we heard this whole idea of being enlightened before?

Participant: Chapter 6.

Jeff: I was waiting. I was waiting for my friend right here in front of me who is writing. I thought you were going to say Hebrews chapter 6. Sig beat you to it.
(Laughter)

Now there’s a dilemma here. I don’t want to rehearse the whole dilemma, but there is a dilemma here. Remember, the dilemma was in Hebrews chapter 6. What’s Paul saying? Is this really a person who has received all of these wonderful benefits and is genuinely and truly a Christian, and so loses his faith? In other words, is the perseverance of the saints wrong?

Now I want you to know something. I would much rather call the perseverance of the saints *the perseverance of God in the saints*.

Participant: Wow!

Jeff: And when you think about it like that, then I don’t want to be in the same room with you if you’re willing to say that God cannot persevere in His saints.

Participant: Wow!

Jeff: Because He can, and He does. So what I want to say is this. What I want to say is more like what John would say, and that is this. *“They went out from us because they were never among us.”* In other words, it may have looked like a duck, quacked like a duck and walked like a duck, but it obviously wasn’t a duck. But that means that somebody can look like a duck, walk like a duck and quack like a duck for a time. And that’s the whole point of the parable of the seed. It can grow up for a time before it dies out.

Now here’s the deal. We’re running short on time, so here’s the point I want to make to you. If you had met Judas and Peter on the same night,--you know, you’re walking down the street of Jerusalem and Judas comes running out of the temple courts crying. He says, “What did I do? What did I do?” And he goes tearing off, you know, and later on you find out that he hanged himself.

And then you walk a little further into the temple precincts and you see Peter. And you just stand back and you watch him. And the girl says, “I know you were with him.” And he says, “I wasn’t with him!” And he goes off.

And this is the question that I have for you. Could you tell at that moment which one is not the apostate?

Participant: No.

Jeff: Absolutely not. What was the difference between Judas and Peter? The difference between them was repentance. And that’s exactly what we see in this quote from Archibald Alexander who was the first prof at Princeton Seminary. He said this. *“The backsliding believer can only be distinguished from the final apostate by the fact of his recovery.”*

Participant: Amen.

“A Faith Persuaded”

Jeff: Now I’ll tell you what that means. That means that if you’re Peter you can’t walk away from the fire saying, “Oh, once saved, always saved.” *(Laughter)*

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: That means that if you’re Peter, who has walked away from the fire feeling guilt about having just denied the Lord, you say to yourself, “The only thing left for me to do is to repent. The only available option for me is repentance.”

Now the question that you need to ask yourself is this in this situation. Do you remember when the gospel dawned upon your darkened life? And if you do, did it mean anything at all to you? Did it mean anything at all? I mean, this is the kind of question that you have to ask yourself. If it did mean anything, then it will lead to my repentance. But if it didn’t mean anything at all, it won’t change me a bit. And you see, that’s the difference between the Hebrews chapter 6 person for whom it didn’t mean anything; they walked away, and those to whom he’s talking to now. And he’s asking them. Does it mean anything to you? Has the gospel really dawned in your life? And if it has, then it will change you.

Well, *the ecclesiastical part* is important. Let’s get to that. The church is an aid—Yes?

Participant: Can I ask you a question about this?

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: You know, Judas is near and dear to my heart because I look like him sometimes. But when you said earlier about the perseverance of God in the saints, God did not persevere in Judas?

Jeff: Well see, I would say that—

Second Participant: He wasn’t a saint.

First Participant: What was that?

Second Participant: He was never a saint.

Jeff: He was never a saint. He looked like a duck, walked like a duck and quacked like a duck, but he was never a duck.

Participant: Because he didn’t repent?

Jeff: Right.

Second Participant: No, because he wasn’t regenerate.

Jeff: Yes, but he didn’t repent because there was not the fruit of regeneration in him. Repentance is the fruit of a regenerate life. So if you think of regeneration as the awakening of a dead person, what’s the fruit of that awakening? Faith and repentance. And if there was no repentance in Judas, it meant that there was no awakening. Does that make sense?

Participant: Yes, that’s huge.

Jeff: Okay. Anybody else?

Participant: You couldn’t have shared that with me years ago? *(Laughter)*

Second Participant: He wasn’t listening. *(Laughter)*

Third Participant: Can you hear me?

Jeff: I can hear you.

“A Faith Persuaded”

Participant: If we are believers, we will have repented. And Jesus said after Peter repented, “Go feed My sheep.” That led to his restoration. I know people who are believers but haven’t fully repented, and therefore God has kind of shelved them.

Jeff: Well if they’ve not really repented, this is where I think church discipline comes in. What’s that?

Participant: Then we don’t know.

Jeff: So let me tell you how this would work itself out ideally. Let’s say this was a public sin. Don’t tell me what it is. Let’s say that it’s a public sin that needs to be dealt with. The church deals with it, tries to restore him, tries to call him to repentance. After a substantial period of time the church says, “Look. You’re unwilling to work with us.” So they treat him as a tax collector like Matthew 18 says, right? And so now, according to his status, in terms of his profession of faith as recognized by the church, that profession of faith is not recognized as valid anymore. Now it may be that he’s still in a backslidden state and will repent, because the Westminster Confession chapter 17 talks about believers going through a time of sin and grieving the Spirit and losing the sense of security that one might have in Christ, and so on, but will be finally brought back.

But we don’t know that. So they’re living outside the church. They’re living under the church’s pronouncement that they are tax collectors and sinners. And then what needs to happen is for them to come back and for the church to restore them and recognize that profession of faith, recognizing that that profession of faith was always valid, but they were just living in sin. But as long as they live outside the church in unrepentance, then at that point you’ve got to say, “I guess not.” And they die in that. They could have repented at the last minute, and all of those kinds of things could be the case. But for all that we see, we see somebody who is unrepentant. Does that make sense?

Participant: My experience is that I don’t deny this gentleman’s faith. He had great faith and still has faith in Christ. But he has not been used by God because for whatever reason he has never really fully tried to reconcile.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: As far as I know, but I can’t judge his heart as far as his degree of repentance. But this is for a long time, 38 years.

Jeff: Thirty-eight years. Wow!

Participant: He doesn’t deny Christ, but he’s not part of a church.

Jeff: You know, one of the things that I would compare that to—not your friend,—but one of the things I’d compare what I just said to is David. So David commits the sin with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 10 or thereabouts. And that leads him to organizing Bathsheba’s husband’s death, and so forth. And God says to him, “*The sword will never depart from your house.*” He’s a man after God’s own heart. He’s a repentant person. But he now has to live with the consequences of his sin. And if you look at the life of David, the sword never does leave his house. It’s just a sad unfolding of the rest of his life. But that’s even a person who has repented of his sin, you know? Okay?

Participant: Why did Judas commit suicide? Wouldn’t that say that he was anxious, or that the weight of what he did was full?

“A Faith Persuaded”

Jeff: Thomas Watson says in his book on the Beatitudes, where he uses Judas as an example, and one of the things that he says that is compelling for me is that the reason Judas takes his own life is because he perceives his sin as greater than God’s grace. He’s beyond the pale. Not even the grace of Christ can save him from his sin. And that’s often typical. When you think about people who see themselves as outside the faith they oftentimes think that about themselves. That was compelling for me, anyway. Yes?

Participant: I think Jesus told us that Judas didn’t repent by telling us that “it would have been better had he never been born.” So in my mind I don’t even think about Judas anymore as repentant, because Jesus told us that it would have been better had he never been born.

Jeff: Yes, you have to think about it. You’re right. I think John tells us that. You have to think about it though, because I think that Matthew even talks about Judas in a way that indicates this. Well, I’ll bring it in. I won’t say it now because I’m not going to be able to put my finger on it. But you’re right. John tells us that clearly, that he was “*a son of perdition.*” Anybody else?

Participant: Yes. Matthew 26, I believe verse 24 says, “*The Son of Man goes as it is written of Him, but woe to him who betrays the Son of Man! It would have been better if he had never been born.*”

Jeff: Yes. That’s not what I was thinking of. But you bet; that is right in line with John.

Participant: John 17:12 calls him “*the son of perdition.*” “*None of them is lost but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture might be fulfilled.*”

Jeff: All right. Go ahead.

Participant: Hard stuff.

Jeff: Yes it is. Well, let’s think about *the ecclesiastical dimension* here. We’ll not spend a lot of time with this point. But I want you to remember that Hebrews 6:12 says that we are to become imitators of those who are faithful. The point is that the church helps us by providing us with examples of people who are faithful. And that makes other parts of Scripture make sense. For instance, in Hebrews 3:13 we’re told to encourage one another. In 10:25 we’re told to stir one another up. And then in Hebrews chapter 11 it doesn’t surprise us that we find examples that we are to follow. And so the rest of Hebrews makes sense when we put this ecclesiastical kind of light onto it.

Ironically the Hebrews themselves had been examples. In this very text we find that they were taxed, overly so, mistreated and even imprisoned. But notice; here’s the thing. How did they endure that? They endured it because, if you look at the text we’re looking at, they endured it because they are described as “partners” and “people who had compassion with other people who were being persecuted.” They were with one another. They were partners. And the word *partners* is that word *koinonia*. And that word *koinonia* is not fire hall fellowship. Remember, that’s a real partnership, people who decide that they’re going to go in on a business venture together. They’re in *koinonia* with one another. So when you lose your property, when you have compassion, when you actually spend time in prison with others, you are partnering with them in your suffering for the gospel. And that’s what they were doing.

“A Faith Persuaded”

But the problem was that at that time they were partnering in their loss of property, reputation, and so on. But the problem is that now they’re looking to depart. And in looking to depart they lose their partnership. And when you lose your partnership, you lose that ecclesiastical dimension of persuasion. And that’s crucial.

You know, we often talk about needing other people. And look, men don’t just need other people because we don’t communicate well with our wives and our grunts are understood amongst us. That’s not why we need people. Christian men and Christian women need one another because that’s the way that we’re built. We’re built as a family. We’re built as a living temple together. We’re built in such a way that we need this sort of ecclesiastical dimension. And I think that’s here in the text. You need that for endurance.

Well I’m going to run through this last point very quickly. It’s *the Biblical point*. And there are two texts here. There’s one from Isaiah and one from Habakkuk.

Why these texts? Well, these texts are there because of judgment. These texts tell us that God is going to judge the nations, but there will be a remnant. And in Isaiah 26:20 we’re told that He will keep His people safe.

Transcriber’s Note: Isaiah 26:20, NKJV.

*“Come, my people, enter your chambers,
And shut your doors behind you;
Hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment,
Until the indignation is past.”*

Jeff: It’s almost like He says that “there are going to be some bad things coming down the pike. But I’m going to hide you in this room and you’re going to be safe.” In fact, He says:

*“Come, my people,
Enter into your rooms and close the doors behind you.
Hide for a little while until the indignation runs its course.”*

Transcriber’s Note: ESV.

Jeff: Now what is He doing? He’s telling them “I’m going to keep you safe in the midst of the struggle that’s about to take place.”

And then Habakkuk asks the appropriate question. *“How long, O LORD?”* This is the prophet. He sees Babylon coming on to the scene. And God is telling him “I’m going to do something in you day that you’re not going to believe. I’m going to bring Babylon. And Babylon is going to punish not only the nations, but he’s going to punish the unfaithful at Jerusalem.”

And Habakkuk says, “How long, O LORD, is this going to happen? How long is this going to take place?” And then the discussion continues. But this is what Habakkuk asks God in the midst of that discussion. *“Are You not from everlasting?”* And the whole point is that “if You’re from everlasting, then Your word is from everlasting. And if Your word has spoken through our lives, as a promise to keep us, then we will be kept, and I’ll be content. I’ll watch for what You say will come.”

And so the point is that God’s purposes are eternal. And so God’s people are safe. And if they are safe, then they should not shrink back in times of difficulty.

And you see that, don’t you? Martin Luther had this great quote. He said that “if you

“A Faith Persuaded”

are not in the hottest part of the battle for the faith, then you’re not in the battle.” And the whole idea was that you ought not to shrink back.

Who can shrink back? I mean, one of the wonderful stories is that of Stonewall Jackson. Stonewall Jackson believed in the providence of God to such an extent that he sat on his horse in the midst of the battle, believing that if a bullet was destined for him, then it would take his life. But if one wasn’t destined for him, it wouldn’t take his life.

That’s a man. (*Laughter*) But that’s a man who did not shrink back in the face of difficulty because he believed that his God was sovereign.

And the question then for us is this. Are we standing or are we shrinking? And I’m not saying are we running? I’m asking are we standing? You know, when you’re young, you think, standing? What about standing? You want to run and advance and take the Kingdom, you know. You want to do your part.

But the bible talks a whole lot about standing. And the whole point is that you don’t realize how much it takes to stand. And you don’t recognize that when all is said and done on the battlefield, and you’re left standing, that’s an accomplishment. That’s called victory.

And the whole point is this. The battle is already waged, and the battlefield is already cleared in one sense. And those who are left standing are left standing in Christ. And so the question is do you understand that, and so stand? Or do you not understand that, and so shrink? And so that’s really what’s happening here.

I’ll wrap up with this. When you think about this in light of how I started, I asked you how you persuade someone to do what they ought to want to do? And these people ought to want to stay in the church. So how does he persuade them to do that? He says, “Did your conversion mean anything to you? Experientially, when the gospel light dawned on you, did it mean anything to you? Do these brothers mean anything to you? They meant something to you at one time. You actually partnered with them. Do they mean anything to you now? And thirdly, does the Bible mean anything to you when it says that this is the fulfillment of all that shall come to pass? And do you believe that you stand in Christ? And if you believe that you stand in Christ, you’re not going to shrink back. You’re not going to depart. You’re not going to leave the faith. You’re going to stay standing.”

And so those are the three components of persuasion that he brings to bear. And so when you talk to people, I think one of the excellent ways we might talk to people is about their conversion and about accountability, and about the bible and its veracity for their lives. And that’s how you persuade people. At least that’s what you do when you do your part of persuasion. Any questions? Yes, Don?

Don: Yes. Just two things. #1, not to carp again on Judas. But maybe you’re thinking of John 6:71, where Jesus said, “*Have I not chosen you, the twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!*”

Jeff: No. All those things are right on the money. I was thinking of something else. But I’m resisting saying it.

Don: All right. My other comment is that it’s very interesting that the author of Hebrews says that “*you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew*

“A Faith Persuaded”

that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.” I think that speaks to me as an American who has a lot of stuff.

Jeff: Yeah, sure.

Don: You know, if someone came into my house because I was a Christian and plundered my property, I wonder how I would feel about that. I think that we need to keep our minds on the fact that we have a better possession and an abiding one in heaven.

Jeff: Yes. Hold on a second, Don. If you have to leave I totally understand; I won't be offended. But I want to say two things. First of all, the thing I was thinking of was Matthew 27:3. *“When Judas the betrayer saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.’”* Some people look at that and say, “Well, isn't that Judas repenting?” And I would say that he goes out and hangs himself, and so he doesn't recognize the greatness of the grace offered there even to him, but does exactly what was foretold of him. He shows himself to be a son of perdition, wishes himself never to have been born, those kinds of things. So I'm agreeing with you 100%, Don about Judas. I'm just saying that's where people look and say, “Isn't this a change of his mind?” So that's first.

Second, you know, one of the things that I struggle with is how we oftentimes hear about the rich young ruler preached today. You know, the rich young ruler is preached to us in this way. The rich young ruler was told to get rid of all he had and come and follow Jesus. And then we preach that as if there's a one-to-one correspondence between the conversation that Jesus has with the rich young ruler and with us. And then the preacher backs away from that and says, “Wait a minute. That's not what he really means. What he really means to us is that we have to be willing to get rid of all of our stuff at a moment's notice, and so follow Jesus.”

Do you see how it translates? And that's not what's being said in that text. In that passage on the rich young ruler Jesus is saying to that young man, as a challenge to him because his stuff is an idol to him, “Go and sell all you have and give it to the poor, love your neighbor, and come, follow Me. Love the LORD God with all your heart. So fulfill the commandments that you say you're already fulfilling. You said that you've been fulfilling these from your youth.”

Now let's just take this to the extreme. “Go sell all you have, give to the poor, love your neighbor and come, follow Me. Love the LORD God with all your heart. Let's see if you can fulfill that law in that most extreme way.” And the man goes away sad.

We should not preach that in the way that says, well, this is Jesus, and He's asking us to give up all that we have, to be ready at a moment's notice to give up all that we have. That's not what that passage is about. But we sometimes do it that way. And so in doing it that way we create a false guilt about do I have too much stuff? It's almost like we can put it in a scale pan and weigh it, right? If I own a ton and one pound of stuff, that's too much. If I take away that one pound, it's okay, right? And my point is that the amount of stuff is not the issue in that passage, right? What's at issue in that passage is the man's salvation, and his claim to have obeyed the law, when he actually hadn't obeyed the law.

“A Faith Persuaded”

And so I think we need to be very careful when we talk about possessions and those kinds of things. What can happen with possessions is what we find in Matthew chapter 6, where we can find our security in our money and our possessions. And then what begins to happen is that we get anxious. And God has to say to us, “You’re putting your trust in your possessions. Don’t you know that I clothe the fields with flowers and I give the birds their food to eat. And you’re getting all anxious about your life because of your possessions.”

So it’s not that possessions don’t hinder us and hamper us. But the point is that possessions and money in and of themselves are not evil. What they do to us could very well be evil. I realize that’s three related points that you may have questions about, but we’re out of time. No, go ahead. *(Laughter)*

Participant: One more thing. Are you focusing on your worldly riches, or are you focusing on Christ and His finished work?

Jeff: Yes. And in a book called *Worldly Saints*, about the Puritans, it talks about the Puritans and their relationship to money. They did not say that everybody ought to be poor. What they said was that you ought to get as wealthy as you can to use those funds to help others. So the work ethic that comes out of Puritanism comes out of Puritanism because the Puritans wanted to make money in order to be a help.

But you know, on the other hand, I want you to know this. The Puritans liked good beer. *(Laughter)* And good beer costs money. *(Laughter)* So I’m just saying.

Participant: Jeff, how about Zacchaeus? Jesus never told him to give away everything he owned. He paid back what he owed through extortion, but he didn’t give away all of his possessions. Yet he loved the Lord.

Jeff: Yes, that’s right. Anybody else? Okay, let’s pray. Father in heaven, thank You again for this day. Again we certainly lift up Terri to you, asking that she would improve. We pray for Your hand to be upon us for good. We ask, Lord, that You would make us persuasive men in the lives of others. Lord, help us to focus in on that experiential component, that ecclesiastical component, and perhaps most importantly that Biblical component in the art of our persuasion. And we ask it in Christ’s name. Amen.

Men: Amen.