

Sermon to the Saints of God assembled at Topeka, KS: Sunday, July 17, 2022

### **Make Straight Paths for Your Feet**

This nation is in serious upheaval. The rod of God is falling upon this wicked generation in terrible and wonderful ways. While terror is falling out all around, these people are determined to 1) press forward with their godless agendas, and 2) race back to every form of hedonistic pleasure available to them, a la the “Roaring 20’s”. They were temporarily stifled by the laws and rules surrounding COVID, but they will have no more constraint at this hour. Feed the flesh; fullness of bread and abundance of idleness. What we’re seeing puts me in mind of this concept: *“How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.” (Revelation 18:7)* While we can lawfully engage in some leisure time activities, we must not be conformed to the world, nor run with them to the same excess of riot. **(1Peter 4:4)** We cannot do as they do – don’t work, just arrange the affairs of your life to be comfortable and accommodating to your lazy, selfish flesh, and to allow maximum opportunity for your leisure agenda. Iniquity is abounding, my friends, and we do not want to be found in a place where our love has waxed cold, and we have turned aside from following Christ. As I watch what’s going on around us, my mind keeps coming back to the verse that says “make straight paths for your feet”, and so I thought we should take a look at that verse, and its context in Hebrews chapter 12.

**Hebrews 12:1** *“1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,”*

- To understand this great cloud of witnesses, we must understand the end of the previous chapter (Hebrews 11). That chapter lists out many of our spiritual predecessors, and describes some of the acts of faith from their earthly pilgrimage. The chapter concludes like this:
  - **Hebrews 11:39, 40** *“39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: 40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”*
  - In many ways those Old Testament saints **did** receive the promises of God. He made specific promises to some of them; he made general promises to all of his people, including the promise to save our souls and, that those souls would be present with him when they are separated from our bodies at death. They did, in fact, receive those promises. So what promise(s) did they not receive?

- 1) They only knew Christ as their promised Messiah – their savior. They knew Him in types and shadows. That was sufficient for their walk of faith. Beloved, we have the incarnate Christ! We have a record of the life and preaching of the Son of God – what a blessed privilege! We get to understand the nature of our Messiah with much greater clarity. This is deeply impactful to our walk of faith, and a thing that we ought not take for granted.
- 2) They have not yet received their glorified bodies, and the fullness of their eternal inheritance. They are eagerly anticipating the Day of the Lord, where that promise will begin to be fulfilled.
  - **1Thessalonians 4:16-18** *“16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. 18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”*
- When we transition into chapter 12 with the word “wherefore”, those dead saints are still the topic; it is those dear souls who make up this great cloud of witnesses. They are awaiting their perfection – the resurrection and perfection of their fleshly bodies that have long since turned to dust. What do we have to do with them becoming “perfect”? They have not received the resurrection of their bodies, which cannot happen until the Lord returns in power and glory. The Lord won’t return until each and every sheep that the Father chose is born, and called to salvation. The call goes out to the sheep via the preaching of the word, which is the work of our lives, as a Church of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the work of every subsequent saint is integral to the fulfillment of God’s will in preparing the Day of the Lord – that time when the Lord will come to be glorified as the King of Kings before the whole earth, and when He will collect up His jewels, and deliver on His eternal promise. Ergo, without us – that is, the chain link of saints in the earth – the work that God appointed won’t be completed, and those dead saints will not receive their eternal inheritance.
- That great cloud of witnesses are deeply invested spectators – they are watching with rapt attention as the quarrel of the covenant plays out according to God’s eternal decrees. They know how this will end, but they don’t know exactly how it will get there, and who will play each part. They don’t know for sure who are the elect of God; they know what they see, and are cheering on those that display fruits of grace, with a desire for their best personal good, and for the fruitfulness of their ministry in the earth. Each of those dear souls is intimately familiar with the ferocity of the spiritual war that we are engaged in. The allusion in the verse is that they are spectators to a sporting event. My friends - it’s a death match for your

soul! Think gladiators in the arena. Satan is constantly on the attack, and our hearts of flesh continually burden us down in the midst of the fight.

- We have a race before us, and we are to run it with patience. We are to actively unburden ourselves, so that we can run faster and lighter. This is a proactive work that must be undertaken anew each day.
  - Every weight:
    - We'll touch more on this as we go along here today. There are endless ways that our hearts and minds are burdened down with fear, distress, worry, fretting, etc. There might be a very natural reason to fall into that state of mind, but we must lay our hands on godly remedies with haste, including getting quickly to the Lord for help with our perspective.
  - The sin that so easily besets:
    - We each have specific sinful tendencies in our flesh that we have to guard against, and where we have those tendencies, we ought to be putting things in place that help us to steer clear of that sin. Once we become clear that we have a sinful tendency, we have to own that fact – we can't go forward in willful ignorance, deluding ourselves that it's not so. From there, we have to put guardrails in place to ensure that our feet stay in a straight path.
    - Beyond that, we have the root of sin that was born in Satan, taught to our first parents in the garden, and is present within each of our dark hearts of flesh: lust and pride. I want something, and I deserve that thing I want, because I am something. We would never plainly say those words outwardly, but those sins subtly well up inside of us and manifest themselves in a thousand ways every day. It is a proactive work to make those things dead in us – over and over again.
      - **1John 2:15-17** *"15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. 17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."*

**Hebrews 12:2,3** *"2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."*

- Jesus Christ endured unspeakable things. He endured them as 1) a sinless man, and 2) God, the Creator of all things. He didn't endure pain as a stoic – he was touched by it.
  - **Hebrews 4:15, 16** *“15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”*
- He patiently endured all things, including shame, the cross, and most importantly the unmitigated wrath direct from the Father that is owed to each of us! Why? Because He had a purpose; because His eyes were not fixed on the outcomes of the flesh – His eyes were fixed on eternal things! This is a very real way that we should be laying aside every weight and the sin that so easily besets us. When we find our hearts stirring in distress, we must step back and prayerfully refocus our perspective on an eternal view. That long view lightens our load, and helps us to submit with a joyful spirit to whatever temporary circumstance the Lord has laid before us.
- Remember also that 1) he is God, and 2) he deserved no suffering. To the contrary, we are sinful men that deserve death and hell. If He could display godly patience in the face of suffering and distress, then how much more ought we to?

**Hebrews 12:4-11** *“4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. 5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: 6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. 7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? 8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. 9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. 11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”*

- My dear friends, we are foolish, sinful creatures. We deserve death and hell, and yet God has adopted us into His family, and therefore deals with us faithfully as His precious children. He knows that we have need of chastisement betimes, like an unruly child. He is a faithful Father that always has His eye on the eternal perspective. He chastens us with precision, knowing exactly what outcome He wants to produce in us. He knows our frames, and exactly what chastisement is needed in type, time, and degree. Take that to the bank. He is not dealing with us

rashly; He is not randomly venting His spleen because he's had a bad day. We often cannot correlate why He is chastening us, or what outcome He is crafting, but we know that it is absolutely targeted and it is for our best and eternal good. Again, keeping that in mind ought to give us great comfort, and allow us to patiently endure chastening.

- What means does God use to chasten us?
  - He afflicts our minds.
  - He afflicts our bodies.
  - He puts us in a circumstance that is contrary to what we desire.
  - He gives our enemies a season to cause us distress.
  - He sends someone to instruct or correct us (a parent, a faithful brother or sister, etc)
- Regardless of the immediate cause of our distress, the primary cause and purpose is from the Lord. We must fight hard against our flesh when we are afflicted, because our flesh wants to put all focus on the immediate cause, as though removing that distress will solve the whole issue. That would be like a child being enraged at a stick that was used to spank them. Who wielded the stick? We ought to glorify God by seeing His hand in our afflictions, and seeking relief **and** instruction. We want to learn the lesson that God is teaching, lest we be lacking something in the long run:
  - *James 1:2-4* "2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; 3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. 4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

**Hebrews 12:12, 13** "12 Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; 13 And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed."

- Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees:
  - When we are chastened of the Lord, we can find ourselves feeling afflicted and burdened down, and slouching into sin. Our hearts are wrestling, and our thoughts are consumed with worry, fear, pride, lust, malice, anger, strategy, etc. Add in the accusations of Satan, and of our own conscience, and we can find ourselves in a bad spot very quickly. In this posture, our hands are hanging low, and unable to effectively engage in the fight. Our legs are weak - paralyzed - and we are unable to effectively run the race that is set before us. We are supposed to lift them up by prayerfully dwelling on the notions of our Father's purpose driven chastisement, and the promised good that it is accomplishing; we are supposed to dwell upon the example of Christ, and how reasonable it is that we should do as our Master did; we are supposed to reframe our perspective to an eternal one, and therefore loosen

the hold that our suffering has on us. These things don't fully remove the distress and suffering that we have, but they enable us to rejoin the race with patience, courage, and good cheer. Who should do this encouraging? 1) We should encourage ourselves. 2) We should encourage each other.

- Make straight paths for your feet:
  - With the encouragement described above, we are to move forward in a straight path. The first part of that is that we have to get moving forward – staying stagnant in a state of agitated discontentment will only get us in trouble with the Lord. The word “straight” here means “upright”. Particularly when we are feeling afflicted, it is time to examine ourselves, and carefully ensure that we are indeed walking a straight path that is prone to keep our hearts focused and settled on spiritual and eternal things, rather than consuming the best of our energies with worldly things and clouding our minds with worldly thoughts, desires, and worries. This verse is not telling us to craft a new path – that path is already laid out for us in the scriptures; the verse is telling us to examine our walk, and diligently course correct to the straight path, lest we be carried completely away, or cause others to stumble with our double-mindedness. This is a big part of laying aside every weight, and the sin that so easily besets us.
  - **1Corinthians 11:23-34** *“23 ¶ For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: 24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. 25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. 26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come. 27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. 29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. 30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. 33 Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. 34 And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.”*
  - This is sober, serious business that we attend to here my friends. This is not a ritual to observe to make us feel good about ourselves, while we otherwise spend our days seeking our own pleasure in this life. We don't want to be

found eating and drinking unworthily! Paul instructs us here to examine ourselves, and that doesn't just mean while we are sitting here. That is a continual examination that we are to do; and when we find things lacking – when our behavior is wrong – we are to **quickly** get about the business of seeking the Lord for help to have a right spirit, and to bring forth the fruit of that spirit – change your behavior! Please give that some thought as we take the Lord's Supper today.

- Are you taking up your cross daily, and following after the Lord? Are you investing your gifts with your might into the service of the king, and helping your co-elect make their pilgrimage? Are you bearing their burdens, and grieved for their afflictions, or are you focused only on your own needs, your own desires, and your own discomfort?
- Are you compacted with this body? Are you behaving as an integral part of the body, supplying for the needs of the other members with your might, according to the gifts that you've been given? Or are you behaving as a cancerous tumor, that consumes from the body, and poisons it?
  - *Ephesians 4:16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*
- Are you loving your brothers and sisters with an unfeigned love, and truly, in honor, preferring them? Are you seeking and heeding their hearty spiritual counsel as you plot the course of your days, or are you chafing against them, and despising them in your heart, thinking yourself to be something, when indeed you are nothing?
- My friends, we are constantly in danger of departing from the straight path and being turned out of the way. We are constantly being tempted to conform to the world – it is a real and present danger!
  - **Romans 12:1-3** “1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. 3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”
  - **John 15:18,19** “18 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. 19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but

*because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.”*

- It's not enough to say I go to a church that preaches good doctrine. There are still a number of churches that talk good(ish) doctrinal talk, but their candlestick has long since been removed. **Behavior** eats doctrine for breakfast. We are what we do, not what we say. Those churches conformed to the world, and so the Lord departed from them. You don't get to that state of apostasy in a moment – it is a slight shifting by degrees, until you have fully left the path. Beloved there are a lot of young people in this church; there are a lot of young parents in this church. Time has passed to the point that many of our younger adults didn't experience things that were formative for the older folks. That's not a problem by itself, but it points to a major danger as the Lord has changed the scene, and we are not in the crucible of constant direct heavy affliction that we were in for many years. We are very thankful to have relief and peace from God; at the same time, we are wise to Satan's devices, and we know that it exposes a new attack vector for that wily serpent: namely, to slowly lull us into a sleepy worldliness in the absence of affliction. We are bombarded with temptation to conform to the world, and to allow our children to conform to the world. The way they talk, look, and behave. (sermons 5/24/15; 5/31/15) Remember what I said in my last sermon from 1Timothy 2:9 – We're not about “good looks”, we're about good works. We're not show ponies, we're work horses / war horses. Put your talents to good use; don't care about your peacocking with various “skills” – show me useful labor for the benefit of someone's actual, practical, daily needs. Quiet, laborious, humble. The plodding of the ox, not the strutting of the peacock. That's the example that you see from the older people in this church – follow it! There's a tendency in young people generally to look at the older generations and think “I know better ... those poor fools”, and that tendency is amplified in this satanic digital age, where people believe that they are geniuses by virtue of birth and google. The world screams the false doctrine of self fulfillment and self glorification. If we're not careful, that's exactly what we will teach our children while we say one thing, but introduce a deadly permissiveness in the name of letting them plot their own course. None of us is immune, and we must war against it. There's nothing high and mighty here – I need this focus – my children need this focus. If you aren't concerned about this, then I'm worried about you! This is a real and present danger – the deceiver -the roaring lion – is on the prowl, looking for whom he can devour! He knows his time is shorter by the hour, and he is deploying his entire arsenal of iniquity, hoping to cause our

love to wax cold. Watch for each other! Provoke each other to love and good works! Be receptive to any kind soul that is willing to provoke you!

- One last thought on this topic of straight paths for our feet. We live in a generation that proudly uses the concept of liberty as a cloak of maliciousness. The people of this nation oppress one another with their “liberty”. It must not be so in the church of Christ. If there is something that I do that seems like an indifferent thing to my conscience, but I know that it causes distress or concern with one of my beloved friends, then my first instinct ought to be to cheerfully let go of that thing. My instinct should **not** be to engage in contentious posturing about it. I should not demand scriptural proof as to why that thing is patently sinful. I should seek peace and order the affairs of my life and my house to ensure that peace. If it feels afflicting to leave off of something that you want for the sake of another person’s conscience, then recognize it as the chastening of the Lord, and lean into that discomfort with joy that the Lord has constrained your path and will make that affliction fruitful when you bear it patiently for the love of God and your co-elect.
  - **1Corinthians 6:12, 13** *“12 All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. 13 Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body.”*
  - **1Corinthians 10:23, 24** *“23 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. 24 Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s [wealth].”*

**Hebrews 12:14-29** *“14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: 15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; 16 Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. 17 For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears. 18 For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, 19 And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: 20 (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: 21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) 22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, 23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 And to Jesus the*

*mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. 25 See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: 26 Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. 27 And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: 29 For our God is a consuming fire.”*

I love you all. Amen.