

Eight Truths to Hold on To

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Introduction.

- A. For many of us, winter can be a depressing time to get through. In addition to all the normal struggles and challenges of our lives, we have to deal with the weather too. At this point of the earth's journey around the sun, it seems like we only get about 45 minutes of daylight a day. When it IS daytime, either it's snowing, or, at the very least, it's cloudy and gloomy. Even if that isn't true, when it is sunny outside, it's also so cold that we don't want to go out in it. All of that makes winter a very bleak season for us.
- B. Of course, not all winters are physical and tangible. Even on days when it's 90 degrees and sunny, we can go through winters in our life experiences. In those times, it seems like nothing is working and any day now, our entire life is going to collapse into a heap of rubble. Sometimes, it can be a battle to get out of bed.
- C. Whether the winter we're struggling with is actual or metaphorical, it can have the same disastrous effect on our lives. It can cripple our relationships with our loved ones, distance us from our closest friends, and worst of all, separate us from God. Satan is quite capable at using the storms of life to bury us in a spiritual blizzard. He knows that if he succeeds in sapping our will to do anything, he's also weakened our will to go to heaven.
- D. Naturally, for every assault of the evil one, there is a divinely provided defense. Satan and his schemes are no secret to God, and in His word, He has given us the spiritual protection we need. Those inspired concepts, once we understand them and apply them, can warm us even in the darkest, coldest days of our lives. In this winter, it seems appropriate to look at them, so let's consider this morning eight truths to hold on to.

I. Immediate Truths.

- A. The first thing that we need to remember when we're going through hard times is that **GOD IS FAITHFUL**. Paul testifies to this in 1 Corinthians 1:9. Now, as some of you Scripture junkies may notice, this is not usually the Scripture we cite to prove the faithfulness of God. Typically, we turn to 1 Corinthians 10:13, which talks about God's faithfulness in providing a way of escape in temptation. It's certainly true that God helps us then, but His faithfulness is much more far-reaching than that. Perhaps the best way we can say it is that God is faithful in keeping His promises, whatever the subject of those promises may be. Just as Joshua comments in Joshua 23, of all the good things that God promises us, not one will fail to come to pass.
- B. This tells us, then, how we need to look to God not just in temptation, but in everything. Are we worried about how we're going to pay the bills next month? God is faithful; He'll get us through it. Are we afraid for the souls of our children in this increasingly corrupt age? God is faithful; He'll give us the help we need to teach them to be righteous. Do we worry about the stain on our souls from the sins of our past? God is faithful; He'll forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Basically, the faithfulness of God is a big "Don't worry about it" sign that should accompany us until the end of our days. We can always count on Him.
- C. Likewise, we can be assured that **JESUS IS WITH US ALWAYS**. He tells us so in Matthew 28:20. Of course, in context, this is predicated upon our faithfulness, but as long as we are faithful, this is a promise we can count on. Friends, there are few things that matter to us as members of mankind more than having somebody else with us all the time. Just look at the main punishment they administer in prisons these days. You might think that a wicked man who has already been locked away for years wouldn't have much else that he could lose, but the way that prison officials control even those hardened criminals is with the threat of solitary confinement. Apparently, friends, even the company of felons is better than being alone. Of course, that's not what our Lord has promised. We don't have the continual companionship of thieves or murderers; instead, it is Jesus Himself who is always with us. We can't see Him, of course, but that doesn't change the reality of His presence. He's always with us, through the good times, through the bad times, through the times when we are surrounded by crowds of friends, and through the times when it seems everyone else has forgotten us. Just like we keep particular watch over our houses, our cars, and anything else that we've spent a lot of money on, Jesus keeps particular watch over us because of the ghastly price He paid for us. He had to give up His life to redeem us from our sins. When we've cost Him so much, He's not about to give up on us now.
- D. That's important on so many levels, but it's particularly important in our struggles with the devil, because **JESUS IS GREATER** than Satan is. So says John in 1 John 4:4. In other words, friends, whenever Jesus and the devil go head to head, Jesus wins. Just imagine how frustrating that must make things for Satan! He has it easy when he attacks people in the world, but not so with Christians. Satan wants to throw all these different temptations at us, but Jesus only allows him to use the temptations Jesus knows we can handle. Satan wants to weigh us down with our sins forever, but Jesus makes it possible for us to find forgiveness just by asking. Satan wants us to live miserable lives here and spend our hereafter in hell, but Jesus gives us joy here and the promise of greater joy in heaven. Of course, that's not a perspective on Satan that he wants us

to have, but it's true. Satan seems like a ferocious adversary, but in reality, he's attacking us with both hands tied behind his back, and that's the best he'll ever be able to do as long as we keep our faith in Jesus.

- E. If we need even more help than that, we should remember that **GOD IS ALWAYS LISTENING**. Along these lines, consider 1 John 5:14. As always, friends, I think we don't appreciate prayer enough. Just like many of us have been, I've been kind of grimly amused recently by all these giant banks that are being bailed out with billions and billions of dollars of our tax money. I've even been known to joke that I think I'll become the First National Bank of Matt, so that Uncle Sam will steer a few billion my way. Brethren, being a bank can't hold a candle to being a Christian. They might get billions from the feds, but we get things from God that you can't put a price tag on. How much is it worth, folks, for us to be forgiven of one sin? How much would it cost the Sultan of Brunei to buy forgiveness for just one little lie? One billion? Two? Ten? The truth is, friends, that all the wealthy men on earth could sink their entire fortunes into trying to pay that debt, and they wouldn't be any closer to buying forgiveness when they finished than when they started. What do we have to do? Ask God for forgiveness, and He will, through the price that Christ has already paid. That's just one tiny example. The truth is, the right to have God listen to us is priceless. We need to appreciate it for all that it gives us.

II. Future Truths.

- A. Basically, friends, for all of us who are Christians right now, we've got it as good as it gets. But what about the future? What assurances does the Bible offer us then? First of all, we know that **NOTHING CAN TAKE US FROM GOD**. We learn this from one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible, Romans 8:38-39. You know how I read this passage, friends? It's almost like Paul sat down, pen in hand, and made a list of the most powerful things he could think of besides God: "Death? Yup; death is powerful. I'll put that one down. Angels? Angels are pretty powerful too. I'll write them on the list." Then, once Paul puts together this list of the greatest forces that could be opposed to us, he dismisses them all. None of them, nor even all of them put together, can possibly separate us from God if we don't want to go. Even if they tried, God would just laugh at them and say, "No; this one's Mine." The world around us is uncertain, but we can be sure of God.
- B. Because we have such confidence in God, we can also be confident that **AFFLICTION IS LIGHT AND MOMENTARY**. Paul bears witness to this in 2 Corinthians 4:17. This is a verse that calls us to perspective. There are times in our lives when things are going well and we recognize that, yeah, we aren't having to handle anything too rough right now. There are times, though, when things aren't going well, when the voyage of our lives seems to have foundered on the rock of some disaster. It's not like Paul didn't have to deal with those things in his life; indeed, he had to deal with the disaster of literal shipwreck on more than one occasion. The beauty of this verse is that Paul looks at those serious trials and says, "That's just momentary, light affliction too. In the long run, it isn't any more serious than those daily paper-cut annoyances." How can that be true? How can we look at the loss of our jobs, or of a loved one, and say, "That doesn't matter?" The truth is, friends, that next to the joy we will have in heaven, it doesn't matter. Once we get that, we can go through the worst trials the devil can throw at us with a smile on our faces, because those things don't touch anything that's truly important. Nothing that happens here can diminish the joy we have in God.
- C. In fact, we need to understand our lives within the framework of the idea that **ALL THINGS WORK FOR GOOD**. Paul makes this claim in Romans 8:28. This is an idea that atheists like to ridicule a lot. The best example I can think of is the character of Dr. Pangloss in Voltaire's *Candide*. Even in the midst of wars, earthquakes, and all sorts of other evils, this character goes around chirping, "All's for the best in the best of all possible worlds." Voltaire uses him to attack the idea of a benevolent, omnipotent God. Of course, the claim that this world is perfect is not really the claim that Paul is making. In fact, in context, Paul is saying the opposite. He describes the world as groaning and in pain, like a woman in labor. However, the pain that we go through here isn't pointless. Instead, it is pain that is readying our way to heaven. God's goal isn't to make us happy here. His goal is to make us happy forever with Him. That's why we can rejoice in each day we see and each event we experience, because each one is working for the good that God's plan has designed.
- D. All of this pain is worth going through because **HEAVEN IS INCOMPARABLY BETTER**. One more quotation from Romans 8 proves this point, this time in Romans 8:18. Sometimes, I think we struggle to get our minds around this idea. The traditional depiction of heaven--golden mansions, white robes, harps, all that bit--doesn't really sound all that appealing. It sounds like a setup for an eternity of boredom. There are a couple of things in that that we need to clear up. First, we need to remember that heaven is described as a place of rest. Here, as Solomon says, we constantly struggle because we have eternity in our hearts. We embark on a lifelong search for perfection, and are always frustrated because we can't find it. In heaven, that search will be satisfied, because we will finally have something that is perfect and whole and complete. Even more than that, though, heaven isn't about what. Heaven is about Who. All the joy that we have ever known in our friendships and relationships here will be nothing before the joy of knowing and experiencing God. God is good, brethren, and no place where He is can ever be bad. The reward for all of our years of loving Him even though we can't see Him will be the opportunity to both see and love Him for all of eternity.

Conclusion. If you want to spend eternity with God, you need to obey Him here first.