

THE SERMON

Eleventh Sunday in Pentecost

Sunday, August 24, 2025

Exhortations for Endurance
Unshaken

Hebrews 12:18-29

Beloved Church, it is a joy to come together again as a family of faith to read God's Word, ask for His help, and find our strength in the unchanging foundation of Christ. We are still working on our series "***Exhortations for Endurance***" today, and I'm pleased to meditate and reflect on a powerful text from the book of Hebrews that reminds us how strong our new covenant in Christ is.

If you paid attention to the reading of this Bible text, the writer of Hebrews 12:18–29 compares the **old covenant**, the one of the Old Testament, which was full of fear and anxiety, to the **new covenant**, the one of the New Testament, which leads us to a state of awe and amazement. The invitation is to live in a way that

makes it clear what is permanent and what is temporary. The invitation is also to know that anything we hold dear must be built on Christ, our solid rock.

I want to tell you a story that might be familiar to a lot of us. Charles Blondin was a talented French tightrope walker and acrobat in the 1800s. He was famed for crossing Niagara Falls on a wire. The exciting show brought in thousands of people. After successfully crossing the wire while wheeling a wheelbarrow, he questioned the crowd, ***“Do you believe I can carry a person across in this wheelbarrow?”*** The crowd erupted with shouts of affirmation. Then he pointed to a volunteer and asked, ***“Who will get in?”*** Silence fell. No one stepped forward.

You see, the people who watched Blondin believed in his skills, but when they were asked to act on that confidence, they hesitated. They cared more about their lives than the excitement of crossing. You have to do something if you believe, right? A lot of the time, we have to make the same choice in our faith: ***we can say we believe in Christ, but are we ready to totally trust Him with our lives? Are we ready to take a chance and trust God?***

The author of Hebrews talks about two mountains: Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. ***Sinai***, where God gave the

law, stands for terror and a feeling of being far away. The people were scared when God showed himself to them as thunder, lightning, and a voice that shook the ground. I would be scared to, no doubt!

Zion, on the other hand, stands for the new covenant, which is full of forgiveness, love, mercy, and a relationship that brings us closer to God. The new covenant in Christ tells us to be brave when we go to God and to have a relationship with him based on love instead of fear. And this is the main point here, to have a RELATIONSHIP with God through Christ.

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe” is what verse 28 says. Friends, the call is to live with an awareness of the eternal kingdom we are a part of and to react with appreciation, wonder, and respect.

So, one of the big questions here is, ***how do we identify the essentials of our lives?***

And here's another question for us to think about: ***How do we distinguish between the temporary and the eternal?***

Those are no easy questions to answer. We probably need some time to digest and reflect.

We live in a time where there are a lot of things that can distract us. There are so many things that demand our attention that it's hard to know what really matters.

We live in a world full of distractions that make it hard to tell the difference between temporary things and things that last. For example, some people feel that social media always shows them photos and viral trends, which might make them feel like they're not good enough or like they're not doing enough. Is this what really matters?

Fame, influence, and image have helped celebrities build empires, yet even they have talked about how empty fame can make them feel. The desire for money and status, as seen in other wealthy people, can take over headlines and goals. However, these accomplishments, while remarkable, are still based on the present. They can quickly take over deeper considerations about purpose, legacy, and spiritual foundation. We need to remember that ethereal things are like sand in our hands; they go easily through our fingers.

Even in everyday life, distractions are less obvious but just as strong. Think about Simone Biles, whom I talked about in a previous sermon. She took a break from the Olympics to focus on her mental health. Her choice

showed that even the most disciplined and successful people can feel overwhelmed by the pressure to do well and the noise of what other people demand of them. Or consider Steve Jobs, who, near the end of his life, thought more about relationships and meaning than about his inventions. These instances show us that the pressing but ultimately unimportant needs of modern life often get in the way of love, faith, and character that last forever.

So, the challenge is to learn how to tell the difference. To stop and think for a moment: ***Is this making me who I am, or is it just taking up my time?***

The Bible says in Hebrews 12:1-2 to ***“lay aside every weight.”*** In today's world, that can mean turning off your phone, walking away from the unending scroll of your phone or computer screen, or not giving in to the impulse to chase what everyone else is chasing. We can live a life of faith and purpose, but only if we are ready to ignore the noise and focus on what really matters, as the "great cloud of witnesses" shows us.

So, one more time, ***how do we distinguish between the temporary and the eternal?***

I'd want to share some ideas that might assist us in making our decision.

First, put your **connection with God first**, in other words, **"prioritize your relationship with God"**: The first thing you need to do is have a close relationship with God. This entails praying, reading His Word, and letting His presence change the way we think and act. Are we making time for God in our busy lives? Or are we just making time for Him when it's easy or when we have a need? As we get closer to God, He will let us see the eternal things that are hidden by the transitory.

Second, let's look at **what you've promised** in other words: **"Evaluate your commitments."** We need to question ourselves, **"Are the things we are putting our lives into in line with God's kingdom?"** We don't have to do "religious" things all the time, but we should think about how we spend our time, energy, and money. Are we putting more value on things that won't last, or are we putting our time and resources into relationships and causes that show God's love and truth?

A third aspect is **to get involved in the community**. We are asked to be active members of a community of believers. The author of Hebrews tells us not to stop meeting together (Hebrews 10:25). Being part of a community helps us stay accountable and gives us the strength to keep going, especially when things get

tough. As we try to live out our faith actively and intentionally, we may draw on each other.

Finally, we should ***try to see our lives from an everlasting point of view***. In other words, ***“live with an eternal perspective.”*** Problems and tribulations sometimes feel like too much to handle, but if we remember that they are just temporary and that our hope is in something far bigger, we can get through them. We belong to a kingdom that can't be shaken. Yes! My friends, we belong to a kingdom that can't be shaken. We can confront life's storms with strength and faith if we know this.

As we journey during this week, may we take a moment to reflect on our lives and consider what is truly essential. Let us ask God to reveal to us where we might be holding onto the temporary and how we can embody the eternal in our daily pursuits. Try it, and you will see...

Let us pray:

Gracious and loving God, we thank You for inviting us into a relationship that is marked by grace and mercy. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. May we discern

what is essential in our lives and let go of the distractions that keep us from living fully for You. Strengthen our hearts to endure with courage, knowing we are recipients of a kingdom that cannot be shaken. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.