

Uprooting Bitterness

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We turn in God's word tonight to Hebrews 12. The text tonight will be verse 15 but we'll read the entire chapter. Hebrews 12. This is the inspired word of God.

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, 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. 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. 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. 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.

Thus far we read God's word.

As I said, the text tonight is verse 15,

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;

Hebrews 12 describes the Christian life as running a race and as it uses that figure of running a race, we are taught here that the race is difficult. We run in the desert wilderness of this world, that is part of what makes it difficult, but also what makes it difficult is our own sinfulness. The weight of our sins that are spoken of in the beginning verses of the chapter, they are the besetting sins that are such a struggle for us in our lives, but we're taught that as we run this race, we must have our eyes set on the Author and the Finisher of our faith, our Lord Jesus Christ, and also on the cloud of witnesses. Those who have gone before run the race and receive the prize in Jesus Christ, keeping our eyes on them, we see and know that one day we also will receive that prize of life with Jesus Christ.

But the race is difficult and that idea of the race and the difficulties of that race, they are carried through this entire chapter. That's why it is in the verses then that follow in Hebrews 12 that I've referred to in the running of the race, the chapter speaks of chastening. There is the need of chastening as we run this race because of the Sins that

we struggle with. We are in need of the chastening of God. That helps us to run this race in a right way.

Then in verse 12, it comes back to that figure. As it speaks of hands which hand down and the feeble knees, picture a runner who's out of breath. He's got his hands resting on his knees because he's tired from the race. That's us and we are tired in the race because there are discouragements in the race. And there are specific things that follow, then, in the chapter that is set before us, the struggles that we face in a real and particular way: we struggle to live in peace with all men; we struggle to live in holiness as God calls us to live. And also the passage then warns us of bitterness and apostasy.

So now we come to the text that we consider tonight. The context is the running of the race, bitterness is one of those besetting sins that can weigh us down in the running of this race and so we want to consider tonight the sin of bitterness. What was striking to me as I worked on this sermon and worked with this text, how often bitterness is addressed in the Scriptures. It's not just this one passage, it's not just a few passages, but what we're going to see tonight is that there are many passages and many parts of the history of the Bible that deal with this sin and it's convicting. It's been convicting for me not only to preach it as I did in Hudsonville and I actually preached it in the Faith Congregation a few weeks ago, but also preaching it again tonight. It's convicting how much and how often I find this sin in myself and how much we find this sin, then, in ourselves.

Bitterness we can classify as one of those so-called respectable sins. That terminology is the title of a book written by a man named Jerry Bridges, "Respectable Sins," and what he means by that is not that there are certain sins that are okay or acceptable within the church, but what he talks about in that book, our sins that we have made acceptable in the church, we ignore them. We don't look much at them. We maybe excuse them and think they're okay. We might think that they're just a feeling that we have that we really can't help. Bitterness is one of those, I believe. It's one of those respectable sins, one that we've allowed to creep into our own hearts and lives and say, "It's okay for it to be there." Now the word of God comes to us tonight and says, "No, it's not." It's not right to live in bitterness. It's not just a feeling that you have. It's not simply an emotion but it's sin.

So with that in mind tonight, we consider this text using the theme "Uprooting Bitterness." We consider first, the sin; secondly, the explanation of that sin, where it comes from; and then finally, the hope. What we deal with right away at the beginning is definition. What is bitterness? Bitterness is a terrible, detestable, sinful attitude that is found in our hearts. This sin of bitterness is something that begins below the surface. It's something you don't see right away but it's found, first of all, in our hearts. That's evident from the very terminology of the text where the text speaks of the root of bitterness. The very idea, the figure root is that it grows underground and when it grows underground for a while, then eventually it sprouts up. That's the sin of bitterness.

So first of all in our hearts, then it sprouts up. We'll look at the sprouting up in a few moments, but first understand what this bitterness is, two words that describe it. First of all, it's resentment and then, secondly, animosity. Resentment and animosity. Resentment

is an anger that is held onto internally that develops into animosity towards someone. It's really an anger or hatred that develops. This resentment and animosity, then, are allowed to fester and grow and take hold of one's heart. That's what bitterness is, resentment, animosity that take hold of one's heart and then really control a man's life, a woman's life, their thinking and their perspective of things.

This bitterness is the root of anger and enmity and hostility and strife and holding of grudges within the church and within our homes. It may be that there's bitterness only in one area of our lives, in one relationship. Maybe just in one, but even if there's bitterness in just one relationship in our lives, eventually that bitterness will spread and it will take hold on us and it will influence our entire perspective of God and of this world and other people as well. That's what happens to bitterness, it grows in that way.

So let's see and understand tonight that bitterness is sin. Let's be clear on that tonight. Bitterness is sin. It's listed in Ephesians 4:31 as one of those sins that grieves the Holy Spirit, but there is an opposite list to that. You turn to Ephesians 4, you see that. It says there at the end of that chapter, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." There you see the sin of bitterness. It's the opposite of being kind one to another. It's the opposite of being tenderhearted. It's the opposite of forgiving one another. Really in the end, it's the opposite of true contentment.

So we see and understand tonight that bitterness is not a feeling that we cannot help, but bitterness is a choice and a decision. It's a sinful choice and a sinful decision. It's a sinful response to something that has happened to us. Often it's a sinful response to what someone else has done against us or what we perceive as something that has been done against us. We would like to say that, "I'm bitter because of what So-and-so has done to me. I'm bitter because of this circumstance in my life." You're not bitter because of that circumstance. It was the occasion for it but bitterness itself is a choice and decision that is wrong and sinful before God. Sometimes it happens that it begins when we're very young. Something happened to us and we responded with bitterness in our youth in immaturity, but then that led to more bitterness, and that led to more bitterness, and pretty soon it's full-blown bitterness in our hearts and in our lives.

Let's see and understand then tonight that this bitterness is something that arises in relationship. It is realized or comes to manifestation in relationships. We see that, first of all from this perspective: bitterness arises out of jealousy. James 3:14 says, "But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth." It speaks there of bitter envying. Bitterness arises out of envy, jealousy. Maybe we're jealous of something else that someone else has in their life: the popularity that they have in life; the looks that they have; the money that they have; the spouse that they have; the work that they have; the athletic ability they have; the gifts and abilities they have. And the list can go on and on.

So that's in relationship, in relationship to another person. We see what they have and we think that we ought to have it and bitterness can set in because we don't. It also happens in many other ways in close relationships. The Scriptures make that clear. In Colossians 3:19, husbands are commanded, "love your wives, and be not bitter against them." That's a sin the husbands can fall into in relationship to their wives. It's the opposite of loving them. A husband who is bitter with his wife is not loving her. Now that doesn't mean that only husbands can fall into that sin. The wife can certainly fall into that sin as well, and many others can fall into that sin also, but it tells us this is one of the struggles in marriage where a wife does something or a husband in his selfishness thinks that she's not loving him like she should and he's bitter towards her and that bitterness grows.

It happens in other relationships as well. Remember that Cain was bitter against Abel because of the good offering that he brought before God. And there was Esau who was bitter with Jacob because Jacob stole the birthright blessing. It was wrong of Jacob to do what he did but it was just as wrong for Esau to live in bitterness against his brother. Then there were Joseph's brothers. They were bitter against their brother Joseph not because he had done them wrong but because he was godly and he was doing what was right, but they lived in bitterness towards him so that, remember what they called him? Kids, do you remember? When he was coming to find them, what did they say? "Here comes that dreamer." That indicates the bitterness that was found in their hearts and in their souls.

So these instances of bitterness tell us that it happens and does happen in the relationships that are closest to us. It happens in a home. It happens in a family. It happens within the church. It happens against an elder or the elders of the church or the pastor of the church, or towards a member who is difficult in the church, and there are people, some people carry this bitterness around with them their entire lives and it must be rooted out because it's not a harmless weed, it's a poisonous and noxious weed. But not only is bitterness found in our horizontal relationships, our relationships with each other, but bitterness can also creep into our relationship with God. It's a sinful attitude in response to what God does.

Now here's why it is that bitterness that we can have toward another person can and will develop into bitterness against God, because God himself is sovereign over all things, he's sovereign, as well, over those hurts that happen in relationships, the wrongs that are done against us in our own lives that may be the occasion for bitterness but when we're bitter against a person, we give into that and we live in that, what happens is it's going to develop into bitterness against God himself. But there are other times when God is working in our lives that we can become bitter against him. There are biblical examples of that.

Hezekiah, we read in Isaiah 38:15, Hezekiah was bitter against God because of the sickness that God sent on him. When he was sick, Hezekiah was not looking at his life from the right perspective and he became bitter against God.

Another example of that was Naomi. You remember Naomi who went down to the land of Moab with her husband and her two sons in a time of famine in the land of Canaan, and you remember that when she was down in Moab, God chastened that family sorely. Her husband and both her sons died. Now God used that, of course, for good; used that, of course, to bring Ruth not only into Canaan and to come to faith and to be converted, but also that she was brought into the line of David and the line of Jesus himself. But yet remember what Naomi said when she returned to Moab. She told her old friends and her old family who were there, "Don't call me Naomi anymore but call me Marah, which means bitter." It's often looked at in history and thought, "Well, she was just a sad widow." But no, she said bitter. She came back bitter at the chastening of the Lord. I don't believe she stayed that way but that's what she was when she returned. She was bitter.

Bitterness is the wrong response to God's providence. We understand how that can happen. We understand and know that God is in control, but there are times in our lives where we so hurt, maybe a spouse is taken away in death, a child dies, there is something else that happens in our lives that's traumatic and hurtful and we wonder how it is that a God who loves us and cares for us can bring such hurt and devastation in our own lives, and there is the temptation in those moments to be bitter against God. We sang of that a few moments ago in that versification of Psalm 77. That's where Asaph was at in the struggles of his own life. He was bitter for a while against God himself.

So we see then tonight, this sin of bitterness in relationship to others and in relationship to God himself, but I said earlier that this bitterness is something that grows and develops in our hearts but then it sprouts up. It's something that pops to the surface and that's the idea here in the text as well. Bitterness is a root that grows underground. It grows where no one else can see it. It's invisible for a time until it pops up, until it springs up, and then it's visible to others.

Well, we see and understand that when bitterness begins, it wraps itself around our hearts like a python around its prey. It strangles us and seeks to take hold on us. But now the question is as it grows and develops in our hearts is: how do we see this manifested? How do we see it manifested outwardly in our lives? There are many ways and the Scriptures speak to this as well.

In Romans 3:14, we see that this bitterness becomes manifest in speech, in hurtful words to others. This is exactly what can happen in a marriage. It can happen for a husband in his relationship to his wife. He may be the nicest guy at church and be the nicest guy when he's out at work and in other places as well, but when he gets home and he's around his wife, he's filled with resentment and animosity in his own heart. Because of that, he may give her the silent treatment when he's angry with her, but then after that for giving the silent treatment, maybe he can't keep the word back anymore and then he batters her with his words. It's because of the bitterness that is found in his own heart. Maybe she's not living up to the standard that he has set for her, or maybe it is that she has very really wronged him in some way. It's easy then for a husband to think that he's justified in treating his wife in that way but the root of that is the sin of bitterness and his words show that he has that bitterness in his own heart.

Not only that, but one who is filled with bitterness shows this in the way that they talk about others. They can't overlook the faults of others. They hold onto those things. Like Joseph's brother, even though he did no wrong really, yet they held onto what it is that he had said and what it is that he had done. Those who are filled with bitterness do not live in love that covers a multitude of sins, they do not live in humility and in a loving way with others, but when others do something against them, they right away think that they've been wronged in some great and terrible way.

So those who are living in bitterness are constantly annoyed at others. Do you find yourself annoyed at others? Well, there would be the proof that there is bitterness found in your heart. Not only that, but bitterness is found in a complaining spirit. Job 7:11 says, "Therefore I will not refrain my mouth. I will speak in the anguish of my spirit. I will complain in the bitterness of my soul." Remember Job and all that he went through, there are times when he struggled and there was a time in his struggle that he complained in the bitterness of his soul. When we are complaining, complaining about others, complaining about God, complaining about the circumstances of our lives, this would be the indication of bitterness that is found in our own hearts. That can happen, for example, within the church. It comes out in that relationship with the elders, with the pastor, with the deacons, with the broader assemblies, complaining about the decision that they make, complaining about the things that they do, complaining about the things that have been said. That's an indication of bitterness that is found in our own hearts and then in the end, bitterness results in vengeful action like Cain toward his brother Abel.

Now sometimes it's not as bold as that way, as Cain when he killed his brother Abel, but it can be found in the church too; that you avoid someone in the church; you really don't want to talk to them; if you know they're going to be some place, you'd say, "I'm not going to go there." Or if you find them at a place that you're at, you're going to do everything you can to avoid talking to them or having any fellowship with them. The root of that is bitterness.

Beloved, this bitterness always shows itself and let us not think that it's innocent, it's not that big of a deal. The man, the woman who lives in bitterness will not know close relationships. He or she will not. They will not be able to develop close intimate relationships. They will not have a close and intimate marriage. In reality, what bitterness does is it cuts off those who are closest to us. Not only that, but in the end it's going to affect our relationship with God where we are living in bitterness against God. We're eventually going to give him the silent treatment. We're not going to want to listen to what he has to say to us and we're not going to go to him in prayer and speak to him either when this bitterness is found in our souls. That's the idea of the passage here. We're running the race, running the race in relationship to God as the people of God saved by grace and by grace alone. This affects us in the running of our race and that's why it is that we must uproot this bitterness. We must uproot it. We must repent of it. We must turn from this sin in our own lives.

Now that's the idea of bitterness, but we are to understand where this bitterness rises from in our own lives. Now that comes out and we see that as we look at the text, as we look at the beginning of the verse. We see there, we read there, "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God." Now there are those who look at the beginning words of the text here and they see that there is proof that there is no preservation of the saints. They would say that the text here is speaking of those who believe, who are the objects of God's grace, who have been given the life of Jesus Christ in their hearts, but they fall away from grace. That's how they interpret the words there, the beginning of verse 15, "lest any man fail of the grace of God." They've received the grace of God but they fail, they fall away from it.

We must understand about that word that's found in the text, "fail," that it never means fall away, and that's certainly not the meaning here in this passage, that there is one who had the grace of God and they fell away from that grace. Instead the idea of the text is this, that there is one who is the object of God's sovereign grace and is regenerated and has true faith in his heart but he falls short. The idea is he fails to grow spiritually because he's not using the means of grace that God has given. He's not seeing things from a right perspective. We should understand that in the idea of the running of a race, instead of a man who is exerting himself in the running of the race, he's just coasting. He's maybe barely running. His spiritual life has become stagnant. He's not going anywhere, or if he is, it's only half-hearted.

There might be some here who enjoy running who can't perceive of someone running in such a way but think of it along the lines of a high school gym class where the high school students are required to run a mile or two miles and there are some who will run hard but there are others who don't care if it takes them 20 minutes or 30 minutes to get a mile under their belt. They're going to cut corners. I had a gym teacher who rode his bike when I was in high school for those kinds of students because they would cut through people's yards and just walk the entire time and come back at the end just running a little bit right at the end to make it look like they had run. Spiritually there may be some of us right now who are running the race in that kind of way. We're still coming to church but it's just to check off the box and say that I've done it, or maybe we come to church just to analyze the sermon and critique it. We might pray and read the word of God but it's just going through the motions. We're not really hearing what God has to say in the word, and when we pray, we're just repeating the same things over and over again. We're not really talking to God and praising God and thanking God and pouring out before him the things that we need.

So that's what the text is referring to, one who is saved by grace but one who's not exerting himself in this race and the problem is that in this bitterness that is found in his own heart, he's failing to see life properly and he's failing to see life properly especially in two respects, in two ways. The first is this: the man who lives in bitterness is failing to see rightly the sovereignty of God in his or her life. He fails to understand how God's sovereignty applies to every aspect of life.

It's easy for that to happen in our lives. A few weeks ago when I preached this sermon, the night before I said to my wife, "You don't have to make supper tonight. Let's just order some pizza." So we ordered pizza and when I was waiting at the pizza place, I had to wait a little longer than I expected to wait for that pizza and then in addition to that, they messed up our order which I figured out just as I was leaving and on my way home, and then on top of that when I got home and I opened up our pizza, half the toppings were missing from it. Maybe you've had circumstances similar to that, but by that time, you're irritated and angry and then I had to go before God and lead my family in prayer and thank God for what he gave and I remember praying at that time that God would help me to see his sovereignty at that moment so that I would not be filled with bitterness, the bitterness that says, you know that attitude, "I'm never going there again! I'm not going there! They messed it up again!" That's bitterness.

Now that's a small thing but we see how quickly that bitterness can be found in our own hearts and it's because we're not seeing the circumstances of life from the perspective of God's sovereignty. He's in control and now how does he want me to respond to what he has now set before me in my own life? He's a God who promises to work all things together for good and so I'm to see life from that perspective but so often we fail to see it that way. Whether it's relationships and what others do against me, husbands, wives, we're sinned against, a sharp word is spoken and we want to hold onto it, we don't want our love to cover a multitude of sins in that instance, we want to hold onto it and we live in bitterness because we're failing to see God's sovereign at that moment and he's calling me to respond in a certain way.

The second area where we're wrong in our thinking when we live in bitterness is we don't love the neighbor as we ought. We fail to apply God's command to love the neighbor as he calls us to do and when we fail to do that, bitterness grows. Now we understand our calling to love the neighbor but we like to make exceptions in our own minds. "I know I'm called to love my neighbor now but in this circumstance, I don't have to love." Now we don't say it exactly like that but that's what our actions show. So then we give in to that anger and that resentment and that bitterness, we fail to see our calling to love and to forgive, and we fail to see the calling that love covers a multitude of sins in our own lives, but the greater problem is not simply a lack of seeing our calling to love the neighbor but we're failing to see the amazing love of God for us. That's really what we fail to see. We fail to see that I am the chief of sinners and that God still loves me and in his love he sent his only begotten Son, and God has forgiven me the greatest debt and so often I think that the sin committed against me is the greater debt than the sin that God himself has pardoned. That's where we get it wrong. Not just our failing to love the neighbor but our failure to see the love of God for us in Jesus Christ.

Now turn that around positively. Here's the weed killer, the Roundup for bitterness: the sovereignty of God and the love of God. But now in looking at that, we get to the heart of the problem. The heart of the problem is my selfishness and pride when it comes to bitterness. It's not other people and it's not the circumstances of my life, the problem is me. That's so important. That's so important that I thought about in the other times I preached it too, having the congregation simply repeat it with me. I won't have you do

that but say it in your head: the problem is me. It's all me. I'm concerned more about the kingdom of me than the kingdom of God. If others would only see my rightness and bow down before my rightness and do what I want them to do, then everything would be great.

We turn God's word upside down. We don't make it about him and his glory, we make it about ourselves and our own glory. When we say, "I don't have to love the neighbor in this circumstance or in this instance," we're turning the word of God upside down or instead of reminding ourselves of our calling to love, we turn around and say, "Why doesn't she? Why isn't he loving me and serving me at this time?" We make it about ourselves. The idolatry of self rises in our hearts and it blinds us to our own sin and you see that this is the fertile soil then for bitterness to grow and bitterness loves this kind of fertile soil.

I'm reminded in this of something that happened a while back at my brother and sister-in-laws' house. Their sewer line was backed up and they found out the problem was is that a root had grown in through a crack in that sewer line and what had happened is that one little root that grew in that crack, it was feeding on all of that sewer water that was coming out and a big root ball grew right within the sewer line and plugged it. That's bitterness, feeding off our sinful natures, feeding off our selfishness and our pride and it grows and it becomes very strong and plugs up everything else, as it were, the loving others and serving the God of our salvation.

What happens then in our selfishness is we want retribution, we want justice for the wrongs that have been committed against us. We take the word of God and say, "Vengeance is mine, saith Gary. And vengeance is mine, saith," and put your name in the blank, instead of hearing the word of God, "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord." We turn it upside down. That's what we do in our selfishness and pride.

So the word of God comes to us tonight and says we must uproot bitterness. Uproot it in our homes. Uproot it in our marriages. Uproot it in the church. And that means doing this: repent. The word of God tonight calls us to repent of this root of bitterness. The word of God calls us to examine our lives, look where we find this bitterness in our lives and repent of it and turn from this sin in our lives. The word of God tonight calls us, examine your actions but not just your actions, examine your own hearts. See and understand the problem in all of this, that the problem is not God, the problem is not my spouse, the problem is not my children, the problem is not my parents, the problem is not my elders, the problem is not other people in the church, the problem is me. It's my selfishness, my seeking autonomy in my life. We must call it as what it is and see and understand that when we live in this way, we keep ourselves from running the race like we should. It's like trying to run a race with your shoelaces tied together. No one would think of running a race with their shoelaces tied together but when we live in bitterness, we give ourselves over to bitterness, that's what we're doing. It puts us in a holding pattern in this race.

But the reality is sometimes that's where we like to be. We are like the pigs who like to wallow in the mud. We want to wallow in our own bitterness. But beloved, when we repent, we are committed to seeing life from a different perspective. You see, it's just not changing and saying, "Well, I'm not going to be bitter," but it's seeing life from a different perspective and the perspective of God's sovereignty and the perspective of God's love.

So may we learn to do that as well, see and know that God is sovereign over all these circumstances in my life and then remember the love of God and remember that that love covers a multitude of sins and if I cannot do that in my relationships, then to follow the steps of Matthew 18 in a humble and in a loving way. So we're called to uproot bitterness.

There's hope for us as we do this. Our hope and our help is found alone in the God of our salvation as we run this race. That's what comes out here in Hebrews 12. In verse 18 we're reminded that we do "not come unto the mount that might be touched," we don't come to Mount Sinai where there were those displays of the holiness of God, but in contrast we are those in verse 22 who "come unto mount Zion." We come to Mount Zion, the place where God fellowships with his people. We have with God a relationship of love and friendship because of his sovereign grace and because of the work of Jesus Christ. That's what verse 24 points out, "And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." Abel spoke of Jesus Christ by a picture in the bloody sacrifice that he brought, but now we see and know the Mediator whose blood was shed for all of our sins. We have fellowship with God through Jesus Christ and then verse 28 points that out as well, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."

We have a relationship of love and friendship with God through Jesus Christ. We're part of this everlasting kingdom that is always victorious but now as we live before him, we need a good dose of godly fear, that we would see the greatness and the majesty of our God and bow before him, the great God of heaven and earth, who loves us with a perfect and everlasting love. Let us pray then that as we read God's word, we would be filled with the word of God and the truth of the word of God, that we would overcome that bitterness in the strength of the word and the strength of the Holy Spirit. It's God alone who can deliver us from bitterness.

We have in the Old Testament a beautiful display of that and this is what gives us hope as we end tonight. Children, you remember that the people of Israel after they came out of Egypt and went through the Red Sea, the first place that they came to after that was a place called Marah. You remember that the people were thirsty. They ran out of water there in the desert. They were thirsty and there was a pool there at Marah and so the people go up ready to drink the water and they take a taste of that water and they have to spit it out. It's bitter. It's no good. It would make them sick if they drank it. And how disappointing that was for them and they complained to Moses just a few days after seeing the Red Sea and with God being present among them with the cloud and the pillar

of fire. But remember God's cure. He told Moses to cut down a tree and that tree fell into the water and it healed the waters and they could drink. So also there's a tree that cures our bitterness. That tree is the cross of Jesus Christ for in that tree we see the love of God, in that tree we see the power of God, in that tree we see God himself and what he's done for our salvation and our redemption, and there in that cross we see power to change as well as the assurance of forgiveness in that cross and there is the power to change.

So as we struggle with bitterness in our own lives, bitterness against others, bitterness against God at times, let us look to that tree, to the cross of Jesus Christ and find hope there. Amen.

Let us pray.

Father in heaven, as we leave here tonight, may this word not leave us but instead give us grace in the power of the Holy Spirit to meditate upon these things and see and know where bitterness has taken hold of our hearts and lives, and we pray, O Lord, in the power of the Spirit, in the power of the word, in the power of the cross of Jesus Christ, that we would uproot that bitterness, that we would dig it out, get rid of it and learn to think in a right way, learn to think along the lines of thy sovereignty and of thy love in Jesus Christ. So Father, give us grace and strength to do that tonight and in this coming week as well. All this we pray, thankful, Lord, that thou hast brought us here, thankful for thy word, and thankful for the many blessings that thou hast given to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.