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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] Now like this morning to return to Hebrews chapter 12 verses 14 to 29 if you're visiting with us today you might have gathered by now. This is a passage, this is a book, a book of Hebrews that we've been looking at for quite a while now, we're nearly, we're almost at the penultimate stages of this study looking at the book of Hebrews which was written to early Christians who were of Jewish origin, who were struggling with persecution, with opposition and with the thought of giving up the Christian faith, they were tempted to give up and return to their roots in Judaism and reject the Christ that they had embraced and so this book under God has been given to, the theme is Christ is much better, really that's the theme of the whole book as you will, I hope have gathered if you've been coming every week, Christ is much better, so focus on why Jesus is much better, why he's the only Redeemer and why he supersedes all that went before him although that was preparing for him in the Old Testament and there's usually, what I've done, what I've usually done in this series is I've usually taken the chunks that we have before us that are given in the Bible that we're using, each section is divided out so that we read today from verse 14, warning against refusing, God is the headline that we've got there and that's just the kind of dividing chunks that's been put there by those who translated the NIV, usually they're pretty good and they're pretty helpful because it's usually a change of theme but actually this one's not that great a division and I probably shouldn't have divided it at this point because really through from verse 14 to verse 17 is connected with the previous section which we looked at last week which was given these two great pictures of running the race and understanding the father's love and discipline in our lives, so I'm going to continue just for a little bit with this picture of running the race, so there's two pictures today, okay so there's more pictures, lots of pictures, pictures are good so the first picture is the same picture as one of the pictures last week which is running the race, seeing the Christian race, seeing the Christian life as a race so it's and really I would entitle this first bit as running on the flat, okay, running on the flat so running on the flat, that's easy, you can grasp that, running on the flat and the second bit is really about, it's a different picture, it's a moving from a moving picture to a standstill picture, so the second bit is really about standing on the rock, so okay you just need to use your imagination and you need to remember that the Bible uses lots of different illustrations, this one one of them is running and one of them is standing still and we take different things from each of them about the Christian life, if you remember last week on verse 12 it finished, therefore strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees, make level paths for your feet so the lame may not be disabled but rather healed, and this talking about running the Christian race and being able to run on the flat and it's about living out the Christian life, living out the life of grace, following the instructions and the commands that God gives, remember last week we talked about stripping off all the things that entangle us and how you you don't have distractions if you're an athlete and all these kind of things, well this is just a further application of that and it really stems from the pictures that come with me, come with me, we'll go to Isaiah, if you can find Isaiah chapter 40 okay right in the middle of the Old Testament there's great prophet who prophesied about the coming of Jesus okay and

Isaiah chapter 40 when he speaks about the coming Messiah it's on page 7 to 4, Isaiah 40 and we've got this great picture of the highway of our God you know that the John the Baptist would come and he'd prepare up way for the Lord and he said that in the coming of the Lord every valley will be raised up every mountain hill will be made low the rough ground shall become plain and the level and the rugged places are plain and the glory of the Lord will be revealed and that's a picture of the coming of Jesus and how he would make this Christian road to walk on towards heaven, he would make it possible and he would bring down the impossible mountains and raise up the impossible valleys and then it goes on at the end of that chapter to have these great words that have become very famous about speaking about this Messiah who will come the Lord the Creator of heaven, he will not grow tired or weary as understanding no one can fall on, that's exactly the same words that we saw last week about growing tired and weary, he will give strength to the weary increases the power of the weak even youths grow tired and weary the young men stumbling for those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength they will soar on wings like eagles they will run and not be weary they will walk and not faint so you've got these lovely pictures of the impossibility of living the Christian life being made possible by grace by what God does for us and so it's about traveling today we're talking for a moment about for a few moments about traveling the Christian road we're kind of dissidents that's what we are we're dissidents in society we're walking a different way to everyone else we're travelers we're passing through and we're this is about how we can run this race or walk the Christian walk and not be weary and it's about following Christ and living the life of grace with itself and there's four very practical implications okay that i'm going to speak about briefly and then look briefly at standing on the rock okay there's four applications that we come into the section that we read from 14 to 18 very simple ones in other words what i'm saying is here when we struggle to walk the Christian walk sometimes it's because the level the place isn't level and he is saying if you follow my ways and rely on my truth and depend on my strength then it will be easier to walk the Christian walk i will make these places level for you and so it's very practical and he says in the first place it's about living at peace make every effort to live in peace with all people and then to be holy so it's about living at peace the Christian message is that we have found our peace with God through Jesus okay there were no longer in a position where we are condemned by God or we are in a real a dis peace with God but we found peace and reconciliation through what Jesus has done so we're friends with God and there's a peace we talk about peace in our hearts and this is the practical outworking of that it's saying don't just leave that peace you have with God in your hearts but make it start to impact the life that you live so that fallouts and grumpiness and aggression and separation and holding grudges and not forgiving people will make the Christian road very difficult for us it'll not make the road flat now that's tough you know that's difficult it's difficult particularly maybe in a secular world in which we live which isn't interested in the gospel and who maybe are very aggressive against our belief and our faith in Jesus Christ we are asked not to retaliate in the same way but to live as much as is possible with us as it says in Romans to live at peace with all men sometimes that will not be possible but to display grace and courage and forgiveness in our relationships wherever we are as you go from here today in your workplace or your neighborhood or

your home whatever in the world that we live in that can be tough but he wants us to live at peace by the power of the spirit and also in the church in the congregation in St. Columbas here and those of you are visiting from whatever church you happen to belong to if you do so it's often that way in churches and it's a bit like the house you know when we get into the house we often let the guard go down and we're nice and good Christians in the world and where we're around other people but in the home we sometimes let our guard down and we're not really that much living at peace there's friction and tension in our marriages and our with our families in our homes and somehow we just don't think Jesus applies to that and that can be like that in the church in the place where of all places it should be that we display the peace of Christ with one another we can be selfish and short and judgmental and expect everyone else to be at peace with us but us not to be at peace with them we can be divided we can be in cleats we can find fault so easily and we're not at peace we're not working out this practical truth we love the thought of being at peace with God but the hard graft of needing the spirit of God to change our hearts so that we're at peace with one another is something we're not so comfortable with that but if we're living that way within the church or within our homes and we're not applying the peace of God to our relationships then we'll find a Christian life really tough it'll not be a level path for our feet it'll be a real struggle and a real difficulty if we're comfortable it'll be nasty and mean and divided and gossiping and finding fault with others and not being at peace then we will struggle to ask the Holy Spirit into our hearts to change us so living at peace is a practical outworking of walking in the the Christian road as is living in holiness you know make every effort to live at peace with all men and to be holy so that's the kind of balance to the peace idea it's not just peace at all costs it's peace as well as living separate to God living reflecting God as much as we can living in obedience to God and that sometimes will bring tensions and divisions into the world in which we live but as far as is possible with us as we live holy lives live peaceable lives the great thing about these challenges or these words are that they drive us to Jesus Christ because we need him to change our desires and our longings so that we live a life of grace which is a life of holiness sometimes the two are put as mutually exclusive sometimes oh it's all about love and it's all about grace and then holiness is all just about kind of obedience and outward things it's not that the two are not mutually exclusive the two come

Jesus says if you love me you will obey my commands because he's good and he is perfect and he is God and so the two go together and the obedience if it doesn't stem from the heart of love then that does become legalistic for us but if we're going to live our Christian lives in disobedience to God and not allowing him to be holy or not allowing him sorry to be lord of our lives then we will also make the Christian walk very difficult it will be like walking or running a marathon with big heavy weights on our ankles or with a big woolly duffel coat on you know you're making that race really difficult by choosing not to follow him and not to allow him to free us up to walk this road it's a level path as we say no to our own sinful desires in our lives a selfishness or a pride and say yes to him and his way of loving service and grace then we will find in a humble spirit that that level place is becoming an easier place to live and walk our Christian life so there's about practically living at peace living in holiness thirdly it's about living out of grace 15 see to that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root causes it grows up to cause trouble and defile many this is relentlessly practical this is not about sitting on clouds this is not about theological fine tuning that is irrelevant to day-to-day living it's about grace what it's about our God caring enough about us in our Christian walk to make the level path for us to walk this way for him in his grace following him dependent on him it's living out grace if you ever tried to untangle a big ball of wool or a string it's all knotted it's perfectly takes you the only thing I can compare it to was at Christmas time when every year every year we've got two sets of Christmas lights and I know it's very inappropriate we're coming in a spring time two sets of really big Christmas lights and they're all wired together and every year I take them off the tree hugely carefully fold them away so there's no tango months and every year when I get back to them to put them back on they're completely in a tangle what happens is there a Christmas light tangler that goes around the world and tangles them all up during the year when nobody's looking I don't know because I put them away and they're all absolutely ready to just go back in the tree and then when I open the bag they're completely knotted and it takes at least seven hours to get it back by which time you want to strip the tree of every blade of green on it and throw it out and burn a lot okay so I'm seeing my own failure there but you know what it's like how difficult is to unknot these things that's what our hearts are like knotted and gnarled and selfish and greedy and it's all intertwined and grace comes in and begins to change that and begins to loosen our hearts and begins to enable his love to flow through our hearts so that we live life to the full the sin that's in our hearts constricts the growth and constricts the freedom and constricts the life that God intended for us and grace's job is tough it's to come in and change us not change everybody else but change us and the great physician is at work when he gives us these practical outworkings of grace so that we don't just leave it in theoretical living and we don't just apply it to

everyone else but we look at what he needs to do what he wants to do in our own heart so he says you know don't miss out the grace of god and allow that knotted bitter root to strangle your heart because bitterness is a desperately strangling and damaging emotion and characteristic and so his grace comes in and it begins his love for us begins to say i'm not going to leave you like this i don't want you to be like this i want you to be free from bitterness and selfishness and greed and pride and i forgive you i want to do this this is my task this is my creative role for you is to to redeem what sin has come and made ugly and dark and black and christ says allow bitterness allow grace into your heart so that bitterness doesn't isn't enthroned because what does bitterness do it destroys our relationship with everyone else doesn't it but it also destroys our own heart it's a desperately horrible ugly thing if we enthrone it if we're unforgiving wanting to receive god's grace for all the things we've done but never willing to give it out to others it can be ambitious it can be ignorant it can be destructive it can be self-pitying and bitterness lingers always with judice it never makes it to the cross bitterness never makes it to the cross for there's forgiveness it always lingers in the self-pity of judice who denied his saviour and who were from self-pity couldn't accept the forgiveness of god his life and it will if you if you mean if you hold on to bitterness it will make the christian race miserable for you if you think everyone else needs to change and if i think everyone else needs to change and not me in my heart then we will find that we don't truly know the freedom that christ christ wants to give what's this all about it's about christ being much better fixing your eyes on jesus have you memorized chapter 12 verses 12 i think that would be a great thing for us to do if we could because it just summarizes the whole of our christian life and what we need to remember so living out grace it's about dealing with this tangled knot of christmas lights in our own heart and allowing god to work and sometimes that can be painful you know you know when the great physicians at work can be painful but it's a healing pain he's wanting to take and disassemble and deconstruct our hearts in order to reconstruct them for his glory and in a whole way and that that needs humility doesn't it it needs to say lord please do this because i need it and i need you to do that because i can't do it myself we can't deconstruct and and break down all the sins and the bitteresses and the angers that are in our own hearts we need him to do that so that will make the level place our christian life a level place do you feel it's like a mountain do you feel you're just going up and you never survive never keep going follow his practical outworkings of grace this is not about working out it's not about earning your salvation he's done that for you you're redeemed you're absolutely full and free and forgiven but it's about sanctity it's about living out our christian life it's about working out our salvation with fear and trembling because he's at work in us let him work so third things live now the last thing is living with purity in this section see to it none of you are sexually moral or as godless like iso who for a single meal sold as inheritance right as the oldest son and i'm going to say more about this tonight because tonight we're looking at the seventh command which is you shall not commit a death and you're going to see that you're going to see that you're going to see that you're going to see more about this tonight because tonight we're looking at the seventh command which is you shall not commit adultery so i'm going to spend a little more time on purity and morality this evening

[19 : 14] but really what he's saying here is he's talking about using the example of isaac who allowed his human appetite his physical appetite for food to absolutely dictate his desires and his behavior and all that he did so that he lost what was promised to him because he was just hungry so it was about allowing his appetite simply to rule him to to govern him and not allow truth and the Lord to do so and that relates also to our attitude to bisexual limerality and to morality as a whole and in the in the light of this this passage remember it's written to a people who are together a community of believers and he's reminded me of saying sexual limerality within the community is absolutely destructive because it breaks that fundamental law of faithfulness to one another and to faith and the the protection of the the marriage bond and it begins to to again see people as objects rather than as people and it's it's usually all about ourselves and it's been the ruination of many a christian community throughout the ages is a a carelessness with regard to what says god says about how we treat ourselves and how we treat our bodies and how we treat his gift of sex to us which i will look a bit more this evening it's about the desires behind our hearts and about our love for community and love for one if we again if we ignore the moral imperatives of god's word for us as believers the christian life will become a mountain an impossible mountain for us to climb because we will be slaves to our own desires absolutely we'll have no self-control which is a fruit of the holy spirit and we will lose our joy climbing up and he wants us to have a level path on which to live the christian life so these are four very practical very everyday ones that i need to apply to myself and you will apply to yourself in your christian life that will enable us as we follow his directions by his grace with his strength and you know most of all and we'll see that a bit more of this tonight as we will come on him and confess our need and confess our faith and confess our need and confess our failure and our struggle with that and as we do all of that we will find joy comes back into our christian lives and strength and courage and it wouldn't seem quite like the great mountain that it often appears to us as we depend on him i'm not it's not a easy believism it's not a careless disregard for the realities and the battles and the struggles people have but as a general rule we see that god is enabling us even in the most difficult of circumstances to live for him even in the battles and the struggles that we face so that is running on the flat and briefly before we close the second section is reminding us to stand on the rock that is Jesus christ what's the theme of hebrew's christ is much better it happens again and again and again we see it again and again it says christ is much better and so here he compares christ and christ on mount sin he uses two mountains as it were as an illustration and he compares it with the revelation of god in the old testament which is absolutely necessary absolutely important but isn't the final revelation of god it needed to be given but what we have in christ is better than what was revealed on mount sin i and that's the theme of this book and all that it represents you know it's beautiful isn't it verses 22 to 24 what have you come to you come to the heaven the jesus city of the living god thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly the church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven you've come to god the judge of all men the spirit of

you know it's a great kind of avalanche a cavalcade of descriptions of who we've come to in Jesus Christ and that he is a great God and that Christ is a great Christ and these Jesus believers don't want to throw back into legalism and into ritual but boldly move forward into relationship with Christ that there's a great future in heaven there's life with him there's a joyful community to belong to failed and fallen so we often are but one day we won't be and there's the belonging eternally with him there's forgiveness there's this blood of Christ that speaks of justice but also speaks of forgiveness and speaks of commitment and speaks of redemption and speaks of hope and speaks of a future and speaks of sacrifice and speaks of substitution that he came and did all in our place and he satisfied divine justice speaks about being chosen about belonging in that way and it speaks about the future and the finish being guaranteed not just up to ourselves so he gives this great avalanche of encouragement to remember who we have come to we've come to Jesus Christ you know you've come verse 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant that's why we believe in the new testament in the covenant and it says clearly in verses 18 to 21 that it's better than Sinai it's better than what God displayed of himself on the Mount of Sinai where he gave the Ten Commandments even though that was absolutely necessary even though that was an outworking as you'll see tonight of the character of God that drives us to Christ as it pointed to Christ and even though all the Old Testament believers were saved by grace and by faith as well it's still in its declaration of God it is a recognition that we can't come to God by following the law we can't come to God by our own obedience the law of God that was given in the Old Testament just highlighted exposed that we needed a savior that we needed someone greater than ourselves it was God's revealed failure of the law to bring us salvation and it points us to the one who alone can fulfill the law on our behalf that is Jesus Christ it exposes our this picture of the Old Testament

God exposes our guilt exposes his justice and it says absolutely that he is a just God and he is absolutely right in what he does and that's what the blood of Abel speaks of Abel was the brother of Cain who was murdered and his blood cries from the ground saying justice give me justice for being murdered rightly so and that's what the Old Testament speaks of it speaks of the justice of God in his law and reminds us that he is a holy and a powerful and a glorious and an other God but it's provisional because it's pointing towards the God for whom his own blood speaks better than merely justice but we've got that great picture of justice and mercy and love kissing at the foot of the cross so that God's justice is not denied in dealing with our sin but his love is not left out of the picture but rather absolutely embraces everything that he is

God is a consuming fire but what we have in Christ is so much better than the partial revelation of the Old Testament which these believers were tempted to go back to and we need to remember that that we stand on the rock that is Jesus who has done it all for us who loves us hugely and who's taking the price for our guilt and will forgive us our sins so we need to as I close we need to we need to be still I think and listen to this Christ this is his word this is his living word and listen to his loving I just say this quickly listen to his loving warning see to it verse 25 that none of you refuse him who speaks if they didn't escape when they refused him who warned him on earth how much less away if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven if you go back to Hebrews chapter 2 we've got that same warning given again Hebrews 2 verses 2 to 4 which says for if the message spoken by angels was binding and every violation and disobedience received it's just punishment how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation this salvation which was first announced by the Lord was confirmed to us by those who heard him and by the Holy

Spirit distributing gifts according to as well so that the warning is the gospel is the salvation that was first announced by the Lord himself and that is his great the gospel is God's great megaphone and it says listen to what to listen to my love listen to my grace listen to what I've come to do listen because I love you listen because that is the only that is his great the Jesus nailed to a cross and then resurrected on the third day is the great megaphone of God listen to his solemn warning loving warning and also listen to his solemn promise in 206 to 28 which reminds us that everything will be shaken apart from his own kingdom which will remain forever speaking of a universal future judgment a sifting a deconstruction of this created world and of this universe but only his kingdom his lordship his people will remain stands very much against the the the modern notion of a weak impotent useless god who can't do anything it's a picture of a god who says I will not be moved and those who are standing on the rock will also not be moved as we put our trust in them that's what the encouragement is to a people who were tempted to give up and walk away said please don't do that please don't do that what I offer you and what I am to you is much much better than anything else and so he gives in conclusion his awesome revelation therefore since we receiving a kingdom that can't be shaken let us be thankful and so worship God acceptably the reverence and fear and all for our god is a consuming fire can I say with all the reverence and with all the love and with all the grace I can I think what's been said here is don't mess with God in the nicest most graceful kind of way we can't mess with God we can't abuse his grace and ignore it and stick our fingers up as if it's irrelevant and important we as people as Christians we have great privilege and he promises us and enables us to walk on level paths as we we don't abuse or ignore or reject him the cross speaks of judgment it speaks of grace and there is a further judgment to come and so we live as believers in reverence and all we worship him because of who he is I think that's very hard very difficult to do particularly in this society we live with a very galled society kind of cocky sophisticated we got no time for the idea of worship or adoration or awe and I have to say that I think that's misplaced I think it's deceived and it's deceptive and we need to ask the question to where are we standing in our relationship with this astounding god of grace who is a consuming fire but who was nailed to a cross was nailed to a cross where do we stand in relation to him and how are we running our

[32 : 18] Christian life is it is always hugely up and down for us is it always a complete battle is it never a level place for us are we always considering giving up maybe they would hear his voice for us and that we wholeheartedly just plunge plunge into the sea of his grace receive his forgiveness and the joy that he brings and the wholeness and the life to the full that he is offering as our maker our lord he knows how we tick fix our eyes it's a great verse the great theme of the whole book fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith who for the joy set before him endured the cross scorned at shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of god lord I ask and pray that you would bless us as we think about the word that you've given to the church the word of god that we by faith recognize and see as transformational is a good news message and deals with the the knotted hearts that we so often hold on to and that atrophy as we grow older and become harder and become more impenetrable and we pray that we would allow your grace to loosen our hearts to forgive us to renew us to transform us so that we follow you and serve you with wholeheartedness and that we don't always find the christian life therefore an uphill struggle may we find that you raise up the valleys that you bring down the mountains that you enable us to soar on wings like eagles to run and not be weary to walk and not faint that impossible path of christian living by your grace enable us so to do and may that grace attract people here today who might not know you and who may think of the gospel as something that is constrictive or controlling or divisive in a wrong way but may they hear the voice of Jesus Christ offering his grace and his love and recognize who the person of god is to be a god who is just absolutely just and right in all his judgment leaves us separate from him unless we are redeemed and saved by Jesus and may we fall at the feet of Jesus for our hope and our future for we ask in his precious name. Amen