

Message #3

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Preacher: Joe Novenson

[0:00] As I close, I want to go back to history. We started with a brief history of you.

And I actually want to do a more exhaustive history. I'm about to read a passage with which you're most familiar, but I want to put it in a context that you'll hear, but maybe missed because of familiarity.

The author of Hebrews is saying, I don't want you to throw away your confidence. You'll hear him use those very words. And so he makes you picture yourself surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. And he wants you to see them witnessing firsthand God's provision. But he wants you to note this. They had less of the Bible than you have. They have less history than you have. You have more of Noah than Noah had.

[1:35] You knew it. Great. They had less of every relational gift than you have. And he even says, they were only blessed finally along with us.

Therefore, and this is why I think the witnessing isn't all of us looking at each other. They were looking to as much as they knew of God.

But he says, therefore, since you're surrounded, you fix your eyes on Jesus. God's last word. That's what you're to witness.

Now listen to it afresh. And we'll pray. And then I have a pretty auspicious goal. I want to summarize all of history in 30 minutes. Oh boy.

And I'm going ahead a lot. Listen to the word of God as I read. And then we'll pray. Hebrews 10.

[2:39] Beginning at verse 36. Excuse me, 35. Therefore, don't throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

For you have need of endurance. So that when you've done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

For yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay. But my righteous one shall live by faith. And if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.

But we are not those who shrink back and are destroyed. But of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

And now faith is the assurance of things hoped for. The conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation.

[3:46] And by faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God. So that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. And then the hall of fame of faith follows.

Which you know, I'm guessing, quite well. And then you get to the end of that hall of fame of faith in chapter 11. And let's pick up at verse 32. What more shall I say?

For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, of Samuel, of the prophets. Who through faith conquered kingdoms and forced justice, obtained promises.

Stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword. Were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war. But against foreign armies to flight, women received back their dead, fied resurrection.

Some were tortured, refusing to accept release so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging and even chains and imprisonment.

[4:59] They were stoned. They were sawn in two. They were killed with a sword. They went about in skins of sheep, at goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated, of whom the world was not worthy.

What a statement about redeemed sinners. Wandering through the deserts and mountains and in dens and caves of the earth. And all of these, though commended through their faith, didn't receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us.

That apart from us, they should not be made perfect. Therefore, since we're surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance.

Let us pray.

Now, Lord, we are doing what is the most important thing that we can do, depending on you to speak.

[6:23] Through the word we have read and through a broken vessel. Show us, please, the remarkable flow of history into which we have been placed so that we won't throw away our confidence.

We're asking for this in the matchless name of Christ. Amen. I'd like to begin with a story that I'm going to know. It belongs to Jerry Clower and he put it in ways I will simply change and move it to Philadelphia.

And it's a story of a young man who pulls up on a moped before there were electric bikes. And a moped was basically a bicycle with a lawnmower engine on it. And all he's got on is a pair of blue jeans.

He's barefoot. He's got on suspenders. And he's a stoplight on Broad Street in Philadelphia, which is the longest straight street, incidentally, in the world. And as he pulls up, right next to him on the left comes a Lamborghini.

And this is a car that's moving when it's standing still. In Philly, we call these Wudda Wuddas because when you're next to them, they go, Wudda Wudda Wudda Wudda. And he just has the guts and he knocks on the window.

[7:48] And the guy pushes down the button and goes, Yeah, what do you want? This car fast? Yeah. You want to see how fast? Yeah.

Show me how fast this car is. You got it. Goes the window. He just starts revving the engine with the clutch in. Just... Pops the clutch.

The tires are so fat. It doesn't screech. It hisses. Just... Boom! Zero to 120 miles an hour. And the car ain't even breaking a sweat.

And he slows down because he's in Philly. So he takes it to 90. And as he cuts down to 90, he looks in the rear view mirror. And the guy on the moped is catching up.

And he's looking. He goes, I'm going to a 90. It's not possible. He is. He goes right past him. Easy. 180 miles an hour, at least. And he goes, this is not possible.

[8:46] It's not possible. He comes back. Woo! Passes him again. He says, I've got to talk with this guy. He stops the car. Gets out. And the guy comes up and slams into the back of the Lamborghini.

And gets off his moped and says, hey man, can I take my suspenders off your side view mirror, please? And he goes, you've got the mental picture.

Good. You have been attached to the kingdom of God.

It moves faster than you want it to. It goes in directions you did not plan. It requires that the hair on your head, if you've got it, is blown back.

You are attached. And I want you to see that to which God has attached you. So you ready?

Ready? Remember cheap special effects.

[9:53] In the beginning, God created. The first thing to remember is, as I told you last year, that's only the beginning of what's created. For most of eternity, God was all there was.

There was no heaven. There was no hell. There were no angels. Those were all created. God existed in perfection.

It's called the doctrine of the aseity of God. He is utterly self-contained. Needs nothing. He is perfect in every way inside of himself.

But he had a want. Not a need. And that want was to externalize from himself so that he might see his glory in what he had created.

And so he does. We're not told when and where he made angels. But let me start with them. First of all, you know, they don't look like half male, half female, sort of Casper the friendly ghost.

[11:03] They're bigger than you are. They're smarter than you are. They're faster than you are. They know more than you know. But some of them turned to the living God and went, no!

And has it ever struck you as he threw Lucifer and others from his presence, he has no plan to redeem them? I say with respect, I mean this.

I fear if I was running the universe, I would have redeemed them because they're more impressive than you are. Every time they show up in the Bible, the first things they say is what? Yeah! No plan. And God makes another realm of beings. Again, when and where, we're not told. Two. A man and a woman. And they're perfect. Picture them on the palm of my hand.

What do perfect humans look like? Travis Kelsey and Taylor Swift. I don't know. But picture two perfect people. And they turn to the living God and say, no.

[12:13] Can I tell you something about me? If I were running the universe, this is exactly how thick my Bible would be right there. I would have just gone, bad idea.

But the whole rest of history is grace. From the moment they took that fruit and went... And went... Want some? Want some?

God was sustaining every atom in Adam and Eve's arms with grace. That's right. That they did not utterly atomize into eternal judgment.

And the whole rest of history is his story. And the whole rest of history is his story. of his getting closer and closer. Of his getting closer and closer after he says, get out.

[13:14] And puts angels. It's cherubim, plural. With a sword. Whether or not it's multiple angels with one sword or multiple angels all with swords. He wouldn't allow them to get back to the tree of life without facing angel war.

Now watch as he gets closer and closer as we move through history. Let's jump ahead. We'll go to Noah. How close is God?

Frankly, not too close. Noah hears a voice. And the voice tells him to build an ark. An ark. And according to what I can tell from the ages, it took 50 to 75 years to build.

Now because of what it's been built on the east coast. It's 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, 45 feet high. And he did so, as far as some scholars think, near no known water body.

And he was told to do it because it was going to rain. Now I don't know, but some scholars think it had never rained. But rather the earth was covered with a very thick, vaporous, dense atmosphere that was able to rain so much immensely.

[14:21] And if it had never rained, that would be like me telling you, go home and build a bomb shelter. Because tomorrow it's going to funneth. You'd say, what's funneth?

What's rain? And so he starts building. For decades. I would have done okay for maybe the first 40 minutes cutting the gopher wood.

And after a few, I would have gone, you know, I don't know. It could have been the taco I had for lunch. I don't know if I heard God. All he had was a voice.

And there's nothing that indicates God spoke to him again after giving him directions until he heard this. Get in. And it says God's hand.

Close the door. But God gets closer. Let's jump ahead to Abraham. Chapter 18 of Genesis verse 1. It says God appeared to him in a human form with an angel on either side.

[15:23] All three looking human. And Abraham at this point is 99 years old. God put his knees under Abraham's table.

It says when Abraham saw him. I can say this now because I'm going to be 74 in a few weeks. At 90 plus years age. 99. It says Abraham ran. No offense. But you ever seen a 99 year old man run? But I make you a promise. If God ever gets close to you. You will push your physical boundaries. They will not stop you. But then he leads and judges Sodom and Gomorrah. Let's go further to Moses.

To Moses he gets even closer. He comes as the pillar of fire and smoke. And he commands Moses to build a tent. You live in tents.

[16:23] Build me a tent. And it says when Moses built it. The pillar of fire and smoke settled down. On top of the ark that he built and put inside that tent.

And please remember. It says they were never moved until the pillar of fire and smoke moved. And listen if you have in your mind the old 1956 film.

With Charlton Heston. Get rid of it. Because the picture there. Is the pillar of fire and smoke is a pillar. Straight up and down. Listen. If it was two and a half million people.

And the fire warmed them at night. And cooled them by cloud at day. And it's just a pillar like this.

They'd have to walk through the desert like this. To stay in the shade. It was a tornado.

It went up and filled the whole sky. One flame. Or in cloud. And it says at night when they stopped.

[17:22] Everyone's tent flap was to open and right at the tabernacle. So you could see God. And on Sabbath night. You weren't allowed to strike up a fire. Just imagine putting your kids to bed at night.

On Sabbath Eve. And your child saying. Dad where's the light coming from? Mom. Mom didn't start a fire for dinner tonight. My son.

My daughter. I just want you to know. God's your nightlight. And this is what it's going to be like. When we're together. With him in the new heaven. And the new earth. It must have been just incredible.

And think of how wonderful it would have been. When the cults came to your door. I never know what to say to those guys. But it would have been so great. When they knocked on your door. Hello. My name's Elder so and so. And I believe God's a doorknob. And you could. You could turn to him and say. Look. I'm glad you're here. Come here. Stand here a minute. You see that tornado? That's God.

[18:23] What I want you to do. Is go down to that tent. Knock on the post. Ask to see Aaron. When Aaron comes. You tell him you think God's a doorknob. I hope you got on asbestos underwear.

I hope you like barbecue. Because you couldn't say. I think this is who God is. Because he was right there. So he now was in their midst.

But he sought by grace. To be closer. Jump ahead to David. 1000 BC. David asks God. If he can build the temple.

And God says no. Because there's blood on his hands. But he led Solomon. It takes 46 years to build. First Chronicles said. It took 188 tons of gold.

375 tons of silver. 675 tons of bronze. And do you know what the book of Hebrews. Calls the temple. Compared to Jesus. A shadow.

[19:27] A mirror. Shadow. Shadow. And it's constructed. And it says. When the pillar of fire and smoke. Descended on the temple. The priests ran.

Not because it was bad. But because the glory was so good. They were like little kids. With a sprinkler. On a hot summer day.

I want to go in. No I don't. Yes. No I don't. It was too good. To stay in. Let's jump ahead to Ezekiel. Here's why.

Do you know what they did with that temple? They hung pornography. Inside. Idolatrous. Pornographic images.

And do you know what God said? Stop. Or I'll leave. I wouldn't have said anything. I would have just leveled the building.

[20:25] You twits. What is wrong with you? Stop. Or I'll leave. And so they didn't. And he did. And the glory of God rose. From the innermost place.

To the outer court. And was gone. Have you ever been to a basketball court. Before anybody gets there. In a large stadium. Or after everybody's gone.

It's a weird place. A big. Huge. Empty. Building. And then the prophets come. And Jeremiah's most repeated word.

In the book is shuv. Turn. Repent. Come back. 41 years he preaches. And never got an amen. Isaiah preaches 61.

And they saw them in half. Probably. And you go through the prophets. Basically all saying. You come back to God. He'll come back to you. And Malachi closes the Old Testament. By saying. When he does get close to you again.

[21:26] He will turn the hearts of the fathers. To the children. And the children to the fathers. Malachi 4. 6. Whenever God's close. What's been happening in this room happens.

Little kids and adults. Turn their hearts toward each other. And then there's 400 years of silence. Almost twice as long as this country has existed.

That must have been arresting. Until John the Baptist comes and says. And I would argue John's the last Old Testament prophet. I've come to make straight the way of the Lord.

I'm going to make the high places low. And the low places high. You strengthen your knees. He's basically saying. Strap in. He's about to come. And then John 1.1 begins.

And the word became flesh. And dwelt among us. And then 1.14 says. And that word became flesh. And tabernacled among us.

[22:30] Same word. And so there. He's back right? That's all he wanted. No. Leave it to the living God.

That after millennia of trespass. He actually gets closer. Because Paul writes in Colossians 1.27. Christ. Not with you. In you. The hope of glory. I believe if Moses had been in Acts chapter 2. When the wind and the fire blew in through the window.

And split. And landed in everybody's head. Moses would have gone. You guys got no idea what's happening here. You just became the tabernacle.

You are God's dwelling. And he likes the neighborhood. And now humans inhabited by the Holy Spirit. Like never before.

[23:30] Start preaching to anything that has legs. And will listen. And the gospel explodes across the world. The last. That we know of.

That John probably. Dies in around 90 to 100 AD. Having seen all of his friends die. Jesus takes him to heaven. In book of revelation.

By hair. And lets him see the future. It says he saw the martyrs. Under the altar. Do you know that means he saw his friends? Yes. I wonder if when he saw them.

If they didn't go. Hey guys. And John disciples Polycarp. He's one of the earliest of the church fathers.

Chrysostom. Origen. Jerome. Tertullian. Ambrose. Anthony. Cyprian. Athanasius. Clement. Augustine in the 400s. Let's jump ahead. From 400 AD.

[24:29] To 1054 AD. When the great schism happens. And the eastern and the western church split. And then in 1517. And there's a little known.

Augustinian friar. Named Martin Luther. Who's coming home. He's not yet an Augustinian friar. He's a lawyer.

Lightning strikes somewhere near him. He is terrified. And reportedly prayed. Satan save me. And I'll become a monk. He thought she did.

So he did. And then he became an Augustinian friar. Ordained. 1507. Convicted so much of his sin. He would beat himself from the back with a whip. Until he was unconscious in his bedroom. Stalpitz said. Martin. Study the scripture. He gets to Romans 117.

[25:30] The just will live by faith. And he's like. Wait. Wait. Is this saying. That I can stand.

Simul justus et peccator. Simultaneously just. Yet still sinful. If I trust rightly in you. I've not seen this. I'm not sure anybody's taught this. But in a measure of concern. He writes the 95 theses. And he packs it to the Wittenberg door. Which sounds like a really rebellious thing.

But if you'd seen the door at the time. The likelihood is. It would have had advertisements all over it. Because everybody went to church all the time. So if you had anything of import. You put it on the door. And he wrote it in Latin.

Because he wanted to talk with the big mucky mucks. But in 1440. Before Martin put it up then. In 1517. A little known guy named Gutenberg.

[26:29] Had invented this thing called the printing press. And got a hold of it. And made copies. And before Luther knew it. He had a revolution on his hands.

And in my opinion. One of the greatest revivals in the history of the world. The reformation took place. That reformation jumped from Germany to France. And impacted a guy named Jan Calvin. It jumped the British Channel. And hit the Wesley brothers. And remember. Columbus sailed the ocean blue in? 1507 is when Luther is ordained.

1506. 1517. On the wall. So people start coming to this country. And in the north. There's a guy named Edwards.

And in the south. There's a guy named Whitfield. And before long. A revival breaks out. In the colonies. And J. Edmund Orr.

[27:34] The beautiful church historian. Exemplifies the impact of the revival. By talking. This happened in Wales. But he notes. That the revival was so intense.

That the miners. Who were coal mining. Could no longer get coal. Out of the mines. Because they stopped cursing. At the donkeys. And the donkeys. Didn't understand them.

Anymore. It impacts everything. We want to be holy. As we sang. Jails emptied.

Money was returned. And in those early years. 1766. Francis McKimmy. A Presbyterian. From Scotland.

Arrives in the United States. adapts the works of John Knox. For the United States. Close to that time. A little known document. Was being written by a guy named Jefferson.

[28:31] Yeah. And in 1774. The first Continental Congress. Takes place. 1861. Something happened.

The northern Presbyterian church. Split from the southern. Because of the war. Between the states. But as horrible as that was. There was something worse. That came in the late 1800s.

And hit America. And Europe. It's called theological liberalism. You don't believe the Bible. Do you? We're enlightened people.

Resurrection. Miracles. Get a life. And before long. It was killing churches. From the pulpits. While people in the pews.

Wanted to hear the Bible preached. So as this ravaged in the 1800s. Some said not on our watch. And in 1936. The Orthodox Presbyterian church was founded.

[29:30] In 1937. Buswell. And Alan McRae. Started the Bible Presbyterian church. First ordained pastor. Was named Francis Schaefer. His shoulder.

Oh there's Mordecai Ham. He preached when Billy became a Christian. Look over his shoulder.

There's a big guy with a beard named Moody. Look over his shoulder.

There's this fat bald German guy. Martin Luther. Look over his shoulder. There's Augustine. And all the way at the starting line. There's a rabbi. In long hair and sandals.

Named Jesus going. What? And you go. Me. In faint humility.

That's pride. He gave you his grace. Run. New City Fellowship. If they write your history.

[30:28] 20 years from now. What will they write? They sort of sloughed by. Or will they write? They fixed their eyes on Jesus.

The author and finisher of their faith. Who for the joy set before him. Endured the cross. Despising its shame. Until he sat down.

Next to the majesty on high. Man they rap. Run well. New City Fellowship. Don't throw away your confidence.

Let's pray. Lord the words that Stephen Fry wrote are true.

And they're needed for us. Just the time I feel. That I've been bought.

[31:32] My worldly wealth. Just the time I feel. That I've been caught. In the mire.

Of self. That's when the breeze. Begins to blow. I know the spirit's call.

And all my worldly wanderings. Just melt. Into his love. Oh I want to know you more.

Deep within my soul. I want to know you. Oh I want to know you. To feel your heart. Know your mind. Looking in your eyes. Stirrs up within me.

Cries that say. I want to know you. I want to know you more. I want to know you more. Fill the hearts of these.

[32:34] Your people. With that prayer. And shake the city. And the world with them. In Jesus name. Amen.