159# Sermon @ Little Hocking, OH 2/3/2008 a.m. Mark T. Tonkery

Christians Are To Be Encouragers

Text: Hebrews 3:13

Introduction

A. William Barclay wrote, "It is easy to laugh at men's ideals; it is easy to discourage others. The world is full of discouragers. We have a Christian duty to encourage one another. Many a time a word of praise or thanks or appreciation or cheer has kept a man on his feet. Blessed is the man who speaks such a word."
B. It is so easy to discourage, in fact many do it with out thinking about it. Yet the Bible teaches that a Christians we are to be different, not just in our belief and the way we live but how we treat one another with encouragement.
C. Starting today I will be bring a series of Sermons on the often neglect topic of encouragement. Today we are going to begin in Heb. 3:13 look at how we as Christians are to be encouragers.

Body

I. Christians are to encourage daily Heb. 3:13

A. Heb. 3:13 reminds us that encouragement is something we do daily. The word "encourage" is in the present tense. It means a habit or a way of life. In fact, Hebrews commands us to "encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today". It is also in the active voice. It means we don't wait for others to encourage us. But we take the initiative. We must encourage even if others do not or could not. Note that we are to "encourage one another".
    1. "How many Christians are there where there is no daily encouragement of the faithfulness in Christ? How many men and women work side by side others in their jobs without ever knowing if a fellow-worker is even a Christian or not who for months or years never mention either God of religion, except, perhaps, profanely!...
    2. Once there was a brother who placed his membership with a church one Sunday; and for the first time, another brother in that same church learned that he had daily worked side by side with that other man for two years in a synthetic rubber plant. These men attended different congregations till the time mentioned; and neither of them had the slightest idea that the other was a Christian! (Coffman).

B. Since we are Christians and live with Christ we should spur one another on towards love and good deeds. We do this when we come together. No matter if it is at church services or the work place. When we as Christian are gathered we should be encouraging each other.
    1. A study was done among American's former prisoners of war to learn what methods used by the enemy were most effective in breaking their spirit.
    2. The number 1 and 2 things that were the most effective in breaking their spirit was not: lack of food; torture, or lack of sleep.
    3. The number 1 and 2 things that were the most effective in breaking their spirit was solitary confinement and changing prisoners from

camp to camp so they couldn't develop any lasting friendships among their fellow prisoners.

4. The study also showed that the soldiers drew their greatest strength from the close attachments they had formed in their small military units. Their will to survive did not come from faith in their country or their belief in the rightness of their cause. It came from their relationships with fellow soldiers. Some soldiers will just stay in the military because of these relationships.

C. Because God designed with in us the great need for encouraging relationship many time people turn to counterfeit forms of Christian encouragement. One such thing is the neighborhood bar. "It's an imitation, dispensing liquor instead of grace, escape rather than reality, but it is a permissive accepting, and inclusive fellowship. It is unshockable, you can tell people secrets and they usually don't tell people secrets and they usually don't tell others or even want to. The bar flourishes nor because most people are alcoholics, but because God has put into the human heart the desire to know and be known, to love and be loved, and so many seek a counterfeit at the price of a few beers." (Swindoll).

1. Christian encouragement is vital in order to keep people involved and motivated in the Christian life. Encouragement is showing people that we care about them and that they are important. Heb. 3:13.
2. Someone said, "Flatter me, and I may not believe you. Criticize me, and I may not like you. Ignore me, and I may not forgive you. Encourage me, and I will not forget you."
3. Do you know that there are people who are members, former members, visitors, and those who have some association with this congregation who think we do not care? I know you do or at least I would like to think that we care and are concerned for one another, but if we are not actively and making a point to show other we care, they will think we do not care.
4. Lost sheep Matthew 18:1-14 sometimes we must go and look for those who have left the flock, and show them we do miss them and care.
5. God knew that people needed relationships to remain healthy. That is why God made Eve for Adam in Gen 2:18, "The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."
6. Also in Hebrews 10: 24-25, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching."
7. We need to see encouragement thought other Christians.
   i. We need others for encouragement to stay faithful; we need others so we will not fall into sin.

ii. It has been studied that each new convert to Christ needs 7 relationships with mature Christians in order for them to stay faithful to Christ and the church.

iii. Peer pressure works both ways. If there is a group of people who are trying to get me to do something that I do not want to do, but I do it anyway so I will not be made fun of is one type of peer pressure.

iv. The other type is when we surround ourselves with people who want the best for me and when I want to do something wrong they can help me not to do it.

v. Heb. 3:13 is a command for all Christians, not just to the preachers public encouragement of the congregation. A Shepherd or preacher cannot watch over the church 24 hours day and 7 days a week, especially in private. I am sorry that sometime people fall through the cracks; I don't want that to happen, but that why Heb. says you and not the preacher alone. We need:

a. We need friends in the church who should aid each other in the spiritual life.
b. Parents should encourage their children, by reading the Bible and bringing them to church.
c. Bible schoolteachers, they are the assistants to the parents and shepherds. They can sometime teach, visit, call, and relate to the children in ways other cannot.
d. The senior saints can encourage the young. Their experience of Christ and the church is vital and should be shared with younger Christians.
e. 1 Cor. 12:26ff. The apostles taught that if one member of the body suffers, or is honored, all the others are likewise affected. How we live and stay faithful as a Christian is directly related to the appreciation and encouragement of the faith of one's fellow Christians, as well as one's self; and, in a sense all succeed or fail together.

II. Christians are to encourage in the assembly Heb. 10:24-25

A. As Christian brothers and sisters, we should think about and do things that will encourage one another.

1. Heb. 10:24 is teaching us just not to know how to encourage one another, but to actually go and do and help others to love and do good deeds.
2. The Bible teaches one means of encouraging one another is the public worship assembly.
   a. Love for our brothers and sisters in Christ cannot be shown in separation, we must come together.

b. The thought is not so much that they were to encourage one another to meet together, but that they were to meet together where such encouragement was available in the assembly.
c. There's an old Swedish motto that says, "Shared joy is a double joy. Shared sorrow is half a sorrow."
d. How can Christians be encouraged when they are absent from the assembly? Because a habitual neglect of the assembly can lead to the desertion of the faith.

3. Bible stress the importance of the spiritual strength that Christians can lend to each other by:
   a. Command 1 Cor. 14:26
   b. Example Acts 2:41, 20:7,
   c. Believers are urged to meet together for mutual edification, and this all the more as they see the Day drawing near, Jesus second coming.

B. Notice what Heb. 10:25 is talking about is not "mere church attendance", but of wholehearted, sincere, devout, and faithful worship of God and the necessity for constant encouragement to stay faithful to God, until Christ comes again.
   1. It is not enough to be physically present for the worship assemblies.
   2. Our hearts, mind, and spirit must be present, prepared and willing to have the attitude to worship and encourage.
   3. This what Jesus meant when he said, "unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 5:20).
   4. Just being here physically is not enough. Something must happen on the inside. Forms of godliness lack power without the partnership of a willing spirit.

C. No Christian can be enthusiastic about their faith and things of God without taking public worship seriously. This is where we are remind of our first love Jesus Christ, where we worship God, and were we come in contact with others who are striving to live the Christian life as we are, and that is refreshing.
   1. It is true that I need to pray, sing, and study my Bible on my own, in my private devotional time. That can be done.
   2. But as Heb. 10:25 puts it I need more than just increase my knowledge about God, I need to worship God with others, I need to see that I am not the only Christian and I need that encouragement to continue on in the faith.
   3. Pro 27:17, "Just as iron sharpens iron, friends sharpen the minds of each other."
      a. During the reign of Oliver Cromwell the British government began to run low on silver for coins. Lord Cromwell sent his men on an investigation of the local

cathedrals to see if they could find any precious metals there. After the investigation they reported: "The only silver we could find is in the statues of the saints standing in the corners." Lord Cromwell replied, "Good we'll melt down the saints and put them into circulation!"

b. Just being among the saints is not the sacrifice alone, we must be "melted down and put into circulation," meaning we must be involved and interacting with one another, encouraging each other.

III. Christians are to encourage by teaching God's word Rom. 15:4-6

A. People are often tempted to read the Bible to support or defend a position they have already taken. But this is not the only way to read the Bible.
   1. Jesus said in Mat 4:4, "Jesus answered, "Scripture says, 'A person cannot live on bread alone but on every word that God speaks.'"
   2. If we only read the Bible one-way such as to defend my positions, we will strive ourselves of the rest of the Bible's meaning and purpose for our life.
   3. One of the great ways many Christians neglect the Bible is by not using it as a source of encouragement for their spiritual life.

B. The Bible provides many examples of people, commands, and promises of God that show the importance and power of encouragement.
   1. Read many of the Psalms and Proverbs.
   2. Moses, for instance, was commanded by God to encourage Joshua who was about to take his place as leader of Israel. Deut. 3:27-28
   3. Hezekiah spoke encouraging words to the discourage people of Jerusalem in 2 Chro. 32:6-8.
   4. Apostle Paul was one of the great encouragers in the New Testament. Col. 2:1-2
   5. Many of us know about Barnabus, the son of encouragement Acts 4:36-37

C. Yet, many times people do all sorts of things to get a pick me up, to feel encouraged, and many times this leads to destructive results. But how different people's lives would be if they would just start with the Bible.
   1. The reason the Bible is the first and best place to start is because the source of mankind's encouragement began with an encouraging God.
   2. 1 Jo 4:19, "We love because God loved us first."
   3. There is never a time when the Lord is unavailable or unwilling to encourage.
   4. Mat 6:30, "That's the way God clothes the grass in the field. Today it's alive, and tomorrow it's thrown into an incinerator. So how much more will he clothe you people who have so little faith?"

5. The promise of God is that He will not allow His children to beg bread. He will care for our needs.
6. Since He took care of our greatest need at the cross by giving us Christ, then we can be sure He will take care of everything else.
7. We must start with Him and His word if we want true encouragement.

IV. Christians are to encourage by our example 1 Thess. 5:11-23

A. 1 Thess. 5:11-23 is the encouragers checklist, although I want to spend more time on this in the coming weeks, I want to just highlight this passage and remind us as Christians we can be of great encouragement to one another by our example.
   1. "People seek models to follow…be an example." John Maxwell
   2. Christians who stand firm in their faith and work of the church encourage their brother and sisters around them, because they show the benefit of the Gospel of Jesus and His word as well as teaching new Christians how to be steadfast and mature in the faith.

B. Sometimes the best way for a person to encourage others to act is for him to act himself. For example:
   1. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson received his nickname because of his stance during a bloody battle. In the middle of the first Battle of Bull Run, the Southerners began to break ranks and run. General Jackson sat on his horse and faced the enemy with his sword drawn, awaiting to do combat when they arrived. Someone shouted, "There is Jackson like a stone wall!" The southern troops rallied and joined him, and the battle was won. He did not have to chide or plead with those men to stand firm. He just set an example for them to follow.
   2. Paul stated in 1 Co 11:1, "You must follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."
   3. The Lord set the example for his disciples to follow in all areas of live, faith, and encouragement so the lives of some many were transformed by His example.
      a. Life of Peter.
      b. Life of Matthew
      c. As well as all who will trust and obey Christ's words.

C. Jesus was a great example, so wasn't Paul and the other apostles were great examples, they were following Jesus. They showed that their teaching was reflected in their life.
   1. We have a lot of religious people today.
   2. We have a lot of movie stars and politicians who are religious and like to tell about their religion.
   3. But what God needs and what I need and other Christian's need is more people living their faith than telling everyone "I am religious."
      a. James 1:26 –27

b. Mt. 5:13-16
c. "People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care." People need to see the Christian life being practice, by us actually encouraging one another before they will believe our message about Christ.
d. People need us to show we care by:
    1. Visiting them.
    2. Calling them.
    3. Sending cards and notes
    4. Talking and listing to them.
    5. Being their, for them.

Finally,

A. What would it be like to discover the new house you were building had burned the night before? This happened to a woman who, as she sat describing her feelings, said that friends came over early that morning, sat with them, and cried with them (Romans 12:15). "We felt better", she said, "just having them there to share the loss with us."
B. A middle-aged man explained the events that led him and his wife to quit going to church services. "We were having trouble with our teens and needed help," he said. "The Bible class teacher seemed to be saying that anyone who had teen trouble was not a Christian parent," he continued. "I wanted help but did not know how to get it," he said; "so we just quit." How he needed an understanding friend to share, to encourage, and to advise him.
C. "I have been so depressed lately," a Christian lady said; "I do not know what has come over me"; "I feel like my faith is weak, but I do not know why," she continued. She really needed a friend. Her faith was not weak, but she was discouraged at being isolated from other people.
D. We need one another, will you encourage someone today, by saying a kind word, writing them a note, visiting with them, go get involved. You and I just might be the one person that keeps that discouraged person from falling into sins deceitfulness.
E. The great encouragement of all was when Jesus Christ came to this earth and died for our sins. Today has your soul been encourage by the great grace of God? If not then come and take advantage of the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus Christ by repenting of your sins, confessing his name and putting him on in baptizes so your sins will be washed away, and you have new life. Come now as we stand and sing.

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