



**Series:** Hebrews 12

**Sermon Text:** Hebrews 12.3-13

**Sermon Title:** What Keeps You from Seeing God

MPT: The collective pursuit of Pursuing Peace and Holiness will lead us to see the Lord while allowing sin and bitterness will keep us from him.

MPS: Strive together to see the Lord

### **Introduction**

Hebrews 12. How many of you love a good movie trilogy? I love em. I mean, if it takes you 3 movies to tell a story, you are doing it right. God Father. Indiana Jones (Not the skulls one). What about Lord of the Rings? Courtney groans because when the 3<sup>rd</sup> came out I made her watch the first two that day and then go see the 3<sup>rd</sup> that night. Cause we are that old. My personal favorite is Star Wars OG. 4-6. Divergent, Hunger games (shoulda been a trilogy), even the expendables. I love a good trilogy. Like each movie can stand on its own, but if you watch all three man the story builds and its awesome.

I bring that up because these 3 sermons in Hebrews 12 are like that. We have a big overarching purpose that we are after, and each sermon is building on the other. Our big purpose I

told you last week is that we are on a quest to get a bigger view of God! And next week we will see that big view of God. Last week we saw he was a loving father. Next week, we'll look at a really powerful picture of heaven and of God as a consuming fire.

And I told you that if our view of God gets bigger, our response will be Holy Awe. Like when you grow up seeing the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains and then you see the peaks of the Rocky Mountains for the first time. WHOA. Humbling. New understanding of what a mountain is. And when that happens – When God gets BIGGER – everything else gets smaller. Fears about the future get smaller because THAT God says he will never leave you or forsake you. Other People get smaller...their voice in your life I should say...because you hear THAT GOD speaking about you, providing comfort for you, calling you beloved child. In truth everything else in our lives is shaped by how we see God.

A.W. Tozer once said “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” And almost always, all of our problems create the stress and anxiety they do because our small god can't handle them. The reason we are casual with him is because he isn't big and awe inspiring. He's a gentle rolling foothill. That's why we don't pray desperately or study the scriptures ravenously. We aren't in awe of him. It's why we don't talk about him to people who don't know him. It's why some among us fall away from the faith. They go through what we now call “deconstruction” and the problem is they've only ever had a god so small they can take him apart. They are missing the BEAUTIFUL, MAJESTIC,

HOLY, MYSTERIOUS GOD! The God who made Everest and K2 with just a few of his WORDS.

Holy Awe. That's our pursuit. And today is part 2 of the Hebrews 12 Holy Awe trilogy. It's the in-between movie. And it stands alone but man it makes more sense with one and 3. Today we are in verses 14-17. **And in these 4 verses we are going to look at the things that keep us from seeing God.** If God really is so awe-inspiring and wonderful...it seems we should just always want to be captivated by him. Why aren't we? Well that's what we are going to talk about today because that's what the passage talks about.

Today we are talking about what will keep us from seeing God rightly. And I've said "seeing God" a few times so let me explain what I mean:

- **Present Relationship:** Knowing the God of the bible & experiencing the fullness of walking with him. That's salvation and life in the spirit.
- **Future Hope:** AND it means arriving into his full presence in heaven one day. NEXT week is all about walking in the reward of heaven while here on earth.

today's passage is a series of warnings. To open our eyes to see the things that will keep us from SEEING God. The author warns us about 5 things. I'll show you that when we see them for what they are...they become catalysts that actually rush us to depend on God.

14 Pursue peace with everyone, and holiness — without it no one will see the Lord.

### What keeps us from Seeing God Disunity

Now specifically here he is saying pursue peace with everyone IN THE CHURCH. The CHURCH.

Oh my goodness I grew up in a mid-sized Baptist church. like 200-300 people. And I do have plenty of good memories. But NONE of those memories are of church business meetings. You know about these? We have one once a year here led by the elders and we keep it nice and orderly and sensical. But I'm talking about the free for all arguments over the silly stuff. Where everybody's pent up rage at their boss comes out instead at their church discussion over the color of carpet. "RED because of the blood. No Green because of New Life. No brown because of the Cross. No Blue like the sky Jesus is coming back through." And you are like this isn't Boise state football. We aren't doing that.

That's petty disunity. But real disunity does the same thing. It takes up all your extra time and more importantly all of your mind and heart. Your heart is filled with emotions about the conflict. About what was said, what wasn't said, why they did this or that. What is their next move? You think about it constantly. And the whole time the enemy is laughing because HE is winning! Your mind isn't on GOD. Maybe you ask God in passing to fix the mess. But here's my question: when you are in conflict with a brother or sister in Christ — spouse, friend,

co-worker, child...do you spend more time praying for them or devising a winning strategy?

THERE IS A REASON Jesus prayed in John 17 what he prayed. His last prayer for the church was UNITY!

**There's a reason we are called to gospel sacrifice of our gospel liberties in order to preserve gospel unity in the new testament.** There's a reason Jesus says before you bring your gift to the altar, if YOU HAVE CONFLICT, go and reconcile with your brother or sister. Then come back to the altar. There's a reason we are to do the same thing before we take communion. Because God doesn't want hypocritical worship! Where we worship as if all is well while internally we are harboring anger towards another. He's a reconciling God who calls us ministers of reconciliation. We get so focused on the problem we miss relationship with God and we just go through the motions of our faith while our hearts are somewhere else.

On the contrary – a group of Christians who seize a moment of conflict as an opportunity, together, to OUTDO one another in showing honor. To wash each other's feet. To FAST & PRAY for unity. TO LISTEN TO & EMBRACE ONE ANOTHER when we express hurt instead of LABELING one another ...Who sacrifice and bless when they could withhold and curse.... These are the ones who pursue peace. And blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God. THEY SEE GOD! God is AMONG THEM!

Conflict is ok. There are NT examples of conflict. And Jesus gives us prescriptions for how to handle it. But conflict can be resolved in peace. Disunity is the fruit of unhealthy conflict. We must PURSUE PEACE with everyone! Don't just settle for stalemate – too many marriages and too many churches are in cold wars. Deterrence based on fear of mutual destruction. No we need to pursue peace! Then he goes further.

**14 Pursue peace with everyone, and holiness — without it no one will see the Lord.**

The next thing he says to pursue is holiness. Because without Holiness...no one will see the Lord.

**14 Pursue peace with everyone, and holiness — without it no one will see the Lord.**

### **What keeps us from Seeing God Unholiness**

This one he says is quite simply a disqualifier from seeing God. Pursue Holiness. Without holiness no one sees God. Which means you don't experience the Head & Heart Knowledge of God, The life experience of fullness of God here nor the future hope - glorious reunion with the saints in heaven one day. You will miss all of that. So let's talk about what holiness is: Holiness of Heart & Holiness of Life

- **Holiness of heart** – This means you have genuinely received the forgiveness of Christ offered to you in his death and resurrection. We are going to come back to how Christ MAKES you holy by giving you his holiness. That's where this sermon is all building towards. But

- Holiness of life w/o holiness of heart is empty religion. It's moralism. Good people who have not been forgiven by Christ for their sins...will NOT SEE GOD! She's a good person...THEN SHE URGENTLY NEEDS THE GOSPEL! Because The Lord didn't die for bad people to become good. He died for sinners to be made holy. And ALL have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.
- **Holiness of life** – your life bears the fruit of your heart. James says faith without works is dead. This is a call to those church theologians who can TALK a holy game but don't walk a holy walk. Your PROFESSION is verified by your LIFE.
  - Your actions REVEAL the condition of your heart. Like if I tell you I work out 3 hours a day...my WORDS profess 3 hours. I do Pilates, then an hour of cardio, then some weights. You'd be like...nah bro I don't think so. Why do you think that? You wouldn't say it out because you are nice. But in your head you'd be like the evidence speaks to the contrary.
  - Bingo.
  - And the bible says the same thing about your walk with God. A tree is not known by its words. A tree is known by its fruit. Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. How many metaphors do you need from God to convince you that what you DO & THINK is thermometer for the condition of your heart!?

Ok now - burden of this passage is you walk away beat up. Please Listen – God knows There is no one truly holy except Christ! And you will fall along the way. He's calling you to **pursue** holiness. Not arrive at it perfectly. And he's doing that FOR OUR GOOD.

while unholiness will keep us from seeing the Lord...THE PURSUIT OF HOLINESS WILL LEAD YOU TO SEE THE LORD! Because pursuing holiness is pursuing Jesus. It's doing what he calls you to do and doing it in the power his presence supplies you. So as you WALK WITH HIM...as you meet with him in prayer and study...as you obey him throughout the day...you will experience the fullness of Joy that comes from his presence Psalm 16!! You fix your eyes on Jesus...you start to experience the power of him walking with you. And here's the biggest thing. I have to say it here:

The beautiful hope of the gospel is that Jesus who is holy says...if you will receive what I did for you on the cross...If you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart God raised him from the dead...you will be saved. Unholiness is sin. Jesus is saying I will save you from your sin. I will give you my holiness. And then, and only then, you can see God.

Pursue Peace...Pursue Holiness. Make those your aim. And as you make peace and holiness your aim, there are 3 things that will try to take you away.

15 Make sure that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no root of bitterness springs up, causing trouble and defiling many.

### **What keeps us from Seeing God missing grace**

Falls short of the grace of God. This one is difficult isn't it? What does that mean? Fall short of the grace of God? Well, we recognize this letter is addressed to Christians. And he's saying to the group – Watch out for one another. This is a communal effort. And grace – all you have to do is receive it. You don't earn it. So how could anyone among us fall short of grace? Easy - he's saying some among you could THINK that just because they are among you...they have the grace of God. But in actuality the grace of God was never received. They have never dealt with God personally. The TRUE Christian community can be, after all, really positive to be around. Good friends, maybe some inspiration from the weekend. But if you don't come to him fully repentant of your sin...fully in need of his grace...fully surrendering your life to him...you aren't a follower of Jesus. You might be a fan, but you are not a follower. It's like me cheering "we did it" when UNC wins a national championship. I'm not getting a ring. I did nothing. THEY did it. I'm just a fan.

And I plead with some of you today to receive his grace. Don't presume just because you come to church or are a good person that you are right with God. One of the most haunting things Jesus says is that some people are going to walk into the afterlife and be surprised by where they stand with Jesus.

22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?' 23 Then I will announce to

them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers! --  
Matthew 7:22-23

Don't miss GRACE! Don't miss it! What if instead you see everything God has done in your life as preparation for this moment to deal with his offer of forgiveness! That's where we are heading today. The Great News of today is that if you are hearing my words you are a candidate for grace! Finally! You see the HOPE here is that if you will receive his grace you can have assurance of eternity with Christ in heaven. You have your name written in the lamb's book of life. And on that day You will hear him say "Welcome home son or daughter. Well done good and faithful servant."

### **What keeps us from Seeing God Bitterness**

This is actually a call back to Deuteronomy 29.18. You start studying the bible you will see that a whole lot of the NT is OT commentary through the lens of the gospel. watch this:

18 Be sure there is no man, woman, clan, or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the Lord our God to go and worship the gods of those nations. Be sure there is no root among you bearing poisonous and bitter fruit. 19 When someone hears the words of this oath, he may consider himself exempt, thinking, 'I will have peace even though I follow my own stubborn heart.' This will lead to the destruction of the well-watered land as well as the dry land. 20 The Lord will not be willing to forgive him. Instead, his anger and jealousy will burn against that person, and every

curse written in this scroll will descend on him. The Lord will blot out his name under heaven, -- Deuteronomy 29:18-20

I'll let the text speak for itself there. The author of Hebrews is recalling Deuteronomy to say don't end up like the person God blots out.

15 ...that no root of bitterness springs up, causing trouble and defiling many.

Not talking about you never have a negative feeling. "Man, I'm angry. OH NO I'M NOT A CHRISTIAN." Not that. This is talking about a root of bitterness springing up. This is hurt that has turned into something else. It's when you start to change the narrative in your heart towards another person from "you did this" to "you are this." And everything that person does, or that group of people do, infuriates you. Bitter fruit is apathy towards God & others. Bitter fruit is self-destructive head first dives into sin. Bitter fruit is lashing out. Bitter fruit is gossip. Bitterness is a toxic thing that will defile many.

Root of bitterness = If bitterness is the fruit, what is the root that springs up? It's idolatry. Desiring something more than you desire God. Needing something more than you need God. And bitterness comes because that false god lets you down. And you are bitter. Some of you have been bitter towards the world for years. And here is the great hope for you today.

Because here is the flip side: Bitterness does NOT have to be a permanent condition! I have seen God turn bitter people into joyful, generous people through the power of his presence. The Spirit of God loves to Renew and Refresh lives that were

once cold and bitter. I watched him warm the heart once of a 63-year-old man who had been having a 2-decade long affair on his wife. And one Sunday morning he showed up at church. his estranged wife had prayed for him for 20 years. That guy showed up for the 9am & came back to the second service and during the second service he gave his life to the Lord. And the Spirit of God changed that man. His cold heart, made colder through YEARS of self-destructive patterns...was renewed by the Lord and he has been a changed man since. If you will receive Christ...look to him...follow him...choose him even though you don't have it all figured out...bitterness will be replaced with peace. Let's turn to the final thing here that keeps us from seeing God. The last 2 verses.

16 And make sure that there isn't any immoral or irreverent person like Esau, who sold his birthright in exchange for a single meal. 17 For you know that later, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, even though he sought it with tears, because he didn't find any opportunity for repentance.

### What keeps us from Seeing God Immorality

The story being referenced here is from Genesis 25. Esau and his brother Jacob were two sons of Isaac. Esau was the older brother. And as the older brother in that time Esau is to receive the lion's share of the inheritance AND, most importantly, a blessing from God imparted by his father. These two things...inheritance and blessing...were his BIRTHRIGHT as the oldest son. And what our text is referencing is that one

day Esau came home from the field “exhausted” and finds Jacob cooking some stew. So he says “hey, give me some of that red stuff.” And Jacob who was very crafty says...sure...I’ll sell it to you for your birthright. WHICH IS CRAZY. Inheritance and Blessing...for STEW? But Esau is a bit of a drama guy...I’m dying here. What good is a birthright to a dead man? SO, ok.

And EVERY READER OF THE STORY Should go WHAT!?!?!?! That’s absurd. Well later in life when Isaac is dying Jacob tricks his dad into giving him the blessing he already tricked Esau out of. And Esau comes in WEEPING because NOW, on the other side of all this, he WANTS the blessing of the father. But it is too late for him to repent.

And our author here is saying...Esau is NOT as much of an absurd outlier as you might think. There were enough Esau’s in the church for him to write this. Some of you are trading salvation, new life, and eternal peace for temporary pleasure. And it’s crazy.

- I’m talking to the secret porn addict. STOP SELLING YOUR BIRTHRIGHT FOR STEW
- I’m talking to the spouse cheating right now. STOP SELLING YOUR BIRTHRIGHT FOR STEW
- I’m talking to the 20 something spending your money and your life on things that will bring you short term pleasure and long term pain. It’s STEW. You are paying WAY TOO HIGH OF A PRICE.
- I’m talking about you who are playing games with God. You are ultimately driven by your appetite. Whether you literally are driven by your appetite and your God is your stomach instead of Jesus. or you are driven by

some other appetite. Esau was intoxicated by his appetite. And he forfeited EVERYTHING for it. And the warning here is don’t be Esau!

If you are hearing my words...There is still an opportunity for you. That’s the point! That’s the HOPE of bringing this up. Don’t fall short of the grace of God!! Don’t be Esau! If instead you will say ok...I know I need help. Man the power of Christ will set you free from the power of sin and death. Romans 8.2. Even though you have let your appetite CONSUME you...and maybe that has been for years...you can receive the grace of God.

See the world tells you to indulge your appetite. And refuses to tolerate any notion that your appetite may not be for something good for you. And then...the world condemns you when that appetite consumes you and leads you to wreck your life. The gospel goes ahead and acknowledges EVERYBODY is messed up. And instead of condemning you for self-indulgence...God offers you forgiveness for and freedom from that very thing that has caused so much destruction in your life!

**What is our hope?**

**The righteousness of Christ covers us**

I’m closing with a theological term you can use around the lunch table. Imputed Righteousness. Imputed think something like imparted or bestowed upon. For a word picture think about Matt Ruhle, coach of the panthers...coming up and giving you a jersey. And saying put this on. And when you put

this on, you are now on our 53-man roster. Congratulations. That'd be pretty cool.

Well the gospel says that Jesus does something kind of like that for us. The New Testament says Christ died on the cross to pay for my sins, but he also lived a perfect life. A life of complete righteousness which made him WORTHY of God the father in heaven. He is actually righteous. And in his grace he trades places with us. He imparts onto us his righteousness when he takes on our sin. And now we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. So God sees Christ when he looks at us. And this is how we are reconciled to God.

But we must receive it. The offer of a jersey is extended to each one of us. But some of ya'll think you've been wearing it when you haven't been. Because you never said yes. You just assumed because you came to the ballpark that you were on the team. Doesn't work that way. Gotta receive it.

you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God (the heavenly Jerusalem), to myriads of angels, a festive gathering, 23 to the assembly of the firstborn whose names have been written in heaven, to a Judge, who is God of all, to the spirits of righteous people made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which says better things than the blood of Abel. -- Hebrews 12:22-24 (CSB)