

No Backup

A sermon prepared for the beginning of Lent and based upon Psalm 73:25-26: “Whom have I in heaven but You? And being with You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

I think that **the biggest challenge of Lent** is to realize how desperately you and I need Jesus Christ. The popular devotional writer Oswald Chambers put it this way: “The greatest blessing spiritually is the knowledge that we are destitute.” Since I believe that is true, my challenge this Lent is to convince you again, or perhaps for the first time, that we have no hope except Jesus Christ.

Let me try to do that by going back to the days when we were **landing on the moon**. Remember? That contraption landed on the moon, the astronauts went out to do whatever they did, and then they got back in that contraption and it took off. What has stuck with me over the years is that there was no backup system. If those rockets didn't work, if the electronic gizmos didn't work, that was it. In fact, I've been told that in the Richard Nixon library in California there's a speech that had been prepared in case the mission to the moon failed and we lost our astronauts. The space program has backups; they call them redundancies, for everything but for the return from the moon there was no backup.

We have backups for so many things in life. We have savings accounts and money markets and mutual funds and who knows what to back up our checking accounts. We have insurance policies to back us up if some time times come our way. We may have a second car, maybe even a third, to provide backup transportation. We have freezers to backup the food in the fridge. In fact, some of you may even have a second refrigerator to back up the first. We have backups and for this we are thankful. These resources come from the hand of God who is not only our Creator but also our Sustainer. But all these backups can make us imagine that we're more independent than we really are. Sin does that in us, makes us think more highly of ourselves than we ought to (See Romans 12:3). So like the astronauts, it's good in the midst of our plenty to remember that there are no backups for the most important things in life.

For example, there is **no backup for the Sun**. The interior of the sun is 27,000 degrees Fahrenheit. The surface is 10,000. It takes 8 minutes and 20 seconds for the heat and light of the sun to reach us. When Someone turns that light out, it's going to get very cold and very dark. In the same way, there is **no backup for your heart**. The heart weighs one pound and is the size of your fist. It pumps 100,000 times a day. In one hour it lifts the equivalent of 11/2 tons. Oh, when you have heart problems things can be done but they're just temporary measures. Even such a wonderful thing as a transplant is still a temporary measure.

And there's **no backup for life**. The story has often been told about a minister talking to a high school student. What are you going to do after you graduate? "Go to college and prepare for a career." "Very good," replied the minister. "And then what?" "After college, I'll get a job and establish myself in my profession, and make a lot of money." "Very good," replied the minister. "And then what?" "After I've established myself and made my money, I'll marry and raise a family." "Very good," replied the minister. "And then what?" "When the kids are raised, my wife and I will retire and travel and enjoy life." "Very good," replied the minister. "And then what?" "Well, I guess I'll die." "And then what?"

There's no backup for life. Now listen to this: God is not a backup when the essentials fail us. You may have observed that's the way many people look at God. If this fails us or that doesn't come through, we'll go to plan B. Ask God for help. Start praying. Promise to go to church. Things like that. Truth be told, don't you and I sometimes think of God that way, the ultimate backup? **Lent is our yearly reminder that God does not want to be your backup.** C. S. Lewis put it this way: "Christ says, "Give me all. I don't want so much of your money and so much of your work – I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self...I will give you a new self instead. In fact I will give you myself, my own will shall become yours." ("Beyond Personality," in "Sermon Illustrations for the Gospel Lessons," CPH, 1982, p. 81)

Hard words? Yes, indeed. God is not just a backup, not just Plan B when your Plan A fails. The sun in the heavens will fail but Jesus Christ is the sun of righteousness who rises with healing in His wings (Malachi 4:2). Your heart will one day fail you but the heart of God's love for you will never fail. "My salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail" (Isaiah 51:6). It beats in your life with the faith, the hope, and the love that are in Christ Jesus. This pulse of God's love beats more than 100,000 times a day and can lift more than a ton of your problems. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). So the conclusion is this, Psalm 73:25-26: "**Whom have I in heaven but You? And being with You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.**"

There are no backups. Judas Iscariot didn't understand that. Scholars have debated the precise reason Judas betrayed Jesus. Was it simply to make some money? Was it to force Jesus' hand and begin a revolt against Rome? Whatever the reason was, Judas plotted. Jesus was just a way for Judas to achieve what Judas wanted. You don't want to make a similar mistake. So I encourage you to **make the most of this Lent**. The theme of our Lenten midweek services

is “Holy Passion: Thine and Mine.” We’ll look at some common thoughts and feelings we all have and we’ll see that even though we are outwardly religious people, we’re not so pure within. When we contrast our inner thoughts and feelings with Jesus’ pure life and with Jesus’ holy passion, we’ll say...hear it again...“Whom have I in heaven but You? And being with You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

When Martin Luther died in 1546, he left a note scribbled on a little piece of paper. Luther wrote at his deathbed, “**We are all beggars.** That is true.” Amen.