Sermon Notes

Speaker: Patrick Mead

2/9/25

The Once and Future King -- Hebrews 12:1-13

1. The title of this lesson is “The Once and Future King.” I took that title from a book series written in the 1930s to the 1950s by T. H. White. The series was a romantic, fiction retelling of the legend of King Arthur and based primarily on the work of Sir Thomas Mallory in 1458.

2. I won’t go into all the details about the legends surrounding a man who may or may not have ever existed, but some background is necessary for the work we need to do today. Arthur was said to be King of the Britons, the people we would, today, call Welsh. He battled and won against Saxons, Celts, and Angles but, eventually, was unable to overcome them and, after tossing his fabled sword, Excalibur, back into the water, he retreated to a cave on an island just off the coast where he was said to be to this very day.

3. In some of the earliest tellings of the legend, Arthur still lives and will return to save England when his beard grows long enough to encircle an object in his cave several times. Others say that he will magically reappear when England needs him most. Some say he is dead until that time while others say he lives.

4. That is why he is called “the once and future king.”

5. Why would I think of that phrase and Arthur when I approach chapter 12 of the Book of Hebrews? To answer that question, I need to bring up another subject: time.

6. Almost everyone who is listening to this lesson is from a Western nation or from a nation in the East that has been influenced by Western thought. To those of us in the West, since the days of the Roman Empire and increasingly so after the Renaissance, time was linear and progressive.

7. Until serfdom was ended in the West, time was not progressive, but circular, or an ever moving spiral. You were a serf because that is what your parents all the way back in time were. If you were a noble, that was something you were born into. Things did not change. Time was not progressive.

8. Neither was time linear. Time was a song set on repeat. Daytime and nighttime. Winter, Spring, Summer, and Autumn. Seed time and harvest. The days and years had a set pattern and time did NOT move on.

9. Your life and nature was an old tale, an old song, and it only mattered that you played your part by the time the music stopped. Except…not entirely.

10. Time was also not singular – not a moment in time but a moment in a sea of time. The future would be what today was and the past was the same as the future. The challenges would be different, different plagues, wars, droughts, and storms – but it was all a jumble.

11. THAT is the world in which the Bible was written. Age was something that was not exact, just linked to events or a number was given to show your place or status in the story. In about a third of the world to this day, the people in those cultures cannot tell you the year of their birth and don’t think about how old they are. Instead, they will say they were born in the year of – and name an event.

12. The OT is full of ways to mark the days and months in a year. Holy days, sacrifices, prayers, and other duties were linked to times within a year but there was no mechanism or reason to mark the years themselves.

13. Difficult to imagine, I know, but we need to at least get the concept before we look at chapter 12. For the moment, we are going to skip past the first part of the chapter and go to verses 22-24.

14. Did you see that? You are still here but you are also there. You have already arrived at the mountain of God. You are already with the angels and with all who have died and been taken into the arms of God. Salvation isn't some future, possible event but a present day reality. You are already there.

15. Now, back to 12:1. It starts with a "therefore" so we have to have a quick peek back into chapter 11 where we endee last week to see what it is there for. By faith, they found their verbs and stayed strong until death. Sometimes it was a horrible death, but they did not shrink back from God regardless of the storm.

16. And now, 11:39-40. God planned something better that would make us perfect, complete, total…not just us, but complete and unified with all of them who have gone before. They are watching. How much they can see and when they can see is something totally out of our knowledge base but look at 12:1.

17. A 'cloud of witnesses' was a phrase in common usage and referred to, say a crowd witnessing a sporting event. As they watch us, we are already with them and they are with us. All of the heroes of chapter 11 are with you and me right now, in this very moment. They have run their race and are now cheering us on.

18. The first thing to do is to get rid of those things that are holding you back. 12:1. The second thing is to fix your eyes on Jesus. 12:2-3. Remember that he finished his race and did it well.

19. Remember that the tough times are also training times. God disciplines us because this life is not all there is. There is more for us to do, for us to be, than this life. Will God put us to work out there in the vast universe? Or does He have something else ready for us? We don't know…and that is why we call it faith, not sight.

20. When tough times hit, we are not being abandoned by God. 12:4-13.

21. Our reaction to the struggles of this world boils down to remembering our training and our Lord. Hebrews 12:14-16. Make peace, be pure, and don't sell your inheritance away for something temporal that will be gone tomorrow.

22. Remember who you are and where you are. Hebrews 12:18-21. When the Israelites came to Mount Sinai, they were terrified and with good reason. The mountain shook and God declared a death sentence on anyone who touched it. Even Moses, the tough, rough, temperamental, irascible leader of the Jews was terrified.

23. We, however, have come to a holy mountain where there is no fear. We are there with them and they are with us. When we take communion, we take it with all who have gone before. We don't need to visit graveyards. Abel's blood cried out for justice but Christ's blood cries out for peace and mercy.

24. We are here, and we are there, and we are actively receiving the kingdom in our lives day after day. Hebrews 12:28,29.

25. The book closes with further admonitions. Love each other. Be hospitable to strangers. Remember those in prison. Honor marriage. Don't love money too much. You already have all you need in Him. Hebrews 13:5-6.

26. Don't get carried away by strange teachings (and they are all over the internet and in our churches). Live honorably.

27. Quit struggling toward salvation and rejoice in the salvation you already have in Christ. You are free in Christ, free to do good, free to be faithful in the storm, fully equipped for every good deed. Hebrews 13:20-21.