

All You Have

Today In Your Reading...

We opened the book of *Hebrews*, whose penman is not revealed in the text, so this writer has always been one of the mysteries of the New Testament. However, despite not knowing who was responsible, humanly speaking, for these incredible words, we trust that God is sovereign and wanted us to have this book; and, though we may not know who wrote it officially, we still know that God inspired the message, which has proven to be accurate in light of the rest of the Bible.

The overarching theme of *Hebrews* is the superiority of Christ over the Old Covenant; the writer, who was quite knowledgeable of Jewish history, Mosaic Law, and the sacrificial system, set out to prove that Jesus was and is the Messiah that the Jews longed for. Thus, in the few chapters that we read, he contrasted Christ with angels (1:4-14), with Moses (3:1-19), and with Joshua (4:8, 9). These two men were “illustrations of the truths God would reveal later” (3:5). Though God had spoken to His people in many ways, “in these final days, He has spoken to us through His Son” (1:1, 2). **Jesus is the final revelation from God.**

How exactly is Christ superior to angels, Moses, and Joshua? The writer pointed out seven ways. First, God made Jesus heir of all things (1:2). Second, “through His Son, He made the universe” (v.2). Third, “the Son reflects God’s own glory” (v.3). Fourth, “everything about Him reflects God exactly” (v.3). Fifth, “He sustains the universe by the mighty power of His command” (v.3). Sixth, “He died to cleanse us from the stain of sin” (v.3). Seventh, “He sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God of heaven” (v.3). Who has done any of these things except Christ? Have the angels? Has Moses or Joshua? **No, only the Messiah, Jesus Christ!**

Daily Reflection

The writer of *Hebrews* was removing obstacles and arguments that the Jews might have against the life and ministry of Christ. He was showing them that He is the Holy One of God, sent to redeem them from sin. Who else did they have but Him? “What makes us think that we can escape if we are indifferent to this great salvation that was announced by the Lord Jesus Himself?” (2:3).

Though God has done all these things through Christ (and there is more), what obstacles and arguments do people raise to deny Jesus today?

No angel and no other human, not even Moses or Joshua, “tasted death for everyone in the world” (2:9). Jesus took on flesh and became a human being so that He could die for us; and, “by dying, He broke the power of the Devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could He deliver those who have lived as slaves to the fear of dying” (2:14, 15).

The God who made everything and everyone will also be the Judge, to whom “you must explain all that you have done. Nothing in all creation can hide from Him. Everything is naked and exposed before His eyes” (4:13). How will you be able to stand before your Judge in your sin and shame without the blood of Jesus to cleanse you? What will you have to offer the God of heaven that He will accept you? Nothing. **You have nothing, only the gift of Christ**, who suffered on your behalf. All you have is the grace of God which has been given in the Messiah of God — Jesus Christ.

Our Great High Priest

Today In Your Reading...

The writer of *Hebrews* continued his case for Christ's superiority over the elements of the Old Covenant system. He already demonstrated that He is to be preferred over the angels, over Moses, and over Joshua. Next, he compared Christ to the High Priest of Israel, the most important and respected position among God's people. How does he stack up?

First, though Jesus was not from the lineage of Aaron, the first High Priest, or from the tribe of Levi, He was from the lineage of a priest named Melchizedek, who came before Aaron (*Genesis 14; Psalm 110*). Melchizedek was an Old Testament type or picture of Christ, his name meaning "righteousness." He was the King of Salem (meaning "peace"), having no father or mother and no beginning or end (*Hebrews 7:1-8*). Since he preceded the Levitical priests of Aaron, this means that Melchizedek was first and that his priestly lineage takes precedence and his ministry and mediation is more important. Abraham, the Father of the Jewish nation, recognized the importance of Melchizedek and worshiped him.

While this assertion, that Christ's priesthood superseded the Levitical priesthood, would have jolted his Jewish readers, the writer was trying to establish the credentials that Jesus had, to be the perfect Mediator for the New Covenant system. In fact, he went on to write, "If the priesthood of Levi could have achieved God's purposes..., why did God need to send a different priest from the line of Melchizedek, instead of from the line of Levi and Aaron?" (*7:11*). The answer is that the priesthood of Levi was imperfect, ineffective, and, therefore, incomplete.

Christ is our great High Priest! His ministry was greater than any priest who has ever lived. He was human and, therefore, experienced everything that we do, even temptation, so He

"understands our weaknesses" (*4:15*). He lived a life without sin; thus, He is holy and blameless. Also, since He is not dead but alive, He is able to intercede on our behalf before the Lord continually (*7:23-25*).

Daily Reflection

What are the implications of Jesus' priesthood? Why should you care about His mediatory role? Here are three things to consider. First, Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice for your sins, by giving Himself (*10:12*); therefore, **you no longer have to make sacrifices for wrongdoing**. Your sins have been dealt with on the cross. Second, because Christ is your High Priest, **you have no need for an earthly mediator**, a priest, a pastor, or anyone else to communicate with God on your behalf. Finally, because your Mediator is holy and righteous, and because He paid the ultimate sacrifice for sin, **you can approach the throne of God with boldness and confidence**, to find grace when you need it (*4:16*). You have total access to God!

Imagine yourself at the throne of God right now. There is nothing in your way. He is ready to receive you and to listen to you. What help do you need right now? How can He intercede for you?

Because of your great High Priest, you have an all-access pass to the God of heaven. He is waiting to hear from you. Because of Christ, **you can approach Him with no reservations!**

A Terrible Thing

Today In Your Reading...

“There is nothing that keeps wicked men, at any one moment, out of Hell but the mere pleasure of God.” This truth was the leading idea of the most famous sermon in American history, delivered by one of our greatest preachers, Jonathan Edwards (1741). It was part of a sermon entitled, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” which helped to ignite a revival in New England that we now call the “Great Awakening.”

After contrasting the superiority of Christ to angels, to Moses, to Joshua, and to the Levitical High Priest, the writer of *Hebrews* finally arrived at his main point — “Our High Priest (Christ) has been given a ministry that is far superior to the ministry of those who served under the old laws, for He is the one who guarantees for us a better covenant with God, based on better promises” (8:6). Because of His work on earth, “Our High Priest sat down in the place of highest honor in heaven, at God’s right hand” (8:1).

Earthly priests were never able to rest, because their work was never done. They were never allowed to sit down in the Temple or the Tabernacle, because their sacrifices for the people never ceased. But Christ, having accomplished all that was required of Him on earth, and, then, after having sacrificed Himself on the cross, “Once for all time, He took blood into that Most Holy Place, not the blood of goats and calves. **He took His own blood and with it secured our salvation forever!**” (9:12).

After His sacrifice, no other offering is required. “Christ canceled the first covenant in order to establish the second one... Now when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices” (10:9, 18). Now, note the writer’s urgency in pleading with his readers. “Dear friends, if we deliberately continue sinning after we have received a full knowledge of the

truth, there is no other sacrifice that will cover your sins... **What makes you think that you can escape if you are indifferent to this great salvation** that was announced by the Lord Jesus Himself? There will be nothing to look forward to but the terrible expectations of God’s judgment and the raging fire that will consume His enemies... **It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God!**” (2:3; 10:26-31).

Daily Reflection

Neither of these words from Jonathan Edwards or the writer of *Hebrews* was meant to shake the faith of a Christ-follower. If you are in Him, you are a new creature, forgiven, sealed, and secured for eternity. These words were meant to rattle those who are putting their faith in their own sacrifices or offerings, their own works or human goodness. If they reject or neglect this great gift of salvation, there is nothing else that can save them from the terrible wrath of God.

Just as it is a terrible thing to reject the only means of salvation that God has given, so **it is a terrible thing to neglect sharing with others** the only means of salvation that God has given. With whom, in your sphere of influence, are you sharing this wonderful gift?

You have the only hope in a hopeless world. Share it. **Wasting opportunities the Lord has provided would be a terrible thing.**

Binding Faith

Today In Your Reading...

Today's passage began with a great question, **"What is faith?"** Then, the writer provided a definition. Faith "is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. It is the evidence of things we cannot yet see" (11:1, 2). The Latin word for faith is *fides*, meaning "to trust." Noah Webster marked that, in the Greek language, the idea of faith was "to be bound or made fast by rope," in other words to be fastened or tied to something one believes. Therefore, Webster wrote in his definition that faith is "the assent of the mind to the truth of what is declared by another, resting on his authority or veracity, without other evidence." Also, faith is "the judgment that what another states is truth" (*Webster's 1828 Dictionary*).

Our passage continued with a long list of people in the Old Testament who demonstrated genuine faith (11:4-40). "All of these faithful ones died without receiving what God had promised them, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed the promises of God" (v.13). It is evident in these stories that faith is a big part of one's relationship with God. In fact, **"It is impossible to please God without faith.** Anyone who wants to come to Him must believe that there is a God and that He rewards those who sincerely seek Him" (v.6). Remember when James wrote that faith without works is a dead faith? I guess we could also say that *works without genuine faith are dead or useless works.*

Why does faith matter so much? Well, consider the alternative. To have no trust in what God says or does is to say that He is not trustworthy, that He is a liar, or that there is someone better. *How can one be in right standing with God if he holds to the belief that God is a liar, not worthy of trust?* To bind oneself to God's words, not knowing but believing that they are true or will come true, is a tremendous act of honor to Him.

Daily Reflection

After having recounted all the people who demonstrated true faith, the writer changed gears and focused his attention on his readers. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress; and, let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us. We do this by **keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish**" (12:1, 2).

Do you have faith? Do you trust God? Have you bound yourself to His words and promises? What "weights" tend to hinder your progress in the life of faith?

Did you notice, that in regards to faith, the writer addressed the issues of suffering and discipline? Many have been tortured or persecuted for their faith in God (11:36-39) and, today, we still experience difficulty, trials, heartache, and punishment (12:6-13). How does faith intersect with hard times, set backs, and discipline?

"God has far better things in mind for you... but you can't receive the prize at the end of the race until you finish the race" (11:40).

Indestructible

Today In Your Reading...

We closed the book of *Hebrews* and opened the first letter of *Peter*. Peter wrote his letter to encourage believers who were suffering (1:6). In fact, it is quite fitting that *Hebrews* is placed next to Peter's letter, as *Hebrews* closes by talking of faith and Peter opens by talking of faith. "These trials," he wrote, "are only to test your faith, to show that it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold; and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold..." (1:7-9).

One of the wonderful things about our relationship with God is that through His grace, **we can have joy in the midst of sorrow, triumph in the midst of trials**. "Be glad! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though it is necessary for you to endure many trials for a while" (1:6). Though we may not feel like rejoicing in the midst of trials, *we can be assured that they are not purposeless*. Remember, James wrote, "Whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. When your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow" (1:2, 3).

Peter wrote something similar, "Trials are only meant to test your faith, to show that it is strong and pure" (1:7). He goes on to compare trials and faith to fire and gold. Gold is one of the most imperishable objects on earth; but, apply enough heat or pressure, it will dissolve. However, **genuine faith is indestructible**. We may undergo intense trials, but these do not dissolve our faith, rather they make our faith more durable.

When I think of faith and trials by fire, I flash back to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who literally experienced the heat. They were exposed to intense pressure and persecution for their beliefs, but they stood their ground and did not give into the pressure (*Daniel 3*).

Daily Reflection

Have you had to face any furnaces in your lifetime? What is the most difficult faith test you have had to endure?

What benefits did you experience as a result of this faith test? What good came from it?

What are some of the unnecessary or unhealthy things in life that fiery trials help to burn away?

Genuine faith is a gift of God (*Eph. 2:9*).

When going through a trial, how can you tell that your faith is His or your own?

Don't allow your fiery trials to pull you away from God; rather, allow them to draw you closer to Him. You have His *indestructible* Spirit within you, and He is building an *indestructible* faith!

Called to Suffer

Today In Your Reading...

We continued Peter's letter, which was written to believers throughout the Roman Empire who were suffering because of their faith. As I read our passage, I found myself encouraged, so encouraged that I sensed that I could not write a devotional thought that was more encouraging than simply repeating Peter's words. I trust that you will find encouragement as well.

"Suffering is all part of what God has called you to. Christ, who suffered for you, is your example. Follow in His steps. He never sinned, and He never deceived anyone. He did not retaliate when He was insulted. When He suffered, He did not threaten to get even. He left His case in the hands of God..." (2:21-23).

"Don't pay evil for evil. Don't retaliate when people say unkind things about you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God wants you to do, and He will bless you for it... Who will want to harm you for doing good? But **even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it.** So don't be afraid and don't worry... If people speak evil against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ. Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong" (3:9, 13-17).

"So then, Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude He had and be ready to suffer too... Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad, because these trials make you partners with Christ in His suffering... **Be happy when you are insulted for being a Christian,** for the glorious Spirit of God will come upon you..." (4:1, 12-14).

"It is not a shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being called by His name... So if you are suffering according to God's will, keep on doing what is right, and trust yourself to the God who made you, for He will never fail you... Remember that your brothers and sisters all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering... After you have suffered for a while, He will restore, support, and strengthen you, and He will place you on a firm foundation" (4:16, 19; 5:9, 10).

Daily Reflection

What do you think Peter meant when he wrote, "Suffering is part of what God called you to"?

He also wrote, "Be happy when you are insulted for being a Christian." Why be happy?

Suffering for the Lord is a privilege and not a shame? Why is that?

Don't lose heart in doing good, even if you are suffering. The God of heaven is watching you.

Twisted Scripture

Today In Your Reading...

We read Peter's second letter, which was an urgent warning against false teachers. Peter was in Rome and the Lord had revealed to him that he was about to die (1:14). Therefore, we could say that these were Peter's final words. "I will work hard to make these things clear to you. I want you to remember them long after I'm gone" (1:15).

First, Peter reminded his readers that he had witnessed Jesus' ministry personally. He had heard Jesus' voice! **Who could be a more reliable source than someone who actually walked and talked with Jesus?** "For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the power of Christ... (1:16-18).

Second, Peter encouraged them to have "confidence in the message proclaimed by the prophets... **Pay close attention to what they wrote**, for their words are like a light shining in a dark place... You must understand that no prophecy of Scripture ever came from the prophets themselves or because they wanted to prophesy. It was the Holy spirit who moved the prophets to speak from God" (1:19-21). The Old Testament prophets were inspired by God. Their message is from God Himself. Trust it!

Third, he warned them to **watch out for false teachers**. "They will cleverly teach their destructive heresies about God... Many will follow their evil teaching and shameful immorality... In their greed, they will make up clever lies to get a hold of your money... They make a game of luring unstable people into sin... They promise much but deliver nothing... They promise freedom, but they themselves are slaves to sin and corruption... So watch out and don't be carried away by the errors of these wicked people. I don't want you to lose your own secure footing" (2:1, 2, 12, 17; 3:17).

Daily Reflection

Peter went on to tell his readers how false teachers get away with their schemes. "Some of Paul's comments (which were the wisdom of God) are hard to understand, and those who are ignorant and unstable have **twisted his letters around to mean something quite different from what he meant**, just as they do with other parts of Scripture" (3:16).

Twisting Scripture is a devilish strategy, taking something that most people trust and making it say something it does not say, something that God would not condone. The problem is that the ignorant and unstable blindly follow along. Why?

Can you provide a modern example of how the true message of the Gospel is getting twisted into something that is not true or biblical?

What are some ways that you can protect yourself from false teachers? How can you be sure not to get pulled in by their twisted message?

If you know the truth, you can spot the lie.