

Ministry on Hebrews

Part 6

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[00:00:00] Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

Chapter 13, verse 15, By him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name, but to do good, and to communicate, forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

[00:01:03] Those of us who've been available have been spending the week looking at some key features of the epistle to the Hebrews.

We commenced last Saturday by looking at the psalm, which is the basis for much of the teaching, Psalm 110, concentrating on that wonderful statement taken up again and again in the epistle to the Hebrews, sit thou at my right hand until I make thy foes thy footstool.

In the gospel, we looked at chapter 2, the suffering of death. On Tuesday, the tremendous contrast between Christianity and anything and everything else that had gone before, particularly Judaism.

[00:02:05] The contrast suggested by words found in the text, shadow and substance. Wednesday, again, words culled from Psalm 110, the Lord hath sworn and will not repent.

Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.

Last night, we looked at what the epistle itself emphasizes in contrast with all that has gone before, Christ and Christianity, and all that Christ ministers is better than anything else.

And we took account of the fact that in an epistle of 13 chapters, 13 times over, we [00:03:06] get the word better.

Now, one thing that comes to light in any book in the Bible, any facet of Christian faith that we study, we come to certain basic conclusions.

Now one basic conclusion can be expressed in many ways, but it's the same message.

One way is to say belief affects behavior.

Another way is to say that creed affects our conduct.

Another one, another way to say it, is that doctrine determines our duty. [00:04:04] I'm not going to go right through the alphabet, although I've started off with B, C, D. Putting it in scriptural language, doctrine affects the manner of life. What we learn objectively in Christ affects our subjective appreciation. Again, the language of John's epistle, this thing is true in him objectively with a view to it being produced in you, in us believers, subjectively. First of all, we learn our position, and that affects our condition.

First we learn the principles, and that produces the right kind of practice. Now again, in Old Testament phraseology, chewing the cud produces the clove and hoof. [00:05:06] Now that might have a link with what we come to towards the end of the meeting. But certainly, another phrase, parallel with all these others, is this.

Revelation demands a response.

God reveals himself, makes himself known to us, and in all good conscience, well in the language of Romans 12 verses 1 and 2, if God has done all that for me, it demands a response from me.

First he does it for me, then he demands a response from me. Now we've been looking so far at key features of the revelation that God has given of himself [00:06:02] in the epistle to the Hebrews, and we are at the point now towards the end of the week where we need in good conscience to be thinking, what is our response to be? Is there going to be any difference in us because of our appreciation of what God has done for us? Now, as with the other sessions, we can do no better than take account of what the text of the epistle says. Now if you go through it, and I hope you will, in the light of all the revelation given, every now and again the writer, under the hand of God, he issues various exhortations. And he says now, it's our duty now to respond in this way, and we should be doing that. And he presses some very clear, precise, explicit exhortations. [00:07:07] Now we haven't time tonight to go into every one. I hope we'll all respond to the opportunity.

If an interest has been awakened in our conscience, go right through, read the epistle, and see how many exhortations there are. I only have time tonight, if that, for one set.

Now last night I said 13 chapters, easy way to remember it, there are 13 bettas.

Quick quiz question.

When believers get together in conversation, which is the vegetarian epistle? Or more precisely, which is the salad epistle? And of course, the only possible answer is Hebrews, because it's full of lettuces. [00:08:06] Let us do this and that and something else. Now what we're going to do tonight is to look at these occasions in the epistle to the Hebrews, where the writer, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, says, now that's the revelation, what is our response going to be? Let us do this or that.

So we're going to look at the 13 occasions in the text where the writer says, let us. It's a nice way of putting it, you know, not hammering us on the head, not grabbing us by the throat, not pointing the finger and saying, what are you going to do about it? But in a nice, gentle way, but in a sober way, including the writer with the hearer, [00:09:05] he says, let us.

I think it's a nice way, it's direct, it's polite, it's courteous, but there's no doubt that there's a sober message to be absorbed. So if the Lord will, we'll spend the next half hour or so looking at these 13 letters in Hebrews. And I read the first one in chapter 4. Let us, therefore, fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, that's the rest of God, any of you should seem to come short of it.

The ministry in the epistle is cumulative.

It builds up progressively, brick upon brick upon brick. [00:10:02] We've tried to lay a foundation during the week, and we are getting to the position now where some of the superstructure is being laid. But every now and again, we have to think back to something we've already learned, and we have to build upon that. We can't refer again to everything that's been gone into earlier in the week. But in the beginning of chapter 4, when the apostle says, now look, let us make sure that we aren't going to be like the people in Israel who were delivered out of Egypt, they were redeemed by blood, they were redeemed by power, they were brought by the power of God into the wilderness, but sadly, only two of that vast company of two million Israelites got [00:11:03] into the promised land. Why was it?

Again and again, and much of the latter part of chapter 3, and other chapters as well, said they didn't get into it because of unbelief.

The writer, every now and then, he says, now look, I'm a bit fearful for some of you. You all claim to be believers, but the way some of you are acting, I have grave doubts. And he says, any individual of you, he said, in any generation, there's a lot of wastage.

Make sure you are one of the ones that carry on. In my day, in generation, on Tyneside, there were about 70 young people of an age of a [00:12:08] generation, sad to say, there are possibly about a dozen of those 70 who, by any stretch of the imagination, could now be said to be going on strongly in the things of Christ. What a tragedy. I know that because of my generation, whom I knew personally.

Some of you who are even older than me might say it's always been the same. There are those who go on, and there are those who fade away. The scripture says to every generation, if there's going to be wastage, if there's only going to be a few that carry on, make sure that you are one of those that keeps going.

[00:13:10] One of the things that the epistle to the Hebrews emphasizes is the need to continue, the need to go on, not to fall or to fail because of unbelief.

I'm not speaking now about whether or not you're going to heaven. If you've trusted Christ as your savior, you'll go to heaven because of his work, because of your faith in him. We'll come back to this later. The strength of faith is not in itself, it's in its object. If your faith is in Christ, you'll get to heaven not because of the strength of your faith, but because it's centered in him who died for your sins.

[00:14:02] But as far as going on strongly in the things of the Lord, as far as making growth, development in your own soul's experience is concerned, you make sure that you're one of those that keeps going right to the end. Well, there's something of that involved in chapter 4 and verse 1. Verse 11, let us labor therefore to enter into that rest lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

Well, it's rounding off the same section and he there defines. He said, it will be unbelief.

There is such a thing as saving faith placed in Christ and that's irrevocable.

[00:15:01] Nothing can change that.

There is such a thing as living faith, the faith that acts in dependence upon the Lord every step of the journey home.

There is such a thing as working faith, acting, serving the Lord in dependence upon him as long as you are left here in responsibility. Let us make sure that we are not guilty of unbelief. If we are truly saved, our saving faith will never go, but it may well be that we cease to exhibit living faith, cease to give evidence of applying faith in the service we do for the Lord. Well, he says here at the beginning and end of that section, he says, I don't want you to be one of those that gives up in unbelief.

[00:16:05] Remember again, Joshua, Caleb got into the promised land. One reason they got into the promised land because of their zealous faith, they'd been into the land, they'd brought back the grapes of Eshcol, they'd sampled the fruit, they'd tasted the joy, they said, I wouldn't give this up for anything, I'm going to keep going till I'm right in the land. That's the spirit that the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews enjoins upon us believers. Verse 14, seeing then we have a great high priest.

We looked on Wednesday at some of the scriptures about the great high priest.

[00:17:01] Before we could have spent a month on that wonderful subject, the Lord Jesus Christ, the great priest over the house of God.

Another thing we haven't time for, but follow it up, wonderful things we Christian believers are said to have in the epistle to the Hebrews. This verse in chapter four says we have a great high priest. Chapter six says we have a strong consolation.

We have hope as an anchor at the end of chapter six when we hear about the Lord Jesus as our forerunner.

Chapter eight again, verse one, we have such a high priest, not only dealing with our feebleness and infirmities, but minister of the sanctuary, leading us into the very presence of God. [00:18:06] Chapter 10 he says we have boldness to enter into the very holiest, the very presence of God. Another thing we looked at on Tuesday, we have a better substance.

What we have is far more substantial than anything else could offer. He's beginning of chapter 12, he says we have a cloud of witnesses in scripture testifying to the worth of the path of faith. And then in chapter 13 he says we have an altar. Wonderful things, better by far than anything that the world can give. Well, we get one of them here. Chapter four, verse 14, seeing then we have a great high priest that is passed into the heavens or through the heavens, Jesus, the son of God, let us hold fast. [00:19:05] Let us hang on.

Let us not give up. A lot of the epistle, a lot of these exhortations say now you've studied that, you've appreciated that, you've learned something about the blessing, keep on going on, hang on, hold fast. And here we have it in chapter four. Last verse, 16, let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Well, I think on this verse we would do well to compare the various translations available to us.

Let's pray over it, get the feel of what the scripture really means. [00:20:01] As it stands, it means if when my family was small, if I'd been out for a walk with them and one of them had fallen down on gravel and made a mess of their knees and I'd picked them up and dusted their knees off and said, now, it won't be so bad, you know, you'll feel better soon, perhaps I might have been helping them in time of need. But the scripture is better than that even. Literally, it's finding grace for timely help which anticipates the need.

If I'd been a wise father and an observant father and seen one of my daughters going into a situation where they were liable to fall down and if I'd said, hang on, and got [00:21:02] them by the hand and they'd seen the danger and taken hold of my hand and allowed me to help them round that danger spot, that indeed would have been timely help. So, when trouble abounds, when danger is near, when we are sensitive to our frailty, we have one to turn to, our great high priest.

We turn to him, we acknowledge our frailty, our weakness, our incapacity to help ourselves and he's always there.

Wonderful thing, the priestly grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 15 said, we have not an high priest who cannot be touched. Really, it means it in the positive way too. [00:22:02] We have a high priest who can be touched. We have a touchable high priest. I like that incident in Mark chapter 5, where there's a woman suffering from very serious hemorrhaging and she sees Jesus and she says, oh, if I could only touch him, I know that I would be healed and she goes to him and she touches him and she was immediately healed.

The Lord tested her faith, he said, who touched me? He knew who touched him. He was wanting to draw her out, to come out clearly for her Lord and Master. And he said, now, that's just the way I want people to act, to be aware that I'm always ready to help, all you have to come to do is to come and to touch me. [00:23:07] Well, we have a high priest who can be touched.

He's a touchable saviour. We are in touch with him by prayer, by dependence. We come to him, we ask for help, he gives it to us, he gives us grace for timely help. We can pray for others, thank God for that. We can come to him in our own need, thank God for that. And the verse says, we know it, we can give lectures on it, we can discuss it in the Bible readings, we can nod in agreement when somebody else says it, the verse doesn't say that, it says, let us do it. For this is the force of the exhortations in Hebrews. Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy.

[00:24:10] Mercy meets us in our needs.

Grace lifts us above our need.

Mercy deals with what we deserve. Grace bestows upon us things that we could never deserve. We get both grace and mercy at the throne of grace. Now, we must keep moving, and the next one, chapter 6, verse 1.

Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection. Perfection, completeness, maturity, full growth. [00:25:01] This is what the word means.

Have you noticed, Paul, writing to Timothy, he says, God's continuing disposition is that men might be saved, and that they might come to a knowledge of the truth.

That's not repeating the same thing twice. Yes, it's a grand thing to be saved, nothing like it, or we'll thank the Lord eternally because he saved us, saved by the mercy of God.

A grand beginning, but it is the beginning, and on that essential foundation, it's God's intention that we should go on, that we should come to a knowledge of the truth of God, that [00:26:08] we should learn of the many facets of this so great salvation, another phrase from Hebrew. He wants us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He wants us to grow in the knowledge of kingdom truth, of assembly truth, of prophetic truth, the personal, moral, official glories of our Lord Jesus Christ. He wants us to be able to distinguish between the dispensations. He wants us to be able to distinguish between that which is positional and that which is practical. Oh, there's a tremendous amount to learn. Those who are the most mature, I'm sure, will be those who would freely confess that they [00:27:02] are merely scratching the surface of all that's available. Now, the writer says to the Hebrews, he says, I'm glad you're saved. If you're saved, you're really saved. He said, but don't think you can rest on your laurels. I remember hearing a Christian believer at the age of about 70 having been a believer for about 50 years and saying, well, I'm saved and I know it, but that's as far as I've got.

God forbid that when his continuing disposition towards us is that we might be saved and go on to come to a knowledge of the truth, that after 50 years of belief and attending, having fellowship with like-minded believers, God forbid.