

The Brightness Of His Glory

The epistle to the Hebrews is an exposition of the greatest event in history, portrayed against the background which is able to give it the most significance and solemnity. It is a manifestation of the great glory and purpose of God in Christ as fully revealed in the light of 4,000 years of Mosaic revelation and preparation. Only through Moses can we properly appreciate Christ. We must follow the chain of God's purpose through the Mosaic revelation of Creation and world history.

Gradually, through Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, the development of Israel, the long succession of prophet and seer, God laid the foundations of the supreme event of the ages. This is the theme of Hebrews—the inexpressibly exalted nature of this glorious manifestation for which, for four long millenniums, man and creation were being slowly prepared. Here, more than anywhere else, are sounded the twin chords of the transcendent privilege and responsibility of those who draw near to God through Christ.

The first three verses reveal the sublime character of the things with which the book deals: God has, in the fullness of time, visited man in a Son. This Son, who dwelt for 33 years on earth among men, is the appointed heir of all things—for him all things were made. He is the focal point of God's glory, the express image of His substance, and he sustains the universe by the Word of his power. Have these thoughts become so common place to us that they have lost their power to thrill us with ceaseless wonder, and to transform our lives?

Previous to the Son, angels were the highest manifestation of God's glory given to man, but we are quickly shown the incomparable superiority of the Son to the angels. The Holy Writings, extant in the earth for 1,500 years before, and stamped with the indelible impress of inspired divinity, clearly reveal that the One to whom they all point was to far transcend the angels in station and glory. This is the message of chapter 1, and at this point, we are reminded of the great responsibility weighing on those to whom God has extended His mercy and His love—

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation" (Heb. 2:1-3).

"More earnest heed"—This is the crying need of all; more earnestness, more heeding. Less lightness and thoughtlessness and carelessness. God could not possibly have done more to vividly impress us with all His glory and majesty; yet how easily we slip back to the natural, empty state of carnal neglect. Spoken by the Lord himself, confirmed by them that heard him, have given witness by God with signs and wonders—and the testimony sealed in many cases by the blood of the messenger.

Is it possible that once enlightened regarding these things they could ever be absent from our minds, or that our lives and conduct could ever after even for a moment be uninfluenced by them?

Sadly, we recognize it is all too possible. Being what we are, it is almost inevitable.

"For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings" (Heb. 2:10).

Why? Because perfection through suffering is the only road from man's present state to the ideal destiny the Scriptures hold forth. It is the hard, necessary way, and the Pioneer must tread it first. "Pioneer" is the right word here, rather than "captain."

The Pioneer of Salvation trod the uncharted way alone, that he might lead many sons to glory. The rest of the chapter elaborates the oneness of Christ with his brethren in origin and nature and shows how essential this was to enable him to save them.

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise

took part of the same” (Heb. 2:14).

“Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren” (v. 17).

How else could he be their Pioneer, their forerunner, their brother? How else could he lead and inspire them by the power of his patiently, suffering example?

Death and sorrow do not lay hold on angels. We admire these glorious creatures, but we are not drawn to them by the common fellowship of suffering and struggle.

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Chapter 3 begins again with exhortation. The object of the book is not just to prove. It goes far beyond and deeper than that. It is to impress, and arouse, and stir up to renewed realizations and appreciation and zeal and endeavor. Wherefore, holy brethren—*“holy brethren”*—What sanctification and communion are expressed in these words! Could there be bitterness or unkindness or foolishness or worldliness among holy brethren?

“Partakers of the heavenly calling”—sharers together of such inestimable divine glories and privileges. *“Consider”*—the original word here is defined by Young’s Concordance as “perceive thoroughly with the mind”—examine and dwell fully upon every detail. Consider this great personage—our apostle, our high priest—as apostle, approaches us from God; as High Priest, approaches God from us. Consider him, the great Mediator, the Keystone of Salvation—patient, meek, preeminently kind and gentle, inconceivably pure and holy, but outstandingly, as pointed out here, true and faithful to Him that appointed him and this is the exhortation.

“Whose household are we, IF we hold fast our confidence and rejoicing firm unto the end” (Heb. 3:6).

Verse 12 – *“Take heed brethren;” “exhort one another daily”*—once a week is far from sufficient. The heavenly calling of God in Christ Jesus is not a once-a-week affair. It is a constant, daily matter, pervading every aspect of our existence, or – it is but a mockery.

“Let us therefore fear” (Heb. 4:1).

Not a morbid dread, but a hearty, wholesome, self-searching concern.

Many have failed and are failing. There is no easy road. Success is quite possible, but only if every precaution is taken to secure it. It is not for the careless or half-hearted. It is only for those who seek it with all their heart and mind, and who constantly meditate upon the law of the Lord. *“Let us therefore fear,”* and let that fear keep us constantly alert to the great responsibility and dangers that face us.

“Let us therefore labor to enter into that rest” (v. 11).

Let us not think it can be entered without labor, much wearying labor, but “the rest of the laboring man is sweet” and no rest is as sweet or worth laboring for as the rest that remaineth for the people of God. Men will work themselves to death for the love of many things. Are the children of the world wiser and more zealous in their generation than the children of light? They do it for a brief corruptible crown—how much more earnestly should we be glad and labor for an eternal incorruptible one!

Twice more we find *“let us”* in this chapter (4). There is great power in the expression. Let us therefore fear and let us therefore labor are based upon our solemn responsibilities.

But *“let us hold fast,”* v. 14 and *“let us therefore come boldly”* (v.16) are reasoned from our glorious blessings and privileges.

Seeing then we have a great high priest who from experience is thoroughly familiar with all our problems and temptations, let us therefore come confidently and unreservedly near before him, in sincerity seeking mercy and grace in the time of need.

The only essential is sincerity, that is, wholeheartedness, complete dedication. We cannot hold anything back. We must put all our faith in one place, as we find brought out in chapter 11. That is

the requirement that deters so many. They cannot summon the courage to trust their full weight to the everlasting arms. They must hold on somewhere else, too, just in case.

“Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity” (Heb. 5:2).

“Compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way.” We need this as a reminder. The more severe our duty compels us to be, the more kindly and gently and understandingly we must strive to discharge it.

Even Christ, at his first advent, shunned the duty of judging as far as he consistently and forthrightly could without compromise of Truth, and rather applied himself to healing and teaching and persuading.

“Though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (verse 8).

Not that he was ever disobedient, but he learned the full meaning and beauty and value and power of obedience and the confident communion with God that it brings by experiencing the dark tempting shadows of evil and suffering. And again, the inspired writer returns to the direct theme of exhortation, Heb. 5:11—

“Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.”

He is speaking of Melchisedec, that strangest of all Bible characters, of whom we get only a shadowy elusive glimpse. How we regret the sad necessities that limited his exposition of this subject!

“For when ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again the first principles” (v. 12).

How many of us have had ample time to become teachers, if we had but applied ourselves as strenuously to God’s word as we have to other pursuits? Do we daily meditate upon the mysteries of God, yearning after strong meat, or are we quite content to be babes forever, without any desire or interest for the hidden treasures of God’s gracious revelation?

Progressing then beyond first principles, Heb. 6:1—*“Let us go on to perfection.”* We must move forward. We must grow. Jesus himself learned obedience and was made perfect through suffering and “grew” in knowledge, and wisdom.

We have missed the whole significance of the Gospel message if we are content to stand still. *“Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge;”* and so forth. *“Be no more children, but grow up into Christ in all things.”*

Chapter 7 returns to Melchisedec, king of Salem and priest of the most high God.

“Consider how great this man was” (Heb. 7:4).

So little we know of him, and yet how sublime that little is! He appears but once in the sacred record and for just the most fleeting appearance. He makes one brief statement, and three short verses comprise the whole incident, but he leaves an indelible mark on the whole history thereafter—King of Righteousness and King of Peace, Priest of the Most High God; greater than Abraham and the whole Aaronic priesthood.

One thousand years after Abraham, the name of Melchisedek appears again—just as briefly, just as significantly. *“Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek”* (Psa. 110:4) are words of Spirit through David of David’s greater son.

As Paul points out, two fundamental facts are established by this statement, the end of the Mosaic economy and the eternal existence of the promised seed.

Who Melchisedec was, where he came from, on whose behalf he was priest and what happened to him, none of these things are told, and it is useless to speculate. This incident gives

us a fleeting glimpse into a whole new field of wonders.

Apart from this, we would have thought that God's relationship to Jerusalem began when it was taken by David from the idolatrous Jebusites. But here we find the greatest, most mysterious character in the Old Testament reigning there for God a thousand years earlier.

What secrets are buried in the age-old ruins of Zion? Was it here that the sons of God assembled before Him in the far-off days of Job? How little we really know of God's revelation to men. Are we firmly rooted in the things that count?

Chapters 8 and 9 show that the Mosaic Dispensation, though glorious, was but a shadowy symbol of that which was to come. The countless sacrifices under the law were nothing in themselves. There is nothing in the death of an animal that can renew and transform the mind. Ritual has no living power.

But by the complete dedication—even to the most cruel of deaths—of a perfect life to the service of his brethren, Christ has established the right and power to transform us by love.

The blood of bulls cannot purge conscience, but the blood of Christ tells us we are washed and forgiven as long as we keep close to Him.

But the consciousness of his presence must and will lay a restraining hand on our natural impulses.

This is the constant purpose of this letter to the Hebrews—to bring the transforming power of these glorious things, to bear upon the individual heart and mind—to lift them out of the natural and fill them with spiritual zeal and desire.

Therefore this epistle is framed around the great sacrifice of Christ as the culminating manifestation of God's majesty and love.

And therefore it alternates between, or rather perfectly combines, exhortation and consolation, a constant shepherding against the twin evils of negligence and discouragement.

Heb. 10:22—*"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith."*

The true heart and the full assurance are inseparable. A true heart is a completely devoted heart—an individual heart whose whole desire is Godward.

Such a condition does not come by mere fortunate chance or accident. It is developed by deeply considering the sublime truths and facts which this epistle urges upon us.

Consider our great Apostle and High Priest—

Consider the majestic mystery of Melchisedec—how great this man was to whom the patriarch Abraham paid tithes.

"Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (Heb. 12:3).

"Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works" (Heb. 10:24).

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (v. 25).

No scripture is of private interpretation, but some truths and precepts shine out more clearly in one particular place than anywhere else and this is such a one.

Then comes that solemn dreadful warning in verse 28—

"He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses," (stoning to death with stones was the penalty), *"of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?"*

How careful we must be of the great treasure entrusted to us! Could we conceive of being careless and ungrateful with even a man who loved us so greatly as to give his son to die for us? It seems unthinkable, but how easily our minds drift away into things that displease and grieve

Him.

Heb. 10:36 – *“For ye have need of patience”*— the original word means much more than we understand by patience. It is a persevering and right-minded endurance, implying far more effort and action than our word patience. We can see this from Heb. 12:1—

“Let us run with patience the race set before us.”

“Ye have need of courageous active endurance” that ye might do the will of God to the end and finally receive the promise.

Then the familiar 11th chapter. The patient labors of bro. Thomas have in Eureka given us a far richer rendering of verse 1—

“Faith is the continuous keeping in memory of the assured hope of the future, and an intelligent understanding and belief of the historical development of God’s purpose in the past.”

“By faith men have subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions” (Heb. 11:34).

Did we realize it was Daniel’s faith that sealed the lions’ mouths? Remember the oft repeated words of the Master, *“Thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace.”*

“Out of weakness were made strong”—They were not born with this triumphant power of faith, nor did it just come upon them. Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (large daily doses). They were weak and fearful, but they became strong and fearless, by faith. And because of faith (v. 37) they were stoned, sawn asunder, destitute, afflicted, tormented, slain with the sword. The call of faith is no light thing.

“Wherefore, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of faithful, suffering, triumphant witnesses, let us, too, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us . . . looking unto Jesus . . . who for the joy set before him endured the cross and despised the shame” (Heb. 12:1-2).

Steadfastly consider him, when inclined to be weary and faint in your minds.

“Lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees” (v. 12).

The road is often bitter, but the end is glorious, and soon that end will come, and great will be the rich reward of patient endurance.

“Follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (v. 14).

Are we holy? Are we striving to be holy, sincerely endeavoring to lay aside all things in word and deed that are not becoming to our high and holy calling? God has promised to give us all the power that we need if we will put forth the effort and true desire.

“Wherefore let us serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire” (v. 25).

Throughout, the delicate balance between gentle comfort and stern admonition is perfectly maintained.

Heb. 13, the final exhortation and benediction, is of great beauty in both thought and expression.

Heb. 13:1 – *“Let brotherly love continue.”* Permit it to fulfill its gentle, healing mission.

V. 2 – *“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”*

V. 3 – *“Be mindful of the affliction of others,”* just as feelingly as if it were you yourself.

V. 5 – *“Be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.”*

“Let us go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.”

Thirteen times in this epistle the apostle says, “*Let us,*” and finally in verse 15, “*Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually.*”

Sacrifice is the theme of the epistle, on every plane from the highest to the humblest—from the great sacrifice of Christ to the simple sacrifice of consistent cheerfulness and praise.

Brotherly love, hospitality, fellowship in affliction, joining him without the camp—all are opportunities for the sweet communion of self-sacrifice.

Consistent unwavering thanksgiving and praise is often great sacrifice and effort. Its value increases with the depth of the sorrow and suffering of the heart, and—

“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever, Amen.”

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