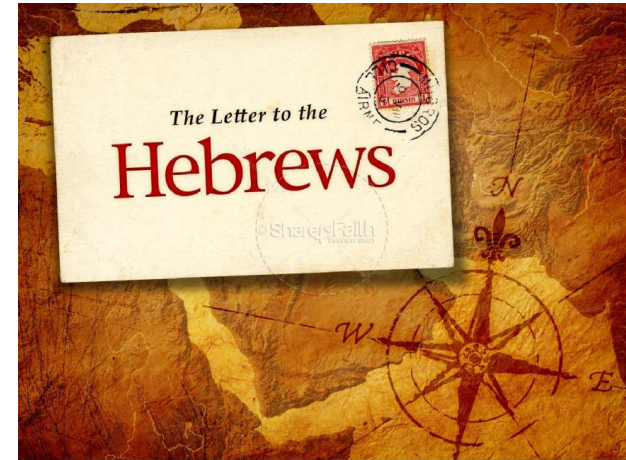


Daily Devotions
from the United Reformed Church

The Letter to the Hebrews



Sunday 25th October – Saturday 7th November

[Introduction](#)

This anonymous letter was given the title “to the Hebrews” in the second century. It uses the Old Testament texts and Jewish patterns of interpretation to show that Christ’s sacrifice fulfils God’s promises and brings the faithful to perfection. It offers a rich theology Christ’s priesthood and of his dual human and divine nature which means he can identify with human suffering. The author is unknown but a reference in 13:24 implies it was written in Italy.

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Sunday 25th October Psalm 20

The Rev'd Ruth Browning, retired minister worshipping at Thornbury URC

May the Lord God hear you pray,
may God's strength
be yours today;
may God bless you from above,
lifting up your heart in love.

2 May God give you all you need,
may God make your plans

succeed;
may God guide you all your days,
filling all our hearts with praise:

3 Now we see the Lord can save,
now the trembling heart is brave;
now we know that Love will hear:
worship now, for God is near!

After Psalm 20, Michael Perry (1942 - 1996)

© Mrs B Perry/Jubilate Hymns

particularly if they apparently
turn away from you
and your promise of life.

We pray for the 'prodigals' of our time.
Give us the gifts and graces
that we need to welcome back.

Strengthen us and help us to grow
in faith and discipleship,
so that when we need to hear hard things
we can do so with open hearts and minds.

Sometimes I wonder if whoever wrote Hebrews was attempting to offer some sort of discipleship masterclass. This chapter opens with an invitation to take a step onwards from what they perceive as the basics of the Christian faith to the harder stuff.

Even if this is some sort of masterclass that isn't a bad thing. A question that I have heard asked is how should those who have come to faith, perhaps through a discipleship course, or by another route be encouraged to grow in their faith. How do we wean children and young people attending our churches or groups led by them from milk to meat? What about those who have been followers of Jesus Christ for longer than they or anyone else might care to remember? What about those who were Christians once, who perhaps had a 'strong' faith but who no longer identify with this identity?

Hebrews has uncomfortable words concerning such people, this passage, and others like it, have been used to justify a muscular Christianity where grace and understanding seem markedly absent. It would seem that for those who leave a return is difficult. It feels like this is at odds with Jesus' own teaching particularly in stories such as that of the Prodigal Son. We might also remember that these words were penned in a time when being a Christian was far from easy (is it ever). The Church was being persecuted. It is perhaps not surprising that there were some who weighed up their options when times were tough and stepped away. What is worth noticing here is that the faithful remnant within the Church are not asked to make judgements or opinions about those who leave. The passage ends with an invitation to show diligence and to hold on to the assurance of hope shown and offered by Christ but through faith and patience to inherit the promise of life in all its fullness described in and through the life and ministry of Jesus.

Prayer

God of comings and goings,
it hurts when friends leave,

Many years ago - before phones had cameras, even before mobile phones were smaller than half a brick - there had been a wonderful sunset which the preacher next evening asked if we had seen? "You know" he said "My Dad made that". Murmurings ranging from laughter to what's he talking about ensued.

A few days later we were doing a class room talk when there was a flash of lightening and crash of thunder at the same time. A young teenager at the table where I was shrieked in terror and disappeared under the table. She was not easy to coax out but eventually she held my hand and I said "It's okay, my Dad made that". She was so taken back that she crawled out and we had a conversation about God our creator.

This hymn makes my heart light and want to laugh as we had on the evening of the sunset. As much as the beauty of nature uplifts our spirits it is "My Dad made that". The blessings asked for in this hymn God gifts and grants. We can only sing "May the Lord hear you pray" because God made us with the ability to pray and so will hear prayers. The final verse affirms that we know God saves, we can know this because we feel, see, touch the love of God at the times when we are strengthened even as we hide under the table. "My Dad made that" - we worship and know that God is near.

Prayer

Lord, Creator, in this strange year when our world changed and continues to change as much as it has in the 150 years since phones were invented, we question why you made that. So much suffering, grief and misery, how can we say "My Dad made that"? The Psalm says "The Lord answer you in the day of trouble!" All we can do is cling to that promise waiting, trembling and sometimes fearful, until we find you are near. Amen

Monday 26th October [Hebrews - The Final Revelation of God's Glory](#)
The Rev'd Peter Clark is the URC Minister within the Dorset South and

West Circuit

Hebrews 1: 1 - 4

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Reflection

The letter to the Hebrews is a one-off surprise book of Scripture.

No introduction, no greetings, no information about who is writing it or why it's being written? Not really a letter at all, really? Just 'bang' straight into the text, the argument, the message.

And what a message! It's almost as if the writer hasn't got the time or patience for such niceties and just wants to jolly well get on with telling the reader about the main and sole topic of the letter i.e. Jesus?

The book is effectively a bridge between the apparently very different Covenants recorded in the Old and New Testaments, with that same Jesus portrayed as the new, better and perfect Covenant ... and then excitedly, though methodically and logically, telling us how God's Covenant is fulfilled in Jesus.

The one who is the 'very imprint of God's very being' is portrayed as the absolute supreme person in all the holy writings that make up our Scriptures: Greater than Moses and the other Prophets, superior to Angels, higher than any High Priest ... and how the death on the cross

[Saturday 7th November Hebrews - The Peril of Falling Away](#)

The Rev'd Sarah Moore serves as Transition Champion for the National Synod of Scotland

Hebrews 6: 1 - 12

Therefore let us go on towards perfection, leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ, and not laying again the foundation: repentance from dead works and faith towards God, instruction about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgement. And we will do this, if God permits. For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, since on their own they are crucifying again the Son of God and are holding him up to contempt. Ground that drinks up the rain falling on it repeatedly, and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and on the verge of being cursed; its end is to be burned over. Even though we speak in this way, beloved, we are confident of better things in your case, things that belong to salvation. For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do. And we want each one of you to show the same diligence, so as to realize the full assurance of hope to the very end, so that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Reflection

In this passage the writer relates to the readers in a direct way. They were long-standing Christians, they should be able to teach the faith to others, but as far as the writer is concerned, they lack understanding and they need someone to teach them basic principles or as the Revised English Bible puts it, they need someone to teach them 'the ABC of God's oracles all over again'.

The distinction between infants who live on milk and the mature who live solid food, is found in Greek writings as well, and is used by Paul in 1 Corinthians (3:1-20). Paul could only speak to the Corinthians as infants in Christ, for they could not take solid food.

Speaking of those who live on milk, the reference to 'righteousness' is about living in the way that is required by God, They are unskilled, in living in his way, whereas the mature are trained by their practice of the faith and come to understand the difference between right and wrong. The writer thinks his readers are failing to understand, but the hope of the writer is that through persistent prodding they will come to understand the deep theological message that is to be unfolded in the epistle.

Thinking about how this might relate to us in this present day, it is a challenge to today's disciples, not only to learn of God, but also to be teachers, ready to speak of our faith.

Prayer

Merciful God,
forgive us when we have been slow to learn of you and your ways.
May our minds be open to learn.
May our mouths be ready to speak.
In Christ's name.
Amen

was a greater-than-ever-before and a once-and-unrepeatable Sacrifice.

Welcome to the breathless excitement of the Letter to the Hebrews!

Prayer

As we start our journey into the writer's understanding of your Son, Jesus the Christ, may our hearts and minds be opened to the mystery, wonder and glory of you as Creator and Covenant-setter, Saviour and ever-present Comforter. Amen

[Tuesday 27th October Hebrews - The Son Above The Angels](#)
The Rev'd Dr 'frin Lewis-Smith is a healthcare chaplain in Salford and a member of Tonge Moor URC

Hebrews 1: 5 - 14

For to which of the angels did God ever say,

'You are my Son;
today I have begotten you'?

Or again,

'I will be his Father,
and he will be my Son'?

And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,

'Let all God's angels worship him.'

Of the angels he says,

‘He makes his angels winds,
and his servants flames of fire.’

But of the Son he says,

‘Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever,
and the righteous sceptre is the sceptre of your kingdom.
You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;
therefore God, your God, has anointed you
with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.’

And,

‘In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands;
they will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like clothing;
like a cloak you will roll them up,
and like clothing they will be changed.
But you are the same,
and your years will never end.’

But to which of the angels has he ever said,

‘Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’?

Are not all angels spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for the sake
of those who are to inherit salvation?

Reflection

“You know how Jesus is the Son of God and the son of Mary?” The four-
year-old at my church is in a questioning mood. “So that means he is a
demi-God like Hercules!” No amount of argument dislodges the little

not an intermediary like Jewish High Priests between people and God. In
contrast, Melchizedek brought an offering of bread and wine and blessed
Abram and God. There are times when doing the right thing is done
because it is right, not because doing the right thing is the done thing.
Melchizedek did the right thing because it was right and not because, as
far as we can judge, it was the usual ritual. Jesus is made perfect and
does the right thing which is not ritual but the source of eternal
salvation.

Prayer

Creator God, we give praise and thanks that Jesus being made perfect is
the source of eternal salvation. May we be able to share this as an
honour for all. Amen

[Friday 6th November Hebrews - Christian Life and Theology](#)

The Rev'd Dr David Whiting, Minister, Sunderland and Boldon URC
Partnership

Hebrews 5: 11 - 14

About this we have much to say that is hard to explain, since you have
become dull in understanding. For though by this time you ought to be
teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of
the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food; for everyone who lives
on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness.
But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been
trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.

Reflection

The ‘this’ about which much should be said and which is hard to explain
is presumably that which has been referred to in the preceding verses, it
is the reference to Christ being a ‘high priest according to the order of
Melchizedek’.

‘You are a priest for ever,
according to the order of Melchizedek.’

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Reflection

This reading seems made for the kind of “compare and contrast” questions beloved by GCE “O” levels when I sat exams. That phrase “priest after the order of Melchizedek” has always seemed curious to me; it rolls off the tongue so neatly, that it is “by God” sounds so complete. Except - why Melchizedek; why had the Psalmist taken the reference from Abram being blessed (Gen 14:18-20) and therefore why had the writer of Hebrews? Our reading points out that only Aaron of the tribe of Levi was called priest by God, the others could not presume their elevation to High priest.

The first 4 verses are full of allusions to the setting of the cultic standard of Judaism but they do not bring together the attributes of Christ as “Son” and “High priest” as is now done by placing verses from 2 psalms (Pss 2:7 and 110:4) in juxtaposition. (This is the start of a theme developing as the letter continues.) In terms of the ritual Jesus, being of the line of David was not a Levite, and therefore following the cult could not be appointed High Priest. By contrast as a Son his elevation is made by God and is forever, his sacrifice is of himself not for himself as the High priest sacrifices on the Day of atonement.

In contrast to Aaron, Melchizedek was completely other: a King of Salem,

one from his newly formulated theory today, but he’ll understand given time.

The Hebrews reading this letter love Jesus; they are impressed by him, honour him, and follow him. But still they need to be shaken out of the idea that Jesus is an angel. Perhaps it is hard for us to imagine Jesus as ‘just another angel’ or angel-in-chief, but a 2nd century Jewish-born Jesus follower would know that the angels of Genesis 6 are described as sons of God. They might know well the variety and apparent hierarchy of angels in the Bible. They might know that angels are unable to eat food (see Judges 13 and the book of Tobit). Gospel-writer Luke seems to know these angel traditions and is very careful to show how Jesus, even once resurrected, eats and drinks unlike the angels (Luke 24:41-43).

We can assume that these Hebrews are also deeply aware of the monotheistic claim that our God is the only God, a jealous God, who does not share the status of God with any other. The writer wants them, and us, to understand that Jesus, as Son of God and heir of God, is sharing God’s throne – that God and Jesus act as God together. To summarise these verses is to undersell them, but the thrust is that Jesus is above every angel, is seated on God’s throne (not below it), and is eternal. Like God. Being God. With God.

Perhaps these arguments seem strange today, if it is some time since you first became convinced that Jesus is more than a prophet, not merely a good man, and more interesting than Hercules. Imagine sitting down with a child who wants to understand what Jesus is – how would you answer?

Prayer

In this hymn prayer, first translated to English by D. T. Niles, the chant “Saranam” means finding refuge and surrendering to God.

Jesus, Saviour, Lord, to thee I fly;

Saranam, Saranam, Saranam;
thou the Rock, my refuge that's higher than I:
Saranam, Saranam, Saranam.
In the midst of foes I cry to thee,
from the ends of earth wherever I may be;
my strength in helplessness, O answer me:
Saranam, Saranam, Saranam.

[Wednesday 28th October - Hebrews - An Exhortation](#)

The Rev'd Dr Nick Jones is minister at Heswall URC & St. George's URC,
Thornton Hough

Hebrews 2: 1 - 4

Therefore we must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the message declared through angels was valid, and every transgression or disobedience received a just penalty, how can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? It was declared at first through the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God added his testimony by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will.

Reflection

At the end of this passage we get a wonderful summary of what we might call God's self-revelation. God has been revealed to humanity both in the person of Jesus Christ and in the testimony of those who encountered Jesus in the flesh (recorded for us in the Gospels), and we can see God today in the gifts we are given by the Holy Spirit. God is not far off and distant, but close to us. However, I've missed something out here that troubles me – signs, wonders and miracles. Are miracles a problem for modern Christians? They certainly can be. If we insist that a belief in miracles is necessary to be a Christian we force people to make a false decision between believing in God and believe in science. If we

The theme of Jesus as priest will be explored and developed in the chapters ahead. For the moment the message is direct and straightforward. You can trust Jesus. He will help you. Keep the faith. Draw near.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
tested and troubled as one of us,
risen and glorious as one with God,
we ask for confidence
to draw near to you and hold firm to you.
When we are beset with need, with fears, with tiredness,
may we seek your presence and find your strength.
Journey with us, we ask, that we may follow you. Amen.

[Thursday 5th November Hebrews - Compare and Contrast](#)

The Rev'd Ruth Browning, retired minister worshipping at Thornbury URC

Hebrews 5: 1 - 10

Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. And one does not presume to take this honour, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him,

'You are my Son,
today I have begotten you';

as he says also in another place, 21

do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Reflection

Imagine walking through rough and rugged territory. Then you pause and lift your eyes. You see that the path leads on to bright uplands. You know that your leader has already gone ahead and prepared the way. And your energy is renewed. Your fears fall away. That moment of pause, of looking up, is 4:14 of Hebrews.

Chapters 3 and 4 took us into the desert, to the Exodus journey, to the lonely lands between escape and arrival. A desert is dangerous. A pilgrim needs determination to get through. The Christian way, the letter suggests, is like the Exodus pilgrimage. There are dangers. We are fragile. Yet get through we must.

Then at 4:14, we lift our eyes. The way goes upward and Jesus has taken it. He is, by the strange geography of grace, both far ahead and near at hand. He has 'passed through the heavens'. He is risen and ascended, above the pressures, pains and powers of earth. Yet he remains one of us. He was himself a traveller, a learner, a sufferer, flesh and blood. He knows our weakness. He was tested to destruction, but not to sin. He sympathises. He can sustain us.

This Jesus is majestic and mighty – up high, as Hebrews puts it. He is also tender, approachable and compassionate – within reach. This is what Hebrews means by calling him priest. Jesus connects earth and heaven. He nurtures contact between the majesty of God and the experience of earth. He belongs to both realms and he bridges, he mediates, between them.

define a miracle as an event which breaks the scientific rules of the universe* then I'm certain I've never witnessed one, and I've never come across a convincing account of a miraculous event. For me – and you may well believe something different – miracles are not a part of my faith. Insisting on the literal truth of the miracles in scripture means reading the gospels as straightforward history, as journalism rather than poetry. What if we read the miracle stories as theology packed with deep symbolism, stories which explain Jesus to us rather than relate a literal truth? For myself, I believe that there is a God who knows and loves me and was born on the earth as a vulnerable human being, and that in itself is absolutely miraculous enough without, like Alice, adding more impossible things to believe before break God is always beyond our complete understanding. (If you are reading this before breakfast, I hope you enjoy it.)

*See David Hume, 'Of Miracles' - Section X of An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding. <https://davidhume.org/texts/e/10>

Loving God,
we give thanks to you today, and all days,
that you came to pitch your tent among us,
to show us that you love us.
We give thanks for the gifts we receive from you
and remember just how amazing and miraculous is your grace.
Amen.

[Friday 30th October Hebrews - More on Redemption](#)

The Rev'd Peter Moth is a retired minister and member of St Andrew's URC Kenton, Newcastle upon Tyne

Hebrews 2: 10-18

It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For the one who sanctifies and

those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying,

‘I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters,
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.’

And again,

‘I will put my trust in him.’

And again,

‘Here am I and the children whom God has given me.’

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

Reflection

Eight words: “Like his brothers and sisters in every respect” [verse 17]. Yet so significant. Years of doctrine and dissent, creeds and Christology, argument and antagonism and theology on an industrial scale – so much packed into so short a sentence. Who is this risen Jesus? Is he just a ghostly spirit or flesh and blood? Is he for real here and now? The questions have been debated for centuries and the answers are central to the truth or otherwise of the Gospel. The author of Hebrews put it to his fellow Greek speaking sophisticates quite simply – “He too shared in

and uncertainty.

The writer of Hebrews affirms that the rest God promises is an experience promised to believers as part of their faith but is experienced at a point after death. It is participation in God’s own rest, as described in Genesis, when God rested upon completion of the work of Creation. So God’s people having completed their service on earth, enter into God’s rest.

Can Lockdown suggest anything to us about the promise of God’s rest? The author suggests that we must keep working at our discipleship, remain faithful and obedient in order to receive the promise of rest. Perhaps emerging into the new normal we need to be attentive to the new rhythms and patterns we create, that we remain true to our calling to love God and neighbour, that we discern fresh ways to ‘walk the way, living the life of Jesus today?

Prayer

Resting God,
you promise that we shall enjoy rest in you.
Until that time comes
hold us in your love and tend us with compassion;
keep us faithful to the Word of life;
enable us to discern new rhythms and patterns for the world in which we now find ourselves. Amen.

[Wednesday 4th November Hebrews - Jesus our High Priest](#)

The Rev’d John Proctor is a retired minister and member of Downing Place URC in Cambridge

Hebrews 4: 14 - 16

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we

‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.’

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later about another day. So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God’s rest also cease from their labours as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs.

Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

Reflection

I opted to reflect on this passage in March and resolved to write it, close to the submission deadline, five months later, wondering whether the Lockdown experience would give me any new insight into the idea of ‘The rest God promises.’ My experience was not as I imagined. I didn’t experience lockdown as any type of extended sabbath. My ways of being with and communicating with my pastorate changed but continued, the everyday necessary activities of household life continued, albeit with reduced frequency but often greater time commitment as queueing became part of the supermarket experience, and the caring responsibilities I have for my mother-in-law increased as other care provisions were reduced.

I noticed the importance of rhythm and pattern. I found myself living with new rhythms – Thursday evening became the new Sunday - the time I ‘met’ folk from my churches; Friday morning became recording time rather than being in school; Wednesday afternoon became a time to worship together rather than have ‘Coffee and Chat’. I found stability in new rhythms and patterns when everything around was in a state of flux

our humanity”.

They lived in a world where they believed angels and devils, principalities and powers ruled under God, and often made a mess of it. The ultimate beauty and perfection of creation was spoilt. That’s why bad things happened. We don’t believe in that anymore. We believe in GDP, Market Forces, global warming and social revolution, and all the nonsense tomorrow’s tricking and treating will bring when it is saints we should be remembering, not ghostly apparitions. The world is still in a mess and not the better place we believe it could be. Into the middle of this imperfection comes the perfect figure of Jesus Christ: conceived, born, crucified, dead and buried – and then risen, not as a ghost or a spirit or an angel, but as a flesh and blood human being like the rest of us. In sharing our physical humanity he affirms that God rules and redeems the human race, and Christ is still one of us despite the mess we make of it. Eight words in eight short verses, affirming that he is the way, the truth and the life - and that’s salvation in a nutshell.

Prayer

Come my way my truth my life
Such a Way as gives us breath,
Such a Truth as ends all strife,
Such a Life as killeth death.

George Herbert

[Saturday 31st October Hebrews - Christ Higher than Moses](#)

Alexandra Priddy is an Elder and Children’s Church Leader at Trinity Mill Hill

Hebrews 3: 1 - 6

Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, was

faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also ‘was faithful in all God’s house.’ Yet Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honour than the house itself. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later. Christ, however, was faithful over God’s house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope.

Reflection

In this passage we are reminded to give Jesus, as one who is to be revered, the glory, and also to give God the ultimate glory as the creator of all things. Mention is made of being ‘faithful’ to God and of having confidence, pride and hope.

I Googled the word ‘faithful’ and words such as: loyal, constant, steadfast, resolute, firm in adherence, and unwavering regardless of extenuating circumstances, were used; such strong powerful and positive words reflecting the God we seek to serve.

In recent months, positivity and confidence have been lacking as we reflect on, the impact of the pandemic, on the actions of some of those in power and on the unrest caused by inhumane treatment of our fellow human beings. Many of the emotions that we are sharing across the world are anything but positive. At times, it is easier and feels more familiar to stay in the negative, thereby enabling us to connect on the latest thing to worry about.

But by focussing on God, we can drag ourselves out of this negativity. We can regain confidence; confidence that all these worldly occurrences are happening for a reason, potentially to encourage us to be a source of light in a troubled world- a world that quite frankly needed a reboot; a world that needed us to focus on HIM and the hope that he instills in us. But this can be a challenge.

were not facing that issue, are you in that same trap?

Prayer

Lord, how often have You heard us sing in our worship J. G. Whittier’s hymn “Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways.” You inspired these words so that we have the opportunity to repent, to turn around, yet still we continue in our old habits. Open our eyes that we might see the foolishness of our greedy attitudes, seeking wealth or fame rather than perfect rest with You. Again, we seek forgiveness trusting in Your love and compassion. Amen

[Tuesday 3rd November Hebrews - The Rest God Promises](#)

The Rev’d Lindsey Sanderson, minister, East Kilbride and Hamilton Joint Pastorate.

Hebrews 4: 1 - 13

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For indeed the good news came to us just as to them; but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. For we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said,

‘As in my anger I swore,
“They shall not enter my rest”’,

though his works were finished at the foundation of the world. For in one place it speaks about the seventh day as follows: ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.’ And again in this place it says, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’ Since therefore it remains open for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he sets a certain day—‘today’—saying through David much later, in the words already quoted,

those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses? But with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, if not to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

Reflection

This reflection is written during the Black Lives Matter campaign. Racial inequality is by no means a new experience. We all have different tastes, sometimes not very helpful tastes. I was brought up in the South Wales town of Barry. In the 1950's there were no fewer than 30 churches, mainly non-conformist, serving a population of about 50,000.

Competition between the denominations was strong. For example, to join a church's youth organisation you had to attend that particular church. This was further complicated by some churches worshipping and working through the medium of the Welsh language. A member of one such congregation once said to me that it was pointless in going to heaven without the Welsh language because without Welsh you wouldn't understand what was being said or going on! They regarded Welsh as "The language of heaven".

A not dissimilar conflict was going on in the early Church in that Christians that came from a Hebrew background were attempting to persuade those of a Gentile background to follow their traditions. In his letter to the Hebrews, Paul challenges this situation by, in effect, asking "Who is the greater in your beliefs, Moses or Jesus?" I am confident that the Christians from a Gentile background would respond "Jesus", but what about those from a Hebrew background? What were their hopes of heaven?

This raises the question as to what is your vision of heaven - "The land of rest"? Does it include people and situations that make you feel ill at ease? Clearly, the early Christians facing the Hebrew/Gentile division

But I have hope; hope that we, as Christians across the world, can start a movement of positivity in our daily interactions and conversations focussing on the elements of Joy, Peace, and Love that this time of 're-set' has brought about, thus reflecting the very qualities that we see in our God.

Prayer

God of Faith and Hope, lead us to better times;
Let your Love spread rapidly and uncontrollably across the world;
Give us the confidence to inject positivity into our everyday encounters and to infect all who we come into contact with, with your Joy and Love.
Amen

Sunday 1st November Psalm 21

Ann Barton, Lay Leader and member at Whittlesford URC in the Eastern Synod

To Your unequalled strength,
O LORD,
Your chosen ones aspire;
Bring to the just victory,
and grant their hearts' desire.

2 The rulers of the LORD's elect
wear crowns of finest gold;
Their lives, once empty,
now through faith
shall burst with wealth untold.

3 The ones who honour You
as LORD,
to such honour come;
And those in whom goodwill
abides
in You will find a home.

4 In wrath our enemies will fall,
Your arm puts them to flight;
We gain our blessings by Your
grace,
and victory through Your might.

Reflection

Psalm 21 is offering praise to God after battle and is a sequel to Psalm 20 which is a prayer before battle. Herq₃David is praising God for the

blessings given to him as King. He has depended on God's strength throughout and God had given David a release from the pressures and constraints that bound him. Besides the joy of temporary deliverance from physical conditions, David also looks forward to ultimate spiritual salvation. He tells of the good acts of God on his behalf: kingship (a crown of pure gold), victory, desire of his heart, long life (forever and ever through salvation), deliverance, honour and majesty, blessings, God's presence and unfailing love. David asserts that his enemies are also God's enemies because they intend evil against God.

The emphasis of Psalm 21 is that David's crown and David's wreath comes from the Lord. The credit goes not to David but to the Lord. The Lord has saved him from the hands of the enemy. The Lord has given him the victor's wreath and ruler's crown.

Psalms 20 & 21 together also declare the fullness of the Gospel message. The Messiah Who suffers in Psalm 20 rejoices in Psalm 21. Christ is risen and has ascended into great joy. At His right hand are eternal pleasures and He is filled with joy. Heaven is a joyful place! The King of heaven is filled and overflowing with joy.

As I write this, it is early morning. The beginning of yet another day during lockdown. Like you no doubt, I yearn for the time when my life can begin again on its familiar tracks and I can see my friends and family in their usual places. I can worship my God in church together with my church family. Will our hearts be filled and overflowing with joy? I know mine will!

Prayer

Crown us, O God,
not with treasure of gold and silver
but with humility.
Robe us with compassion,
that, as you call us into the kingdom of your Son,

we may strive to overcome all evil by the power of good
and so walk gently on the earth with you, our God, for ever.
Amen

[Monday 2nd November Hebrews - How to Reach the Land of Rest](#)
The Rev'd Colin Hunt is a retired minister and member of Hutton & Shenfield Union Church, Essex

Hebrews 3: 7 - 19

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,

'Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
as on the day of testing in the wilderness,
where your ancestors put me to the test,
though they had seen my works for forty years.
Therefore I was angry with that generation,
and I said, "They always go astray in their hearts,
and they have not known my ways."
As in my anger I swore,
"They will not enter my rest."'

Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today', so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partners of Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end. As it is said,

'Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.'

Now who were they who heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not all