

Shepherding Notes

Hebrews

By Caleb Bunch

The Audience

The book of Hebrews was written when persecution began to come against the church with great intensity. This letter was written to professing Jewish Christians who had left Judaism behind and began following Jesus. The main concern of the author is that there would be professing believers who would be tempted to bend under pressure and run back to the defunct system of the Mosaic Law. So, this entire book is designed to show how there is no longer any value in Judaism, and that salvation is only available through the Lord Jesus Christ. We see six specific warnings not to deny Christ and go back to the old ways scattered throughout these pages.

- Do not neglect salvation — Hebrews 2:1-4
 - Do not harden your hearts — Hebrews 3:7 – 4:2
 - Do not be dull of hearing — Hebrews 5:11-14
 - Do not apostatize — Hebrews 6:1-12
 - Do not go on sinning — Hebrews 10:26-39
 - Do not grow weary — Hebrews 12:3-17
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Shadow and Substance

In the Old Testament we find a shadow of the glory of Christ in types and symbols. In Hebrews we find the substance. The author of Hebrews certainly held an intricate knowledge of the books of the Law. It was always God's plan to fulfill the Old Testament systems of worship with the true object of our worship, Jesus Himself. The sacrifices, the tabernacle, the temple, the ark of the covenant, and many more physical objects of Old Testament worship have their purpose fully explained as we see how God used those things to foreshadow the person and work of His own Son.

Jesus Is Better

The theme of Hebrews is the Superiority of Jesus. He is the fulfillment and substance of all the Old Testament shadows. Here is an outline to help think through the author's argument.

- Jesus is superior to Old Testament prophets — Hebrews 1:1-3

- Jesus is superior to angels — Hebrews 1:4 – 2:18

- Jesus is superior to Moses (and the law that Moses gave) — Hebrews 3:1 – 4:2

- Jesus is superior to Joshua (and the rest He provides is better) — Hebrews 4:3-13

- Jesus is a superior priest (superior to Aaron and the Levites) — Hebrews 4:14 – 7:28

- Jesus is a superior tabernacle — Hebrews 8:1-5

- Jesus' covenant is superior to the Old Covenant — Hebrews 8:6-13

- Jesus provides a superior sanctuary than the temple — Hebrews 9:1-10

- Jesus is the superior sacrifice — Hebrews 9:11 – 10:18

- Jesus provides superior encouragement — Hebrews 10:19-25

In this first chapter we find that Jesus is superior to both the Old Testament prophets and to the angels. What I would like you to see is how the author makes his arguments. He states his case by first making a claim, then presenting Old Testament Scripture to back it up. For example, in order to argue that Jesus is of greater authority and standing than the angels he cites: Deuteronomy 32:43; 2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7, 45:6-7, 89:26-27, 97:7, 102:25-27, 104:4, and 110:1. That is nine citations from thirteen verses just in this short chapter.

This book is saturated in Old Testament references in order to prove that the entirety of the Old Testament was pointing to Jesus. His airtight argument revolves around the fact that God had always planned for the system of Judaism to pass away and to be replaced with a new and better covenant. One cannot simply choose to cut Jesus out of the equation in order to avoid persecution and return to the old ways of Judaism. Jesus is the equation.

"The theme of Hebrews is the Superiority of Jesus. He is the fulfillment and substance of all the Old Testament shadows."

Hebrews 2 continues the argument that Jesus is superior to angels. This is, perhaps, a little out of left field for most modern readers. We live in a society that has been largely sanitized from the supernatural, whether real or mythological. Our modern atheistic, materialistic, naturalistic society has scrubbed the notion of angels from our minds and replaced the image with cartoonish imitations.

The original readers of this letter would have held a much more accurate view of angels. These Hebrews believed the Old Testament, including passages like 2 Kings 18 in which a single angel killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in their sleep in one night. Every time an angel appears in the Scriptures people respond in fear. The problem was not that these people thought too highly of angels. Their mistake was that they were thinking too lowly of Christ — they began to think of Him as nothing more than a glorified, created, heavenly being on par with the Cherubim and Seraphim.

The unknown author of Hebrews distinguishes Jesus from the angels in a number of ways.

- Angels cannot save anyone. Not one angel could accomplish the necessary requirements to bring even one sinner to glory. It is Jesus who brings "many sons to glory," becoming the "founder of their salvation." (vs. 10) Jesus, not angels, is our deliverer from the fear of death, which is referred to as "lifelong slavery."
- The Father has subjected the world under the feet of Jesus, not the angels. (vs. 5–8)
- The angels are only messengers and servants, doing what they are commanded. Jesus, on the other hand, controls all things. "He left nothing outside His control." (vs. 8)
- Unlike the angels, Jesus has become our elder brother in the faith, sharing His inheritance with us. (vs. 11–13)
- Jesus, the eternal God, took on human nature and truly became a man. Although angels often appear in the Bible in the visible form of men, none of them were ever truly human — they were not born of a woman, did not have human nature, and did not maintain the constraints of human limitations such as hunger, thirst, and exhaustion.

The one big question that snags people up in this chapter is derived from vs. 9 which mentions that Jesus was made lower than the angels. This citation of Psalm 8 regarding

being lower than the angels is likely a reference to the biggest difference between humans and angels: the possibility of death. This is why the author makes such a big deal about Jesus becoming like us in every way and links that to Him saving us from the fear of death.

"Jesus is better than the angels because no angel has ever died for you."

People who are into comic book superheroes have a habit of arguing about which character would win in a fight. Those who love sports battle over who is the GOAT. Those more inclined toward American history debate which president is the greatest. If you were to ask any Hebrew in the original audience of this letter regarding who the greatest Old Testament figure is, you would have likely received a 100% response: Moses. He was the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, through whom God mediated the Old Covenant Law. Moses was the greatest Old Testament deliverer, leading the people out of bondage in Egypt. He was the greatest in terms of his relationship with God, speaking to Him "face to face, as a man speaks to his friend." (Exodus 33:11)

But as great as Moses undoubtedly was, Jesus is better. And the competition isn't even close. "For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses — as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself." (vs. 3) Pay close attention to that argument. Moses is being spoken about as the house, and Jesus is the builder. This is a way to claim that every single thing that Moses ever accomplished was "built" by Jesus. Moses could not part the Red Sea on his own. He could not turn a stick into a serpent on his own. He could not even speak on his own. All of the things that made Moses great were performed through him, but not by him. Moses was a servant in God's house (vs. 5), but Jesus is the Son who has authority to rule the house.

The comparisons do not stop with Jesus and Moses. The author of Hebrews turns his attention to those who followed Moses and those who follow Jesus. He presents a stark warning: "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God." (vs. 12) The Israelites during the Exodus were not permitted to enter the Promised Land because of their disbelief and rebellion.

Here is the key to the argument. It can be found in the easily overlooked word "if." "For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end." (vs. 14) This theme of perseverance will weave throughout the rest of the book of Hebrews. True faith perseveres to the end.

There are many professing believers who name the name of Christ, but soon after fade away. The author of Hebrews is pleading with his audience, and by extension to us, that we would stay the course, holding fast to the promises made to us through Jesus. I implore you to examine your own heart. Is there an unbelieving heart growing in you? Are you giving quarter to your doubts or to your disobedience? If so, Hebrews 3 is calling

you to repent so that you will not end up like the Israelites who were not permitted to enter the Promised Land because of their unbelief.

"Moses was a servant in God's house – but Jesus is the Son who has authority to rule the house. The competition isn't even close."

Yesterday we saw that Jesus was superior to Moses. In today's chapter, we discover that Jesus is greater than the man who followed Moses: Joshua. What was Joshua's role? It was to bring the people into the Promised Land and to conquer the inhabitants who were living there.

Hebrews 4 is making the argument that Joshua was never able to actually bring the people of his day into true rest. The Canaanites inhabited the land as a thorn in the side of the Hebrews for the entirety of the Old Testament. You are going to have to think about the chronology in order to understand the argument. This entire chapter is an extended commentary on Psalm 95. Follow the flow of his argument using these steps.

- David, writing roughly 400 years after the Exodus, is recounting the tragedy of so many people failing to enter the Promised Land because of their unbelief.
- David quotes God's own words as to why the people could not enter in: "I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'"
- David's song demands something of the people of his day: "TODAY, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." David was commanding people to listen to the Lord so that they will be able to enter God's rest.
- Hebrews 4 latches onto the fact that David viewed God's rest as something future. It was never achieved by Joshua, or anyone who followed him.
- There was a Sabbath rest that was future to Moses, future to Joshua, and future to David. But we who live under the New Covenant are able to enter that rest through Jesus Christ. (vs. 11)

Here is the bottom line: all of the Old Testament teachings about the Sabbath find their fulfillment in Jesus Himself. He is not just the greater Joshua, leading us into our rest. Jesus is the greater Sabbath. He is our rest.

The closing paragraph of this chapter transitions to speak about Jesus as our great high priest. The punchline is presented right up front: we can confidently draw near to God's throne of grace because Jesus has become our perfect high priest.

Let your mind grasp the picture being presented. You are walking into the throne room of God. Imagine the angelic hosts looking at you with questioning eyes that ask, "What do you think you are doing here?" You can humbly point your thumb at the High Priest walking in beside you and say, "I am with Him." Jesus has given us access to the Father. He has made God's throne open to us, free of charge, and free from condemnation.

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In yesterday's chapter we saw that Jesus was a greater high priest by nature of His origin (vs. 14), by nature of His sympathy (vs. 15), and by nature of His sinlessness (vs. 15). Those were all short arguments that didn't even span an entire verse. Hebrews 5 expounds on those ideas in a number of ways. Chiefly we are presented with the practical reason why Jesus' sinlessness makes Him a better priest. The priests of Israel always had to make sacrifices for themselves before they could feign to offer sacrifices for someone else. They were like plague doctors who also carried the disease. But Jesus is not like those priests — He was perfect and did not have any need to be made right with God before He could sacrifice for others.

There are two mysterious statements that the author makes. First is that Jesus is a high priest "after the order of Melchizedek." We will develop this thought more in chapter 7. For now, you just need to know that this means Jesus is not required to follow all of the stipulations of the Levitical priests in accordance with Old Covenant Law. Jesus was a priest from a different order.

Secondly, he states that Jesus "learned obedience through what he suffered." Some people stumble over how to reconcile the idea that Jesus is both God and that He had to learn something. Here is how we should understand it. Jesus didn't learn something that He didn't know — He had to experience something that He hadn't experienced. His "learning" was His suffering. He had always submitted His will to the Father but had never been required to do that in the same way that we are called to obey. As a man, Jesus experienced the suffering of temptation, trials, tragedy, and torture. Through it all, Jesus never wavered in His perfect obedience to the Father. Jesus succeeded where every other priest had failed.

This chapter concludes with another warning: do not be dull of hearing! The word "dull" in Greek is *nōthroi*, which means lazy or sluggish — not ignorance, but laziness. He argues that they should have grown to a point of being able to eat meat, but they were still requiring milk. Don't allow perceived understanding of the gospel to dull your love of learning more about who God is and what He has done for you through Jesus Christ! Let your ears be ever tuned to listen carefully to the sound of God's Word.

"Jesus succeeded where every other priest had failed. He experienced the suffering of temptation, trials, tragedy, and torture – and through it all, never wavered in His perfect obedience to the Father."

Is there a backdoor to Christianity? Is there a way that a Christian can lose their salvation? Is there some kind of threshold of behavior before one is disqualified? These are questions that Christians have struggled with for centuries. There are some passages that warn against apostasy that have brought about great consternation in the hearts of Christians as to whether or not all Christians will persevere to the end.

What is an apostate? It is a person who professes faith in Christ, and may even show some signs of growth, only to later show through their words or deeds that they are not actually saved. The author of Hebrews is calling his listeners to continue on in Christianity and not return to the defunct religion of Judaism. The warning presented here is that if someone does turn and run from Christ, there is no other road of repentance available for them.

In order to understand this warning correctly, let's be reminded of a variety of other truths that the Bible presents regarding God's work in keeping us saved.

- Romans 8:29–30 presents us with the "golden chain of redemption." These verses reveal that God is the chief actor in every part of the salvation process, and that all whom God has predestined are the same group of people that He will eventually glorify in heaven. No true child of God falls off of the boat along the way. As Philippians 1:6 explains, God started the good work in you, and He will carry it out to completion.
- In John 10, Jesus says of His sheep, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." Can you break God's power grip on you?
- Every Christian is set free from the guilt of their sin. According to 1 Corinthians 1:8, God will "sustain you to the end, guiltless."

If your salvation depended upon you, then you would never have come to Jesus in the first place. If your continued salvation depended upon you, then you certainly could fall away. But, by the grace of God, you are held fast in the Lord by His grace. These verses in Hebrews 6 are not designed to cause fear about losing your salvation. They are here as part of God's overarching, comprehensive plan to keep His children safely within His love.

The Surety of the Promise

Do you remember the words of the hymn "How Firm a Foundation?" "What More Can He Say / Than To You He Has Said, / You Who Unto Jesus / For Refuge Have Fled?" That is drawn directly from verse 18 which says, "we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us." But what is our strong encouragement to hold fast? It is that Christ is holding fast to us. "We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf..."

The anchor of our faith is not that we are clinging with all deliberate intensity onto the Savior. Rather, it is that the Savior is holding permanently and unwaveringly onto us.

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The book of Hebrews is the only book of the New Testament that expressly refers to Jesus as our High Priest. And the key chapters that focus in on that aspect of Christ's ministry on our behalf are Hebrews 6–9. You cannot read the Old Testament without acknowledging that the priesthood was a big deal. Everything about that system pointed to and found its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus. For today's shepherding notes, I will focus in on three main topics: Jesus is part of a better priesthood, Jesus is a better high priest, and Jesus provides us a better covenant.

Jesus Is Part of a Better Priesthood

It may be a good idea for you to go back and read Genesis 14:17–24 in order to get a good sense of the historic events that Hebrews is referencing. Here are the highlights about Melchizedek.

- He was a priest of the one true God four generations before Levi was born, and more than 500 years before the birth of Aaron. His priesthood predates the entire Levitical system.
- His name and titles are royal — King of righteousness and king of Salem, meaning king of peace.
- He has no record of father or mother or genealogy. This does not mean that he popped into existence without parents. Rather, his parents were not recorded, nor were they part of a priesthood. Therefore, his position as priest was not inherited.
- There is no record of his birth or death, and in that way he resembles the Son of God. His priesthood has no retirement date. (The Levitical priesthood had a required retirement date at one's 50th birthday — Numbers 8:24–26.)

A Jewish person would struggle to consider Jesus as a priest because of how connected the priesthood was to the tribe of Levi. Jesus was not from the tribe of Levi — He was from the tribe of Judah. This is why Hebrews goes back more than five centuries before the priesthood was established in order to anchor the priesthood of Jesus to this figure, Melchizedek. And this should not have been a surprise to the people of Israel because Psalm 110 expressly predicts that the Messiah would be a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.

Jesus Is a Better High Priest

Unlike other priests, Jesus is:

- A forever priest — able to hold His priesthood permanently, because He continues forever (vs. 23–24)
- Able to save to the uttermost (vs. 25)
- Always living to make intercession for us (vs. 25)
- Holy, innocent, unstained, and separated from sinners (vs. 26)
- Exalted above the heavens (vs. 26)
- The one who sacrificed Himself for us (vs. 27)
- Seated at the right hand of the Father (vs. 8:2)
- The mediator of a more excellent ministry enacted on better promises (vs. 8:6)

"Consider just how much greater He is. The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office. But He holds His priesthood permanently, because He continues forever."

HEBREWS 7:23–24

You surely know that our Bible is divided into two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. What is a little less well understood by many Christians is that there is a primary covenant associated with each of these testaments. The author of Hebrews takes a large quote from Jeremiah 31:31–34 in order to highlight the point that it was always God's plan to make a new and better covenant. Jesus has given us the New Covenant that He spoke of with His disciples the night He was betrayed — telling them that this New Covenant was "in His blood," meaning it was ratified at the cross. Hebrews 8:13 tells us that this New Covenant makes the old obsolete.

The covenant that is being replaced is the covenant made with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai — the Law. Although it includes all of the individual laws found in Exodus through Deuteronomy, it can be summarized in the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 20)

The author of Hebrews picks up on Jeremiah's prophecy about this promised New Covenant to show three distinct differences between the two.

Effectiveness

The Old Covenant was written on tablets of stone that were easily ignored by the people of Israel. From generation to generation, they passed into obscurity. In contrast, the New Covenant is written onto the very heart and mind of everyone included within it. Every Christian knows the gospel, and through it knows God Himself. It is through the gospel that the separation of God and man that has existed since Eden is now able to be overcome.

Comprehensiveness

The Old Covenant was a conditional document. Many of the Israelites of the Old Testament era did not know the Lord or follow Him — even though they existed under the Old Covenant, they didn't have a relationship with God through it. The New Covenant is much different. Everyone under the new and better covenant knows the Lord "from the greatest to the least."

Mercifulness

The Old Covenant is structured as a list of rules. The very nature of it is designed to catalog exactly how sinful a person is. As Paul writes, "Yet if it had not been for the law, I

would not have known sin." (Romans 7:7) The Law didn't make anyone sin. But it did highlight the sinfulness of their sin. It showed people how far they fell short of God's perfect standard. The New Covenant acknowledges our sins, but also deals with them. Instead of recording our sins, the New Covenant is God's way of "remembering them no more."

"It was always God's plan to make a new and better covenant — one that is more effective, more comprehensive, and more merciful than anything the Law could offer."

In chapter 7 our primary focus was on Jesus as High Priest. In chapter 8 we saw how Jesus mediated a better covenant. Today we are going to primarily focus on Jesus as the sacrifice. Right up front, I want you to try to get this image in your mind's eye. Imagine a priest, decked out in all his official garb, carrying a spotless, gentle lamb to the altar to be killed. Now, realize that every time that happened, it was always intended by God to be a picture of Jesus the priest offering the Lamb — which was Himself — to be sacrificed.

"He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption."

This chapter parallels the priestly work of Christ to the priestly work on the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament. The most important imagery to grasp is the setup of the temple. The inner chamber was called the Holy of Holies — the place where the presence of God dwelt, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. Only the High Priest was permitted to enter, and only once a year. When he did go in, he had to take a sacrifice of blood for himself and for the nation.

Christ, our better High Priest, entered into the true Holy of Holies in heaven to offer Himself as an effective sacrifice. Unlike the other sacrifices that had to be given year after year, Jesus' sacrifice was effectual, and therefore occurred only once "to bear the sins of many."

Here are three quick things to notice about this sacrifice:

- Death was required to inaugurate the covenant. "For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive." (vs. 17)
 - Death is required to forgive sins. "Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." (vs. 22)
 - His death is able to purify our conscience from dead works. "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God." (vs. 14)
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"Every time a lamb was carried to the altar in the Old Testament, it was always intended by God to be a picture of Jesus the priest offering the Lamb – which was Himself – to be sacrificed."

The Only Acceptable Sacrifice

Hebrews 10 begins with an airtight argument as to why the Hebrew people should never, for even a single moment, consider returning to Judaism. Simply put, those sacrifices can't take away your sin. That is why they were always repeated (vs. 2–3). And, it is impossible for animal blood to actually absolve anyone's sin (vs. 4). Jesus' singular sacrifice is the only one that can perfect anyone (vs. 14).

With most of the epistles in the New Testament, there is a discernible transition from orthodoxy (right beliefs) to orthopraxy (right living). In Hebrews, that division is not as sharp. However, we have now arrived at that point in Hebrews when the author is primarily speaking to orthopraxy. Consider the kind encouragement toward action.

- Vs. 22 — Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.
 - Vs. 23 — Let us hold fast the confession of our faith without wavering.
 - Vs. 24 — Let us consider how to stir one another up to love and good works.
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Encouragement to Gather

Notice that one of the key expressions of unwavering hope and faith is the commitment to gather. We are told not to neglect meeting together. (vs. 25) Remember the context of this book. The author is speaking to suffering Jews who were being tempted to leave the faith and return to the defunct system of Old Covenant Judaism. And the first practical point of action he highlights is to continue to gather in person with one another.

One thing that is unquestionably true as we study the Word is that avoiding fellowship with the saints is detrimental to the soul and sanctification of the believer. The author is writing to people who were being highly mistreated, and some would even eventually be killed for their faith. Yet, he calls them to faithfully and regularly gather. If you ever find yourself in a situation where medical complications have proven to be a providential hindrance to gathering, pursue as much fellowship as possible through other avenues until you are able to return. But there is truly nothing that can replace the joy that comes from being the gathered people of God.

Warning to Persevere

Verses 26–39 present a frightening warning for those who profess faith, but continue living in unrepentant sin. For such a person, there is only a "fearful expectation of judgment." The point is this: talk is cheap. Anyone can say that they love Jesus. But if that is true, then the trajectory of that person's life will be to leave sin behind and pursue godliness. For us to run that race, we need endurance (vs. 36). But to close out this chapter, the author provides an encouragement for those who truly believe: "But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls."

"Avoiding fellowship with the saints is detrimental to the soul and sanctification of the believer. There is truly nothing that can replace the joy that comes from being the gathered people of God."

The final three chapters of the book of Hebrews focus in on faith (chapter 11), hope (chapter 12), and love (chapter 13). Hebrews 11 is sometimes referred to as the "Hall of Faith" or the "Old Testament Hall of Fame." It contains a number of tiny biographies designed to reveal how the greatest heroes of the Old Testament trusted in Christ. Hebrews 11 defines faith for us, and then explains that without it, we cannot please God.

By Faith

By declaring that the accomplishments made by these men and women were done by faith, it necessarily undermines the concept that they accomplished these feats because of their innate strength, wisdom, intelligence, or effort. Just consider for a moment the stories of the Patriarchs in Genesis. Do you remember how shockingly disobedient and sinful they were? They were not heroes. They were evil, self-centered people just like us. When we read that they achieved these things by faith, it indicates that they achieved by trusting God to succeed where they could not on their own. In each case, we observe that the individual trusted God to keep His promises. They acted upon the belief that God will always do what He says and that His way is better than our own. And because they acted in faith, they were commended by God.

Looking for a City

Abraham is described as searching for "a city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God." He was willing to live as a sojourner and stranger in this world knowing that he would be welcomed into the city of our God in the next world. Verse 13 widens that notion by stating that "these all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth." The author of Hebrews is helping us to relate to the position of being the outsider, the sojourner, the outcast of society.

Of course, we should never intentionally be off-putting to people. But if you truly follow Christ and live for Him, then those who live for the world will naturally look at you as an outsider. The author of Hebrews is arguing that it is worth it to suffer in this way because of the blessing of heaven. And yet in a completely different sense, we are no longer outsiders at all: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." (Ephesians 2:19) We become outsiders to the city of man, but we become citizens of the household of God.

Of Whom the World Was Not Worthy

What does it look like to be victorious? So many of the people on this list are known for incredible feats of colossal proportions. But then there is a beautiful, unexpected turn. There are other acts of faith that we might not naturally consider in the same vein, but are just as glorious: "Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword... of whom the world was not worthy."

Perhaps you will be called to do great acts of faith for God, either in some historically significant manner, or through suffering for His sake. More likely, you are going to carry out your calling by living by faith in the mundane moments of your life. Don't get it twisted — every day is a high-stakes opportunity to live by faith or not. Walk by faith, my brothers and sisters.

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You will never find the word "hope" in Hebrews chapter 12. But, if you are paying attention, you will see that hope is exactly what the author of Hebrews is trying to instill in his Christian readers. Let's consider how hope is found in this chapter in three distinct ways.

Running the Race

I have recently been trying to get in shape. As part of that process, I have been running three times a week. I know that some people love to run. Those people are crazy. I run because I know that my labor is not in vain. If I keep it up, I will be in better health and can be more efficient in my life. There is a prize at the end which I hope to achieve.

In our walk with Christ, the author of Hebrews is calling on us to run that race with eyes fixed on Jesus. But the power to complete the race is not ultimately in us. Jesus is appropriately described as the "founder and perfecter" of our faith — the author and finisher of our faith. He also ran His race with a prize in mind. It was "for the joy set before Him" that He endured the cross, despising the shame. So what is the prize at the end of the race that should cause us to run with endurance? The answer is found in those three simple words: "looking unto Jesus."

Don't Grow Weary

Hebrews 12 gives a strong warning about not growing weary. But what good does a warning do by itself? The original audience of this letter was experiencing extreme persecution, yet they are being told to endure. Two main tactics are given. First, consider Jesus "who endured such hostility against Himself." When suffering, remember that Jesus has suffered more than you, for sins not His own. A servant is not greater than his master. The second tactic is to recognize the disciplining hand of our God: "He disciplines those that He loves." There is hope in knowing that we will never be punished by God. Instead, we will experience His correcting hand of love.

An Unshakable Kingdom

It can be easy to grow weary when running the Christian race if you are looking backwards. The author describes some of the most restrictive places that existed under the Old Covenant, like Mount Sinai when the ten commandments were given to Moses. And instead of being told that we must stay away from the presence of God, we read the

exact opposite. "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God..." Salvation is not merely future. It is present. When you come to Christ, you are welcomed into an unshakable kingdom.

There is not only hope in what we know God will do in the future. We also have hope that God is doing a good work in and through us in this present moment. "We have come to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant..." That is reason for hope.

"The anchor of our hope is not merely that we will one day enter an unshakable kingdom — it is that we have already come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God."

Love

Hebrews 13 begins, "Let brotherly love continue." This chapter exhorts us to love one another, even when it is difficult or when it means loving those who cannot give anything in return. He mentions love for strangers, love for prisoners, love for spouses, and love for leaders. He even includes that we are not to love money.

It is interesting to notice that the way that we love people can look differently based upon our relationship to them. The way that you love your spouse is by holding marriage in honor and running from sexual immorality. The way to show love to those who are persecuted is to visit them in prison and care for their needs. The way to display love to your church leaders is by submitting to them as they watch over your souls.

The City of God

Right in the middle of all these commands about how we should relate to one another, we are given one more warning against apostasy. Verse 8 highlights the immutability — the unchanging nature — of Jesus. He points this out in order to underscore the fact that the teachings of the apostles will always remain. No new message, doctrine, or theological perspective will ever subsume, replace, or overwrite the glorious truths that have been revealed about Jesus.

Here we find a reminder not merely to love, but to acknowledge that we have been loved by Jesus. "So, Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore, let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured." (vs. 12–13) Here we see the proper order of the Christian life. The gospel propels our actions. Our love is a reflex to the love we experience from Him.

The image of being outside of the camp has run all throughout the book of Hebrews. It concludes with this beautiful illustration of Jesus being sacrificed outside of the camp. Just like the sheep were led outside of the camp to be slaughtered, Jesus was led outside of the city gates — positioned so that anyone who was entering the city to sacrifice their Passover lamb would have to look at Him. This was done to "sanctify the people through his own blood." The blood of the Old Covenant Passover lambs did not have the ability to actually sanctify, but the blood of Jesus certainly does.

Benediction

The word "benediction" means blessing. Let's land today by simply re-reading this powerful blessing with which the book of Hebrews closes.

"Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." — Hebrews 13:20–21

"Our love is a reflex to the love we experience from Him. The gospel propels our actions — He was humiliated for us, He endured reproach for us."