



JUST JESUS

The Book of Hebrews

Lessons Four and Five

TEXT

Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.

So, as the Holy Spirit says:
"Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts
as you did in the rebellion,
during the time of testing in the desert,
where your fathers tested and tried me
and for forty years saw what I did.
That is why I was angry with that generation,
and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray,
and they have not known my ways.'
So I declared on oath in my anger,
'They shall never enter my rest.' "

See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. As has just been said:

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

Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said,

"So I declared on oath in my anger,
"They shall never enter my rest.' "

And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work." And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest."

It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before:

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

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

Hebrews 3:1-4:14

CONTEXT

The "Letter to the Hebrews" isn't actually a letter at all, but a 1st century sermon that was written and sent to a small house church, probably in the city of Rome following the increased persecution of 65 A.D. under Nero. The recipients were likely Roman Jews who had become Christians, and the author knew them personally.

The first section of the sermon is 1:1-2:4

- 1:1-4 God spoke his final word through his Son
- 1:5-14 God's Son enjoys an exalted status, far superior to the angels
- 2:1-4 Consequently, the message delivered through the Son has the highest importance for us regardless of circumstances

"The preacher confronts his distraught and frightened friends with the realization that God comes before them in a vivid and loving way in the new revelation they have received through the Son. The spoken word of God is the awesome reminder that God is with his people, even when they have an impression of his felt absence. (Lane, p. 41)"

The second section of the sermon is 2:5-18

2:5-9 God's Son shared our humanity fully so that he could:

- experience death on our behalf (v. 9)
- bring us to glory, as his brothers and sisters (v. 10-14)
- vanquish our adversary, the devil as the champion of our faith (vv. 14-15)
- become a fully qualified high priest (vv. 17-18)

The emphasis on the person of Christ is continued in 2:5-18 where our author directs our attention to the fact that Jesus (the final, ultimate revelation of God whose message is of the utmost importance) also shares our situation. He is like us in every way, which gives him the right and power to be our Champion and our High Priest.

SUBTEXT

Four Basic Questions

3:1-4:14 presents us with five basic questions:

- 1) Why does the relationship between Moses and Jesus need to be explained?

Although this really begins the next section of our sermon, our author now turns his attention to the fact that as one who is both fully human and fully God, Jesus is superior everything that has come before. Jesus is the ultimate, faithful high priest. For the purposes of comparison, our author puts Jesus side by side with the greatest prophet of the OT, Moses. Moses was obedient to God's calling and appointment as the leader of the nation even though it meant standing up to Pharaoh, he led the nation to freedom, he "mediated" the covenant of grace embodied in the Law to the people from God, he was the leader for an entire generation, and received revelation in a way that set him apart (cf. Numbers 12:6-8). Moses is a big deal. However, Jesus is still superior to Moses.

- 2) What is the nature of the disbelief addressed in 3: 8-9; 12, 15, 19 and 4:11 (hardness of, or an unbelieving heart?)
- 3) What is the purpose of the author's comparison of our situation with the situation of the nation of Israel when they were ready to enter the promised land?
- 4) What is being referred to by "rest"(3:11, 19; 4:1, 3-11)?
- 5) Why does the passage conclude with this famous reference to God's word (4:12-13)?

Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.

Why does the relationship between Moses and Jesus need to be explained?

In conclusion to the previous section (Jesus shared our humanity to experience death on our behalf, bring us to salvation, vanquish Satan and become our merciful and faithful high priest) and in transition to the next section, our author starts with the command to **fix your thought on Jesus** (NIV) or to **consider Jesus** (ESV). **katanohsate** means “think deeply,” “to put the mind down on a thing, to fix the mind on something,” it speaks of “careful attention and continuous observation and regard.”

So when we **consider Jesus**, what is it that we will see? Our author points to the fact that as one who is both fully human and fully God, Jesus is superior everything that has come before. Jesus is the ultimate, faithful high priest. For the purposes of comparison, our author puts Jesus side by side with the greatest prophet of the OT, Moses. Moses was obedient to God’s calling and appointment as the leader of the nation even though it meant standing up to Pharaoh, he lead the nation to freedom, he “mediated” the covenant of grace embodied in the Law to the people from God, he was the leader for an entire generation, and received revelation in a way that set him apart (cf. Numbers 12:6-8). Moses is a big deal. However, Jesus is still superior to Moses.

Moses	Jesus
Was faithful in God’s house	Built God’s house
Was a servant in God’s house	Is a son over God’s house
Testified to what God would do	Is the revelation of what God has done
What happened to Moses house?	We are God’s house
Moses was not perfectly faithful	Jesus was and is perfectly faithful

Adapted from Doriani, Hebrews to Revelation

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 So I declared on oath in my anger,
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See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. As has just been said:

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Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter

his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

Let Me Just Briefly Say...

3:6-4:14 (the rest of this passage for the most part) is really a long development of 3:1-6.

- 3:1-6a Consider Jesus...who was faithful to the one who appointed him
- 3:6b-4:13 Will you be faithful?
- 4:14 The basis for our faithfulness: Jesus our great high priest

Very Nearly Famous

What is the purpose of the author's comparison of our situation with the situation of the nation of Israel when they were ready to enter the promised land?

The point of departure for the author for this extended development section is Psalm 95 which recounts the events of the late Exodus when the nation was on the border of the promised land but in unbelief chose not to take God at his word and enter the land which led to the infamous period of wilderness wandering (Cf. Numbers 13-14). Psalm 95 was also used as the call to worship at synagogue. In effect what the author is doing is taking a well-known, often sung song (like Amazing Grace), which speaks of the central event of the Old Testament to tell a "rhetorical parable." The effect is this, you have seen how this worked in the past, what does this tell us about today?

More specifically the events of Numbers 13-14 tell us what the consequences of hard heartedness look like. The same people who had seen the plagues, participated in the Passover, walked on dry ground across the Red Sea, watched Pharaoh's army crushed, been led by a pillar of fire and a column of smoke, received God's very own words in the Law at Sinai as the sealing of his covenant with them, and were taken care of every day with manna in the desert also looked at the reports that the spy's brought back and said, "Well, we don't think God can do this. He said he would give us this land, but we don't believe that he will." It is a picture of people who have started the journey of faith but not finished it. They have not continued to follow God, but turned their backs on him.

God's response is stern, "Fine then, I won't give you the promised land." The nation again refuses to listen and tries to take the land on their own. They are crushed and sentenced by God to 40 years of wandering. It is an unforgettable lesson. The author is saying in effect, "Be very careful, lest you too suffer this same fate by refusing to listen to God's word, this message that was brought by his very own Son."

Spiritual Arteriosclerosis?

What is the nature of the disbelief described as hardness of heart, or an unbelieving heart?

It is important to remember that the condition being described here is out right rebellion against or rejection of God. Raymond Brown points out that these verses provide a picture, "...not of casual drifters, but of deliberate deserters. (Brown, *The Message of Hebrews*, p. 86)"

Lane offers a more extended explanation.

What is hardness of heart? Its character is exposed in the divine response to the clamor of the assembly contemplating violence (Cf. Numbers 14:10-11)

Hardness of heart signifies treating the Lord with contempt; it is the refusal to believe in the Lord; it is choosing to listen to human voices of despair rather than in listening to the voice of God. (Lane, pp.63-64)

We are not immune from fears, doubts and temptations. However, like soldiers facing combat there is a grave difference between being afraid and rebelling against your commanders. What is in view here is the deadly denunciation of belief in God, a rejection of him and his ways entirely.

Spiritual Angioplasty

One might legitimately ask, “If I am prone to fears and doubts about God’s goodness, his ability to deliver and provide for me, what is the remedy that will keep me from hardness of heart?”

The answer: *But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.* Notice three things:

- *First, we are commanded to encourage each other.* Encouragement isn’t a nice thing that some people do, or a gift that only some people have, it is a command that is to characterize our way of life!
- *Second, we are to encourage one another, which requires community.* The Christian life isn’t meant to be lived alone. We need other Christians around us, intentionally entangled in each other’s lives so that we can both fulfill the command to encourage them, and so that we ourselves can be encouraged. Community is the tightrope not the net. You can survive without the net as long as you don’t fall, but you can’t even take a single step without the tightrope.
- *Third, the command to encourage one another is to be carried out every day.* Every single day is called “today” when it is the current day. Our author is reminding us that we need people around us all the time, regularly, continually. Our Christian life is a journey in which each day must be taken in stride. We are not “encouragement camels” who can survive on the bare minimum dispensed at long intervals. We are a lot more like “encouragement sea lions.” We can live without the water of encouragement on dry land only awkwardly and for a short time. Our natural place is in the water.

*Who do you know who needs to be encouraged this week in their faith?
What are you going to do about it?*

There is every indication that this warning is both serious and that it is not yet too late. ... *none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin* ... is a prohibitive aorist subjunctive, which forbids and an action that has not yet started to begin: Don’t even think about starting to harden your hearts! You haven’t done it yet, though you may be on the verge of it, so don’t even let it begin to happen.”

The Diatribe

Our author finishes this section of rhetorical device known as a diatribe. It is a series of harsh questions, with easy, readily available answers that is intended to provoke the audience into grasping the truth of this Old Testament parable.

Question: *For who were those who heard and yet rebelled?*

Answer: *Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?*

Question: *And with whom was he provoked for forty years?*

Answer: *Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?*

Question: *And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest,*

Answer: *but to those who were disobedient?*

Conclusion: *So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.*

Implicit Conclusion: Take care lest you too miss out on what God has for you by turning your backs on him.

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said,

**"So I declared on oath in my anger,
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And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work." And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest."

It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before:

**"Today, if you hear his voice,
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For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.

“And Now You Know the ‘Rest’ of the Story...”

What is being referred to by “rest”? (3:11, 19; 4:1, 3-11)

Our author is using the word “rest” as a metaphor for ultimate, final salvation. He talks about it in terms of:

- God’s rest from creation, ***“And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.”***
- The Sabbath rest commanded by God and modeled on his own rest after creation, ***a Sabbath rest for the people of God,***
- Rest from travels by having a permanent home in Canaan (a type), ***‘They shall not enter my rest,’*** ***those who formerly received the good news failed to enter, if Joshua had given them rest,***
- Our ultimate rest in his presence as the fruit of our salvation after our death, ***promise of entering his rest still stands, ... of another day later on ...whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.***

So what is the author trying to convey by using such rest intensive language? By taking the wide range of uses for the concept of “rest” the author is affirming that ultimate, complete, restful freedom from burdens is God’s intention for us as the ultimate goal of salvation. Rest is part of who God is and what he provides, but like Old Testament Israel, we may forfeit this blessing through our disobedience, and ultimately through a rejection of God.

C.S. Lewis makes an interesting related point in his book *The Great Divorce*. Here characters who have been consigned to Hell are allowed to visit Heaven for a day. Loved ones and friends come to them and explain they may indeed stay in Heaven if they desire. However, when confronted with their sin, or what they will have to submit to God, most of them prefer to not stay in Heaven. They willingly reject the “rest” offered by God in favor of their own desires and agendas. God’s rest for the non-believer, those who have hardened their hearts, doesn’t seem like rest at all.

Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any

double—edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

A Sword, A Sword, My Kingdom for a Sword

Why does the passage conclude with this famous reference to God's word (4:12-13)?

These famous verses about the nature of God's revelation seem to be an odd finish to the extended "rhetorical parable" the author has been making regarding continued faithfulness in order to experience God's rest.

By using the image of a two-edged sword, Lane believes the author is making an allusion to God's warning, and judgment, that if the nation tried to take the promised land by their own strength, after rejecting God's instructions to enter it, they would "fall by the sword of the Amalekites and the Canaanites." (Cf. Numbers 14:41ff) Hence, when we are confronted with God's word, we are being confronted by God himself and the consequences of disobedience or ignoring God's word are grave.

Notice the following points:

- ***sharper than any double-edged sword***... not just as sharp, but even sharper than the best that existed.
- ***penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow***; ... able to make very fine, very subtle distinctions in ways that other things cannot. Scripture is not a hold over from the days when we "didn't know what we know today."
- ***it judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart***... things, which are impossible for us to do to others, are no problem for the bible. God's word to us is more than capable tool for understanding ourselves and our God.

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Because of the nature of God's word, we must be very, very clear. You cannot trifle with God. You cannot fool him. You cannot hide from him. You cannot deceive him. We may be able to do that with other people, but God knows everything.

For most of us the "appearance of religion" is more appealing than genuine religion. God says, "Make no mistake, I know what is going on in your hearts."

Therefore, since then we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

This section of the sermon concludes with a return to the faithfulness of Christ. We began in 3:1-6 by seeing how Jesus, the final revelation of God, has been faithful in ways that even Moses could not be. We have had an extended development section in which we have seen the grave consequences of not being faithful, of not continuing in our Christian walk. Now we again return to the theme of Jesus' faithfulness, recalling the fact that Jesus' humanity is able to make him be our sympathetic high priest.

The pattern is instructive: Jesus, current concerns/temptation, Jesus. Again, we are reminded that Christ is central for us. He is the very center of God's plan for us and the one to whom we are always to look. To fail to do so, to ignore this message of the gospel, to stop following him after we have begun leads to huge problems.

..let us hold firmly to the faith we profess... refers to the confessional statements made by the early church about Jesus being our salvation. In front of God who knows all, let us continue to, regularly, as a matter of continual lifestyle hang onto our faith.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE

Jesus has been completely faithful. What about you? Will you be faithful? Where are you most tempted to not be faithful (idols and orphans)? Is it even appealing? Do you even care?

Are you in danger of “playing games with God” by thinking that you can fool him with outward pious behavior when the condition of your heart is rebellious and unbelieving?

What are we to make out of these exhortations to “keep going” in our faith, when God is the one that gives us faith and makes us able to believe in the first place? Can I lose my salvation if I don’t keep working at it?