

Hebrews: The Anchor Holds



God is going to speak to us through a sermon preached by a disciple of Jesus Christ to a small Jewish house church during the reign of Nero that was being tempted to go back into Judaism. Many in this small Jewish house church were true believers in Christ. They were inviting their family, friends, and neighbors, who were also Jews, to the assembly of the saints. Many had heard the good news of Christ, some had believed and some had not. Yet now, as persecution begins to break out on the Church, some are tempted to turn away from Christ as the only hope of salvation and go back under the Law of Moses, believing that instead of Christ on a cross the sacrifice of a lamb could actually make what is wrong with them right with God. What a tragedy.

This is perhaps my favorite book. I know I say that a lot, but it is just awesome! I want you to get the gist of this book. I have picked out fifteen passages that I believe will each give us the flow, the summary, and the main thought of the book of Hebrews, which is the anchor holds.

Scriptures

"But we see Him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of

the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.” (Chapter 2:9)

“Therefore He had to be made like His brothers in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because He Himself has suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted.” (Chapter 2:17-18)

“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Chapter 4:14-16)

“Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.” (Chapter 5:8-10)

“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, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” (Chapter 6:19-20)

“This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.” (Chapter 7:22)

“Consequently, He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” (Chapter 7:25)

“Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the

Majesty in Heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.”(Chapter 8:1-2)

“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 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.”(Chapter 9:11-12)

“But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until His enemies should be made a footstool for His feet. For by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”(Chapter 10:12-14)

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the House of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”(Chapter 10:19-25)

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross,

despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”(Chapter 12:1-2)

“Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”(Chapter 12:12-14)

“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”(Chapter 12:28-29)

“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.”(Chapter 13:20-21)

What an awesome High Priest we have! Our entire salvation is based on Jesus Christ, Jesus Messiah, being a great High Priest. Because God’s justice is satisfied and we have been pardoned, we cannot just come before His throne, but we actually live before the throne every day of our lives. God is speaking, and I pray you are listening.

I believe that Apollos, a disciple of Jesus Christ, wrote this word of exhortation. It is not a letter from Paul to the Hebrews. It is a sermon birthed in the heart of a young disciple of Christ for a small Jewish house church that is struggling during the reign of Nero. Not yet, but soon some of them will give their life for Christ. As of now, they are just suffering, not because they are Jewish, but because they are Christian. At this time in Nero’s reign, the Jews had favor. So the temptation was to leave the

Church and the hope of Christ for salvation, and go back to believing you can still be made right with God through the sacrifice of a lamb in the Temple and your obedience to the Law of Moses. Therefore, this sermon to the Hebrew people is unlike anything we have in the New Testament. There are five warning passages revealed in chapters 2, 3 and 4, 6, 10, and chapter 12 that absolutely send a chill down your spiritual spine. A warning that is so strong that many do not even read the book of Hebrews because it seems to contradict security of a believer, so many in the Evangelical Church just stay away from it. Others try to water it down to make it come in line with security of a believer. I ask you not to do that. I ask you to read this book and understand that the warning passages are written in this book because there is a real danger for people who sit under the preaching of the gospel to not make it to the end, and thus, revealing that they never knew Christ. In this sermon of warning, the overwhelming evidence is that it is a book of assurance to people who are living in a very difficult time. So let's dig into it.



The Anchor Holds



If I were to break this book down, I believe the theme of the book is Jesus, a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. That just seems to be obvious; it just jumps out and grabs you. The reason the writer of Hebrews is trying to present Jesus as our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek is because he wants us to understand that as the forerunner, our anchor of hope hold. As we cling to this hope, this hope will see to it that you and I get home safely. There is actually nothing in this life that can cause us to be separated from our God if we cling to, never abandon, hope that is found in Jesus Christ. Remember, this sermon by Apollos is being preached to show how superior Jesus Christ is as the High Priest of the Church vs the Law of Moses. In chapters 1-6, you will see Jesus presented as the Messiah and He is a better High Priest. Then in chapters 7-8, you will see

the Church has a better covenant. In chapters 9-10, you will see the Church has a better sacrifice. In chapters 11-12, you are going to see that since we have a greater High Priest, a better covenant, a better sacrifice, we have a better mountain. Our mountain is not Mount Sinai; our mountain is Mount Zion. Then the last chapter reads kind of like a letter. So it is a sermon that is being written to a church that ends like a letter. Therefore, the Church has a better ending, and that is chapter 13, with the key passage being Hebrews chapter 13:20-21.

The whole purpose of this book is to bring us to a place of worship because we have a Kingdom that cannot be shaken. We have an anchor that holds no matter how life comes at us. As we hold to the anchor of Christ, that anchor will see us home. So no matter where we find our self or what we find our self in as believers in Christ, we ought to be able to worship our God with reverence and awe. When this book ends, what should take place in our lives is worship.

A Better High Priest

Apollos starts out by reminding us that in the past, God spoke in a lot of different ways to a lot of different people, and through a lot of different people. But in these last days, He has spoken to us through His Son. He compares Jesus to an angel, in that He is much better than an angel. Again, you have to remember that the Jewish people believe that Moses received the Law from God through the hand of an angel. The Bible is trying to show that God didn't give us the new covenant by the hand of an angel, but by His Son. He has not spoken through an angel, He hasn't spoken through Moses, but He has spoken through His Son Jesus. Then the writer is going to contrast how much greater this salvation is in Christ. He also says there is a danger that in a small Jewish house church, there are a lot of people who are going to neglect this great salvation, and He warns them about drifting. The picture is a little ship coming into the harbor to the port, and because of the current and not navigating correctly, the boat misses the dock and it just drifts on past. I remember when we

used to farm in Smithland there were two islands we farmed. I watched my papaw and my dad navigate a barge. When the current was really strong on the Ohio River, they had to pay close attention to hit the landing. There is a danger that some of you sit in church Sunday after Sunday, yet your ship of faith never comes in to the dock. You trust in yourself, sit under the preaching of the gospel for several years, believing you can be right with God on your own, with maybe a little aid from Christ. That is what some of us believe. We have never really abandoned trying to make ourselves right, instead of putting our complete faith and trust in Jesus Christ as the only hope of salvation. You are going to wake up one day to find you missed it. It is going to be too late. There is no hope of salvation for you in this life if you don't abandon faith in yourself and completely trust in Jesus Christ.

Then he begins to teach us about how God's Son is a priest after the order of Melchizedek, and was made lower than the angels for a little while when He became a man just like you and I. I have said this for years, but I believe in our teaching about Christ some of us actually believe that the life of Christ was rigged. You believe He couldn't have sinned if He wanted to because He was God. Therefore, you don't believe His life was fair in comparison to ours. Yet Scripture completely teaches that while He was God, He was just like you, fully human, tempted to sin, just like you. He actually suffered in being tempted, yet He did not sin. Do you get that? He was tempted just like us, yet where we gave in, He never did!

There are some people that will not accept ministry from me, but will accept ministry from you because they don't believe I have been there; I haven't done the things they have done. Yet Scripture teaches you shouldn't run to somebody who has been there and done what you have. You should run to somebody who has been there but did not do what you did! You need to understand that Jesus Christ has been where you have been, except He didn't give in to temptation! Therefore, He went to a deeper level of temptation than any of us have ever been to. You gave in, maybe right off the bat or maybe you went a little further, but you eventually gave in. Not Jesus, He just kept being tempted and tempted and

tempted, and He suffered and suffered and suffered, so that when you come to Him as your High Priest, He sympathizes! Because He has been there and didn't do that, He knows what you need. The Bible says let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace because He has already made propitiations for our sins! Apollos tells this church that it has already been dealt with! Therefore, when you find yourself being tempted, come to Him and you will receive mercy and grace, and in the Greek, it says 'in the nick of time.' Whew! Wouldn't you like to pack around a little mercy and grace and just pull it out of your pocket and use it when you need it? Have you ever been in a situation where mercy didn't arrive and grace didn't come? You see, you were trying to get it ahead of time, but mercy and grace come 'in the nick of time.' In this passage, I believe mercy should be interpreted as the ability to get over with what you did. When you come to the throne of God, He gives you the ability to get over what you did. I am sorry...I do not understand how some of you still can't get over what you did twenty years ago. The mercy of God gives you the ability to get over what you did! It has already been dealt with! Also, God gives you grace. Grace is God's enabling power to help you get on with your life after you blew it.

- **Warnings**

Now, there is this strong warning passage sandwiched between the passages of this great truth about Jesus being the High Priest. The warning is that not everyone who came out of Israel made it in to the Promised Land. Whoa! Did you hear that? There is an evil heart of unbelief in some of us in the church. There is someone sitting in a church right now who believes that they are a believer, but in all actuality, they are not a believer at all. Though they are in the crowd that looks like they came out of sin, when the Church is gathered in Heaven, they will not be there. Whoa...now this scares to death those of us who believe in the security of a believer. It seems like it is a contradiction, but it is not.

You see, Apollos is writing to the Hebrew people in the time of persecution, so he isn't looking at salvation from the perspective of Paul, where you are justified by faith. I mean he does believe you are justified by faith, he does believe the moment you come to Christ you are made right with God. But he knows there are a lot of people who think they have faith that do not really have it; and what lets you know that you don't really have faith is when life is tested, it is when you are tempted. I mean when something happens and your life falls apart and you turn from God, your faith wasn't what you thought it was. So the writer of Hebrews isn't presenting salvation from the beginning as Paul does; he is presenting salvation from the end. He is saying if you really come out, you will go in. But if you stop somewhere in the middle, it reveals your heart wasn't what you thought it was. He is telling us not to put trust in the fact that we say we have come out, because there is a whole lot of people who came out of Israel that didn't make it to the Promised Land. They didn't get in.

In chapter 6, Apollos is going to name some characteristics that to be honest with you, if it was taken out of the context of Hebrews, you would think these people are believers, but they fall away. The writer says that once you have been in this condition (he names six characteristics of this condition), it is impossible to ever renew you again to repentance if you fall away, because Christ would have to be crucified again for you, and He is not going to do that. Now let me say this, if you go back to chapter 3, 6, and 14, the way you know you are a child of God is you hold firm your confidence to the end. In chapter 3, those people are God's children who hold firm their confidence to the end. So how do you know you are God's child, if you are Apollos? You hold firm to the end. If you don't hold firm to the end, it means you are not God's child. He tells this Jewish house church, if you abandon hope in Christ for salvation and go back to believing you can be made right by the Law of Moses, once you turn your back on the sacrifice of Christ, you have sealed your fate. It is over and there is no more hope for you. This is not talking about a believer sinning a sin and

losing the salvation. It is talking about somebody abandoning hope in Christ and going back to believing the Law of Moses.

Then Apollos is going to close this section about Jesus being the High Priest by telling us that Moses got them out, but couldn't get them in. So how do you and I, who have come out of sin, know that we will really get into Heaven one day? He gives us this picture...Jesus, right now, is no longer on the earth, and when He died on that cross and was resurrected, He went into the very presence of God. And right now, He is behind that curtain in the Holy of Holies in Heaven. He is our forerunner!

A forerunner was the picture of the guy who got out of the ship when the ship was out on the sea and it came into the harbor. You have to remember, in the Biblical world, the way they guarded their harbor was to fill it with sand, so in low tide, you couldn't come into the harbor. The enemy couldn't come into the harbor during low tide, only at high tide. It made the harbor easily defended. Picture a ship coming off of the sea, gets into the harbor at low tide, and it can't get into the harbor because the ship is too heavy to cross the sand bar. A man would get out of the ship, take the anchor with him in a little boat, row it over the sand bar, and then he would get into the harbor and drop the anchor. The anchor had a rope tied to it that was tied to the ship. The ship is out on the sea, the winds and waves are blowing against the ship, it is being tossed back and forth, but the anchor in the harbor holds the ship! Then as the tide begins to rise, the ship goes to where the anchor is into the safety of the harbor.

Here is the picture...Jesus Christ, for you and I, went into the very presence of God. He is seated right there, right now, at the right hand throne of God, He is our anchor of hope! And you can trust that one day you will be where your anchor is, because the anchor will hold no matter what life throws at you! Wow! So in the midst of the sermon that warns us about turning from Christ, it tells those of us who do not turn from Christ and cling to the hope of Jesus only (plus nothing), that one day we will be

where we are supposed to be, and that is in the harbor of salvation because our anchor is already there.

A Better Covenant

Then Apollos will talk about how Jesus is a Priest after the order of Melchizedek, and he will reveal that because He is a Priest after the order of Melchizedek, we have a better covenant. So why would you go back to the old covenant when the new covenant of Jeremiah of chapter 31 has been brought to fruition? Apollos, who is very eloquent in the Scriptures, Apollos, who was studious of the Scriptures, an Alexandrian Jew, takes the Old Testament principles, applies them, and shows how they are fulfilled in the New Testament. Now he is going to show Jesus as a priest after the order of Melchizedek, because He never dies, didn't have a beginning or an ending, and lives forever. He isn't like those priests who served and then died, and then you had to change priests. Imagine putting your hope in a priest and then he dies, and you have to start all over again. Not all priests were good. Jesus Christ by the power of an unending life, an eternal life, a life that never ends, ushered in a new covenant and the old one has vanished.

He teaches that the new covenant is not like the old covenant. The old covenant was based on 'if,' 'then.' It was based on works...God says you will be My people, if you do this and this and this. The new covenant is not conditional on obedience or works. It is unconditional in nature. It is not based on what you do for God, but on what God has done for you in Christ. Under the old covenant, the laws were written on stone. The laws of the new covenant are written on your heart, on your mind. You don't have to look things up; you know what to do, and what not to do, because it has been written on your heart. The old covenant people were an unregenerate people, some of them were saved, and some of them weren't. If you were an Israelite under the old covenant, you were always having to teach people they had to know God. Under the new covenant, those of us who know God do not need anyone else to tell us that we need

to know God, because all know God. This means the new covenant people of God is regenerated people. The Church is not a mixture of saved and lost. The true Church of Christ is regenerated. This means you may have your name on the role of our church as a member, but if you do not know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you are not part of the Church of Jesus Christ, so you are not really part of our church either. We just don't know you are really not who you say you are.

A Better Sacrifice

This passage teaches that under the new covenant, there is no more remembrance of sin. God doesn't remember our sin again, wow! There is a better priest and a better covenant because there is a better sacrifice. See in the old days, those priests went in with the blood of a goat or a bull and it could never get the job done. All it could do was roll the sin forward. But when Jesus Christ came as the Lamb of God, one time for all people, He took His blood into the very presence of God and offered it as a sacrifice for your sin.

Then Jesus did what no priest in the history of mankind had ever done; He sat down! Notice beginning in chapter 9 that we have a list of all that furniture that was in the Temple, but there was one piece missing, and that was a seat. You see, after a priest did what he had to do, he had to get out. He knew he couldn't sit down because what he sacrificed didn't finish the job. The writer of Hebrews is saying not see our High Priest in Heaven standing, worrying, and making a repeated sacrifice. Once He went to the cross and sacrificed Himself, He took His blood into the presence of God and God accepted His blood as payment for your sin, and then Jesus sat down because your sin debt has been paid in full...Wow! Thus, a death has occurred that has redeemed us from our sin! It didn't just make salvation available; it accomplished salvation, it finished salvation for those who God calls unto Himself (Chapter 9:15).

A Race to the Mountain

Then we find out we are in a race. We are the only one in the race; we are just following a whole bunch of people that has been in the race from the beginning of time, because the true people of God are people of faith. The writer says knowing we have a better High Priest, knowing there is a better covenant, knowing there is a better sacrifice, let's run. He pictures the Christian life as a marathon. You have to realize that under Law, whoa, we away from that mountain, but under grace, under Christ, we run to a different mountain. It is Mount Zion, the heavenly city, New Jerusalem. He says we are running to God, we are running to Christ, and we are running to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. Do you have this picture? We are running, and the finish line is about Zion. You started life at Mount Zion, spiritually, and you are running around this mountain, the mountain of God. You run the race by realizing there is a whole cloud of witnesses who have already run their race, and they sat down. Abel, Noah, Moses, Abraham, you could just go on and on. When they died, they handed the baton to the next guy, who handed it to the next, and somewhere the baton was handed to you. And you are supposed to look back at some of these great saints of faith, and they are to be an example to you of how to run the race. Every year when the Tour de France comes on, I make a commit to ride my bike. And I do ride my bike for about two weeks...the tour goes off and I quit riding. Any weight I took off comes back on quicker, it seems. Have you ever gotten motivated that way, and then it didn't last? This is why we have such a great cloud. The reason we continually read the Word about these great witnesses of faith is because they are an encouragement to us. We run realizing that there is Abraham, there is Noah, there is Abel, and there is Sarah, and they finished and they sat down. We are not going to quit running until we sit down too.

While we are running, we are supposed to lay aside every sin, every weight that is hindering us. What is hindering you from running? Lay it aside.

Then keep your eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for

the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame. Once He made an offering of Himself, He sat down at the right hand of God! Wow!

Let me just say this, if you watch me too long, you will quit, or you won't want to run with me anymore. If you picked out the greatest person you know and run with your eye on them, they will get in some situation and will let you down. There is not a person anywhere that will not let you down from time to time. We are supposed to keep our eye on Jesus. There are many people who won't go to a church because of something the preacher or one of the members did. The moment I hear that I think, *their eyes are not on Jesus*. Run with your eye on Jesus.

He says lift up those droopy knees; get those hands up! I remember when I ran a half marathon in Nashville. It was kind of hilly, and toward the end, my knees didn't want to move. When you started out your knees are high, arm were pumping. Have you noticed that the longer we do this, there comes a time when those knees just don't come up as high and those arms don't pump as hard? He is saying get those hands up; get those knees pumping.

He says make your path straight so that you may bring healing to what is lame. Whoa...now wait a minute, if you are lame, it is going to be hard to run. This is not talking about you; this is talking about others. When I run the half marathon in Nashville, I ran it with my friend and my daughter. We decided we were going to stay together, which means two of us we held somebody back. I think it was them holding me back...but we were going to cross together. ☺ This is teaching that as you run your race, yes, everyone is supposed to be looking to Jesus, but there will be a time when you are running that your life is actually going to be an encouragement to another brother. For a little while, you are going to run along beside them. You are going to run that half mile with them, and then that for half mile up the mountain when they don't believe they can get to the top, you are

going to be their encouragement; you are going to slow down just long enough to get them over that hill!

I'll never forget when we were running that race in Nashville and we went around that bridge and saw the stadium where the Titans played and seeing that finish line. Keep your eye on Jesus and the mountain of Mount Zion! Do you know what it causes? It causes worship. You can't help it! When you think about the reason you will cross the finish line and be given the crown of life, and you realize that it was not you that did it, but Christ did it through you, you just have to worship Him!

A Better Ending

We have a better ending. We have the ability, not just to get together in a public assembly and worship Him where it is easy, but we can actually go out there in life and worship Him knowing that God will equip us with everything we need to do what He wants us to do. What He does in us is actually pleasing in His sight, to whom be glory forever and ever. Your High Priest is seated on the throne of Heaven right now, making intercession for you. Mercy and grace is available!