

“OUR HOPE: JESUS THE HEART OF HEBREWS”

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Heb. 5:11- 6:3

In Alexander Dumas’ brilliant novel, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, a young man is wrongly accused of a crime and is imprisoned on a lonely, barren island. In the dungeon he meets a monk who, sensing the character of the young man, tells him of a great treasure hidden on Monte Cristo, another island far away in a distant corner of the sea. Soon the monk dies.

Through a series of harrowing events, the young man escapes. He travels at great peril to the island, where, following a map traced indelibly on his mind, he finds the hidden treasure. The monk, he discovers, had not exaggerated. There are gems and precious jewelry, objects of gold and silver in unbelievable abundance. Overnight, the youth is an extremely rich man.

In time, he becomes known as the Count of Monte Cristo. No one knows the source nor the extent of his wealth. He lives like a king with a never-ending supply of riches. Whenever his bankroll gets low, he simply returns to the hidden treasure of Monte Cristo and replenishes his supply.

I propose that we follow the Count’s practice in our approach to the book of Hebrews. Here, truly, is a treasure chest of spiritual riches in unimaginable abundance. Unfortunately for many of us, it remains hidden treasure. Apart from a few well-known passages, the typical Christian knows little or nothing of the vast wealth of hope and help God has tucked away in this virtually “deserted island.”

As a beginning, therefore, let me take you to this treasure chest for a fresh look at the book of Hebrews, give you the key that unlocks it, and show you the riches God has put there. Then, like the Count of Monte Cristo, you can return at will and, chapter by chapter, take handfuls of these

spiritual gems to provide resources for hope-full living.

There is no escaping the fact that the book of Hebrews has been a center of controversy. Churches have divided and Christians have broken fellowship with one another over doctrinal differences supposedly rooted here. Basically, there are two major interpretations of this most difficult book of the New Testament canon.

Some expositors argue that the book of Hebrews was written to Christians who were in danger of falling from grace, thus losing their salvation. This is the classical Arminian view. A second group claims the book was addressed to mere professing Christians, those who had only come part way to Christ and were in danger of drawing back before being finally and actually converted. This is the position of most Calvinists.

Both of the above pose monumental problems, pitting one portion of scripture against another, in violation of solid Biblical scholarship. But there is a third alternative, one which appears to have been obscured or missed completely by most students of this treatise. This view solves the apparent mysteries surrounding certain seemingly contradictory texts, and I believe it does justice to the book of Hebrews, while remaining true to the total teaching of scripture.

It sees the book of Hebrews as having been addressed to born-again Christians. People who had been saved prior to the time the book was written, were still saved at the time this message was put into their hands, and would continue to be saved for all eternity. But, and here is the nitty-gritty of it, they were sinner-saints. Saved people who had allowed sin to gain a foothold in their lives, and, as a result, had lost the confidence derived from an intimate walk with Christ. Even worse, though they were born again, they were in grave peril of losing their future reward. Both the joys of an abundant walk with Christ here on earth and the benefits of such a walk in their life after death were on the line. Dealing creatively with this dual peril is the thrust of Hebrews.

The Treasure Chest

Our first discovery is that there are a number of unanswered questions about this book. Who wrote it? When was it written? To whom was it addressed? Volumes have been written by scholars trying to unravel these mysteries, and we could speculate endlessly about them. But, when the Holy Spirit leaves certain questions unanswered, we should not be unduly distressed by His silence.

Our ability to appreciate and benefit from the treasure-chest of Hebrews does not depend upon knowing as an absolute certainty who wrote it, what date it was written, or even to what specific place it was sent. We do know this orphan book which begins like a sermon and ends like a letter, was directed to a group of Hebrew Christians who, under intense pressure from certain religious leaders and their Jewish friends, were in serious spiritual danger.

The author calls them “*holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling*” (Hebrews 3:1). He accuses them of being lazy and lethargic, on the verge of becoming spiritual dropouts. Through dull indifference they had lost much of their original dynamism. Their faith was stagnant. They had stopped growing spiritually. They had become lax in their church attendance, careless in their living and sloppy in their use of the scriptures. Their whole system of priorities was confused. They were no longer distinguishable from rank and file folk around them. Put simply, they were a lot like some of us!

We don’t like to stand alone, either. We don’t like to be isolated from our neighbors, family, or friends, either. The Hebrews’ love of ease was no greater than ours. We, too, live by the myth that happiness is in having. So when what we have is threatened, we are threatened. And, Christian or not, we tend to turn tail and duck for cover. Our “classification” drops from “*spiritual man*” (1 Corinthians 2:15) to “*ordinary man*” (1 Corinthians 3:3). We are saved-sinners. And, having no real reason for the hope that is within us, in the truest sense, we have no hope!

The solution is the same today as it was when the book of Hebrews was written: *Jesus!* God’s answer then is God’s answer now. Through this unknown penman, our Heavenly Father urges all sinner-saints: turn your eyes upon Jesus! Take a long, hard look at Him. Get with Him. Stay with Him. Go on with Him to real maturity.

This is the single theme running through this spiritual treasure chest. This is the one strong cord to which we are told to cling. Several strands intertwine to create this one sure cord of hope. They are graphically given in the outline which follows: The Heart of Hebrews. As we carefully work our way through Hebrews, you will find these strands often are so enmeshed with each other they are difficult to distinguish. For that reason, no attempt has been made to divide the book chapter by chapter, or verse by verse. The strands overlay each other. Weaving back and forth from first word to last, but they are there just the same.

Look At All Jesus Was! That’s the first strand.

Look At All Jesus Did! That’s strand number two.

Look At All Jesus Means! That’s strand three.

Jesus is the heart of Hebrews! He is its richest treasure. Yet there are other precious jewels waiting to be discovered in this treasure chest. How do we unlock it to get to them?

The Key

I believe the key to this book is found in Hebrews itself, in verses 5:11-- 6:3. Here our author explains there are many things that should but cannot be said because, sadly, these Christian believers never grew up!

“Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for some one to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For every

one who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings, and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we shall do, if God permits” (5:11 --6:3).

These seven verses form the key which unlocks the treasure chest of Hebrews. They declare the issue at stake in Hebrews is not spiritual birth, but spiritual growth! The things said to these people in this particular passage could not be said to non-Christians. Would the Spirit of God say to a non-Christian, “You ought to be a teacher of the word”? Would the Spirit of God say to a non-Christian, “You ought to be eating meat,” when they couldn’t digest milk? Would the Spirit of God say to a non-Christian, “You should skip on past the fundamentals of repentance and faith in God”? The Spirit of God would not insist people grow who had not yet been born.

So, through this key passage, Hebrews interprets itself. The people to whom this book refers were born-again persons. This is important. The Biblical references to the eternal security of believers in Christ are numerous and clear. They permit no uncertainty. “*He who believes in the Son has eternal life...*” (John 3:36). “*(Nothing) shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 8:39). “*No one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand*” (John 10:29).

These and other references so frequently appear and are so obvious as to be beyond debate. The Bible is God’s word and God does not contradict Himself. Therefore, passages in the book of Hebrews which *seem* to suggest a saved person can be lost again need to be examined closely. When seen in the light of this key passage (5:11-6:3), we recognize that what is at stake is not salvation, but reward.

In various portions of scripture, the Holy Spirit has taken pains to warn it is possible to reject the lordship of Christ over our lives. It is possible *right now* to lose the joy of walking in company with Him. As a result, when we meet Him at the end of this life, it is possible that reunion will not be all it should be. We will have nothing to present to Him if our works are burned by the fire of His judgment (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). Against that dreadful possibility the writer of Hebrews hammers out the recurring theme --

Grow, Christian, Grow!

One of our Project Winsome International lay leaders was an engineer named Dick Schoof. At a Leaders Conference, Dick shared how he had finally gotten that message. “The more I know about the Christian life,” he said, “the more I see it as a ladder leading to heaven. Being born again is mounting the first rung. From there on out, it’s one rung after another. The further you go, the greater the distance between rungs, so you’d better g-r-o-w!”

There’s a lot of truth in that, and it’s in total harmony with what the book of Hebrews teaches: *“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food”* (5:12). Grow, Christian, grow!

Grow Intellectually.

Move on from basic Christian teachings to the more demanding aspects of life. Speaking with the crisp candor of many “Brits,” Major Ian Thomas, a noted Bible scholar from England, once said to me,

“I’m sick and tired of hearing Christians tell me to preach the simple gospel. What they usually mean by this is, ‘Tell me what I’ve always been told so I can hear what I’ve always heard. Then I can know what I’ve always known, believe what I’ve always believed, sit like a cabbage in the pew and never think, never struggle, never change, never grow.’”

The prospect of thinking, struggling, changing and growing is a painful one to many Jesus Folk.

That's why we must keep our heads on straight with a solid knowledge of God's written word. These deep truths will help immeasurably in our Christian growth

Few writers have undertaken a practical approach to the book of Hebrews. The reason for this must surely be an abysmal ignorance on the part of many Christians, coupled with a “Who cares anyway?” attitude about such vagaries as the law, the prophets, the sacrificial system and angels. Therefore, to say Jesus is greater than any of these means little or nothing to contemporary Christians. If you fit into that category, I hope this study will instruct and help you understand the significance of these things. This is a day when all God's children need a reason to hope. If we're to have that reason and be able to articulate that hope, we must grow up intellectually. We must move on from the ABC's of theological hair-splitting to something with teeth in it. Grow, Christian, grow!

Grow Spiritually.

Maturity in Christ means more than preoccupation with the elementary truths of Christianity, clutching a few theological cliches. It means exchanging the typical for the actual. The shadow for substance. The wrappings for reality. It means putting meaning into verbiage we view as sacrosanct.

When Lucille and I became engaged, I presented her with a large, exquisitely wrapped box.. She could not contain her excitement. She took off the lovely wrappings, opened the large box, and inside found a ring. Then do you know what she did? She kept the wrappings and the box and threw away the ring! Of course not! Though the wrappings were beautiful, that beauty was completely diminished when she was face to face with the reality of the ring and what it symbolized. A new life. A complete change.

That's what the book of Hebrews is all about. A new life! A complete change! That is to say, having begun a new life, you must not stop there! You must go on to maturity in Christ. Grow,

Christian, grow! You must stop fretting over whether you have been saying the right words when you pray. Or whether your baptism was as meaningful as it might have been. Or whether your understanding of communion is complete. Or whether you have all the “i's” dotted and the “t's” crossed in your thinking about prophecy.

There are some things only faith can settle, as is so gloriously declared in Hebrews 11. If you have faith enough to believe God could bring the world into being out of nothing (11:3), you have the faith for these first principles. These ABC's of Christianity. So accept them by faith, and grow, Christian, grow!

Grow Personally.

Go on from theory to practice. From creeds to deeds. Be willing to live for Christ now, *regardless*. I don't know who said it, but it is said so well.

“Faithfulness to doctrine is not mere faithfulness to beliefs, but to the whole of life.

Obscure doctrine which delves into the past or future and makes its bed in
picayune triviality is about as vital as studying the mating instincts of the gnat.

Doctrine must have a bearing on life.” Amen!

The message of Hebrews is growth. To go on from the so called “simple gospel” to a “reason for the hope that is within you.” As a saved-sinner whom Satan tries to intimidate and neutralize by focusing attention on your many failures as a Christian, you must take a new look at Jesus. Who He really was. What He really did. What He is continuing to do. Here on earth. Now!

And, as your spiritual well runs dry from time to time, follow the practice of the Count of Monte Cristo. Return regularly to your “secret” source of spiritual treasure, the book of Hebrews. Take much, so much that you cease to live in spiritual poverty, and experience spiritual abundance!

OUTLINE

1. LOOK AT ALL JESUS WAS!

A. Greater than the Prophets (1:1-3)

(Their message was temporary and fragmentary. His message is final and complete.)

B Greater than the Angels (1:4-14)

(At best, angels are only servants, while He is Son.)

C. Greater than Moses (3:16)

(God gave the law to him, but Jesus is able to set people free from the law of sin and death.)

D. Greater than Joshua (3:7-4:13)

(He led the Israelites into an incomplete conquest. Christ not only leads us in, but on to total victory.)

E. Greater than Aaron (4:14-5:10)

(He was the high priest. Christ is the perfect priest, who made the perfect sacrifice, which having been made, never needs to be made again.)

2. LOOK AT ALL JESUS DID!

A. Gave us a better Revelation (1:1-3)

B. Gave us a better Relationship (1:4-14)

C. Gave us a better Hope (2:5-10:18)

1. What was meant to be will be! (2:5-18)

a. God's intention for man fulfilled in the man (2:5-9)

b. A trailblazer for us by Christ (2:10-18)

2. Victorious life here and now (3:16)

3. Abundant life here and now (3:7-4:13)

4. Forgiveness and freedom here and now (4:14-10:18)

- a. Through a better Covenant (8:1-6)
 - Providing better Promises (8:7-13)
- b. Through a better Tabernacle (9:1-10, 23-24)
 - Equipped with a better Mediator (9:11-12)
 - Offering a better Sacrifice (9:23-28)
 - Achieving a better Result (10:1-18)

3. LOOK AT ALL JESUS MEANS!

Because “we have” all that is declared above, “let us” avoid the ten deadly dangers of--

- A. Drift instead of Decision (2:1-4)
- B. Hardened Hearts instead of Help in Time of Need (3:7-4:16)
- C. Spiritual infantilism instead of Christian Growth (5:11-6:3)
- D. Laxity instead of Loyalty (6:4-20; 10:26-31; 12:15-17)
- E. Wavering instead of Boldness (10:19-23)
- F. Isolationism instead of Fellowship (10:24-25)
- G. Weariness instead of Endurance (10:26-39)
- H. Comfort instead of Discipline (12:1-11)
- I. Dull Indifference instead of Grateful Response (12:25-29)
- J. Expediency instead of Eternity (13:1-15)

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