

HEBREWS 3:1 – 5:10

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- **Second Hortatory Interjection**

1. Jesus, the supreme example of a faithful son (3:1-6)

Therefore, holy brothers, sharers of the heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, ²being faithful to the one who appointed him, as also Moses [was] in [all] his house. ³For this one has been considered worthy of much more glory than Moses, just as the one who built the house has much more honor than it. ⁴For every house is built by someone, but the one who built all things [is] God. ⁵And Moses, on the one hand, [was] faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of the things to be spoken. ⁶But Christ [was faithful] as a Son over his house; whose house we are if [only] we hold fast the confidence and the boast of the hope.

1.1. Given that Jesus is intimately familiar with the conflicts and tensions between faithfulness and human existence, the writer urges the readers to consider his example in that regard. Despite all the difficulties he faced, he remained faithful to the one who appointed him.

1.2. Jesus is "the apostle and high priest of our confession" in that he was sent by God to make atonement for our sin.

1.3. Though Moses, a highly exalted figure in Judaism, also was faithful in the face of testing, Jesus has been considered worthy of much more glory than Moses – all things have been subjected to him – the difference being like the proverbial difference in honor between one who builds a house and the house that is built. It is a difference on that order.

1.4. Having appealed to the proverbial truth about the builder being worthy of more honor than the house that was built, the writer adds the truism that every house is built by someone (and thus for every house there is someone who receives greater honor). Since God, as Creator of the universe, is the one who built all things, his honor is unfathomable.

1.5. Moses was faithful as a servant *in* God's house, as a member of the house of Israel, bearing witness to the fullness of God's later revelation in the Son. "For example, when Moses speaks of the 'blood of the covenant' (9:20), he foreshadows the new covenant that God would make through Christ" (Koester, 246).

1.6. Christ, on the other hand, was faithful as a Son *over* God's house, *over* the new-covenant people he founded, not *in* that house. Guthrie writes (p. 128): "Servants have an obligation to faithfulness, but sons have a special, vested interest in and authority over the house. Jesus displayed a filial kind of faithfulness as the Lord and founder of his house, the new covenant people of God."

1.7. The author and his readers, not the Jews, are the new covenant people of God, but the continuance of that privilege depends on their holding fast their boldness or confidence and their holding fast their pride in the hope they profess. In other words, they must not surrender their faith under the pressure they are facing. This is a key objective of the author for his readers.

2. The negative example of those who fell through faithlessness (3:7-19)

⁷Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear his voice ⁸do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion in accordance with the day of the testing in the wilderness, ⁹where your fathers tried [me] with a test and saw my works ¹⁰[for] forty years. Therefore, I was angry with this generation and said, 'They are always going astray in the heart, and they did not know my ways.' ¹¹As I swore in my anger, 'They will not enter my rest.'"

¹²Watch out, brothers, lest there will be in some of you an evil, unbelieving heart resulting in falling away from the living God, ¹³but encourage one another every day, so long as it is called "today," so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴For we have become sharers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of [our] confidence, firm till the end. ¹⁵As it is said, "Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." ¹⁶For who rebelled after hearing? Indeed, was it not all those who came out of Egypt through Moses? ¹⁷And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸And to whom did he swear that they would not enter into his rest if not to those who disobeyed? ¹⁹And we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

2.1. Given the need to hold fast to their confession of faith, the writer urges them to heed what the Holy Spirit is saying to them through Ps. 95:7c-11. They must not harden their hearts as did the Israelites when they rebelled against God in the wilderness. God was angry with that generation and swore that they would not enter his rest, which here is a reference to the rest from their enemies that God had promised he would give them in Canaan (Deut. 12:10; see also, Ex. 33:14; Deut 25:19; Josh. 1:13, 15, 21:44; 22:4, 23:1). This promise of rest in Canaan ultimately is fulfilled in God's heavenly kingdom (12:22-24).

2.2. He tells them to "watch out" lest some of them come to have an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from God, and he admonishes them to encourage one another daily so that none of them may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

2.2.1. Sin has a deceptive attractiveness that makes one resistant to the word of God. The more it lures, the less one is willing to hear what God wants. Here the sin of compromise and unfaithfulness held the promise of making life easier. In an active fellowship, the clouded vision that sin induces is challenged, which helps one stay the course.

2.2.2. He says they are to encourage one another "as long as it is called 'today'" because the Psalm says "*Today* if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts." There will be a time when the opportunity for a right relationship with God will have passed, a time marked by the Lord's return, and at that time there will no longer be a need for encouragement because the race will have been run.

2.3. It is crucial that they not become resistant to God's word through the hardening induced by sin because they (and we) must remain faithful till the end. The consequence of the Israelites' failure to remain faithful, the consequence of their refusal to continue trusting in God and his promises, was that they did not enter the Promise Land. The same will happen to his readers if they abandon their confession.

3. Transition: from the problem of the wanderers to the promise of rest "today" (4:1-2)

Therefore, let us fear, lest, while a promise to enter into his rest is remaining, any of you should be found to have fallen short. ²For indeed we have had the gospel preached [to us], just as they also; but the word of preaching did not benefit those people because they were not united by faith with those who listened.

3.1. Given the example of the fallen Israelites, they need to fear God, to fear the consequences of rejecting his will, lest a lack of such fear lead some of them to fall short of entering into God's promised rest, the ultimate manifestation of which is eternal glory with him. Guthrie writes (p. 152), "Therefore, the 'rest' is something a believer enters (and thus experiences) now, but this rest remains a promised destination for the future." It is another example of the fact "Christian realities have been inaugurated but have yet to be consummated" (p. 152).

3.2. As with the Israelites, the mere fact the gospel, the good news of deliverance into rest, was preached to them will not benefit them unless they are among those who are surrendered to that gospel, who are trusting in the divine revelation.

4. The promise of rest for those who are faithful (4:3-11)

³For we, the ones who have believed, enter into [the] rest, just as he said, "As I swore in my anger, they shall not enter into my rest," although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴For somewhere he has said about the seventh [day] the following: "And God rested on the seventh [day] from all his works." ⁵And again in this place [it says], "They shall not enter into my rest." ⁶Therefore, since it remains for some to enter into it, and those who formerly had the gospel preached [to them] did not enter because of disobedience, ⁷again he sets a certain day -- today -- saying by David, after so much time, as it has already been said, "Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." ⁸For if Joshua gave them rest, he would not have spoken after these things about another day. ⁹So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. ¹⁰For the one who entered into his rest has himself also rested from his works, just as God [rested] from his own [works]. ¹¹Therefore let us be diligent to enter into that rest, lest someone may fall by [following] the same example of disobedience.

4.1. Those who have believed the gospel of Christ enter into God's rest, with all that that entails for the future. The fact there is an ongoing opportunity to enter that rest is evident from the fact God, long after he rested on the seventh day of creation, denied some of the Israelites the privilege of entering his rest because of their disobedience. They *could have* entered his rest but for their faithlessness, and indeed some did enter it.

4.1.1. Note that God "rested" on the seventh day in the sense he abstained or ceased from the work of creation that he completed on day six. Allen Ross writes in *Creation & Blessing* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 113-114, "The word actually means 'cease,' more than 'rest' as understood today. It is not a word that refers to remedying exhaustion after a tiring week of work. Rather, it describes the enjoyment of accomplishment, the celebration of completion."

4.1.2. Note also that what probably is blessed and sanctified in Gen. 2:2-3 is not simply the seventh day as a day of the week but the seventh day as a representation of God's rest, the goal toward which creation moves. It is a sign pointing to the ultimate rest of the people of God. As Andrew Lincoln comments in "From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective," in D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) 348-349:

The climax of God's creative activity is not the creation of male and female so much as his own triumphant rest. It is true that His blessing and hallowing of the seventh day are not meant to be considered simply in a vacuum but have some relation to the created world. What is crucial, however, is the nature of that relation. The seventh day is to be seen as representing the completion of the whole creation, and therefore in its blessing the whole creation is blessed. . . . Creation, therefore, is blessed

with special reference to its goal, God's rest, which is set apart in some sense for all His creation including man and woman; but the precise sense awaits further unfolding. . . .

The framework of Genesis 1 and 2 certainly indicates that there is a divine ordering of history, so that, as history moves toward its consummation, it moves toward the goal of God's rest.

4.2. That the opportunity to enter God's rest continued beyond the conquest of Canaan is evident from the fact David, long after the conquest, wrote "*Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts,*" the implication being that they could enter God's rest by not following the Israelites' example of disobedience. Thus the conclusion in v. 9: So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. It is not something in the past, a promise that has been exhausted. It is something that remains for them and for us.

4.3. The Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God refers ultimately to life in the eternal state. We will at that time rest from our works in that the struggle of existence in this fallen, sin-corrupt world will have ceased. Life in that state will further parallel Sabbath observances in that it will be characterized by the praising of God.

4.4. Given the blessedness of that rest, the writer urges his readers to be diligent, to exert serious effort, that none of them miss the rest by following the Israelites' example of faithlessness.

5. SECOND WARNING: Consider the power of God's word (4:12-13)

¹²For the word of God [is] living and active and sharper than every double-edged sword and penetrating as far as [the] division of soul and spirit, both of joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³And there is not a creature hidden before him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom our account [is given].

5.1. They must be diligent in maintaining their faithfulness because the word of God shows God's awareness of the inner recesses and darkest corners of the human heart.

5.2. Everything is laid bare before the eyes of him before whom we must give account. Since faithlessness and lack of trust in God's promises cannot be hidden, they must exercise diligence so as not to drift into that state.

III. The Position of the Son, Our High Priest, in Relation to the Earthly Sacrificial System (4:14-10:25)

A. Overlap: We have a sinless high priest who has gone into heaven (4:14-16)

¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold firmly the confession.

¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but [one] who, having been tempted in every way (in likeness [to us]), [was] without sin. ¹⁶Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, that we may receive mercy and may find grace for timely help.

Guthrie labels these verses an overlapping transition because they serve as a conclusion to the exhortation running from 3:1 – 4:13 and as an opening for the great central exposition on the high priesthood of Christ in 4:14 – 10:25.

1. Hold firmly to the faith (4:14-15)

a. Because Christians have a *great* high priest who, in his ascension, passed through the impermanent physical heavens and into "heaven itself" (9:24), meaning the spiritual realm of God's immediate or special presence, we must hold firmly to our confession of faith. If we do not, we will not have the benefit of his work.

(1) David deSilva writes in the *Dictionary of the Later New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997) 440:

The author of Hebrews uses the term *heaven* to refer to two different realities in his cosmos. There are the "heavens" that are part of the changing, temporary creation. . . .

Hebrews also speaks of "heaven itself" (Heb 9:24), the place that Jesus entered after he "passed through the heavens" (Heb 4:14) and from which vantage point he stands "exalted above the heavens" (Heb 7:26). This is the eternal and abiding realm, beyond the material and visible creation, where Jesus serves as high priest in the "greater and perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation" (Heb 9:11). The impermanent heavens are what Jesus must pass through in order to get to the true and real tabernacle (Hooke).

(2) Koester notes (p. 282), "Jesus passes through the heavens like a priest moving through the forecourt of a sanctuary and into the holy of holies (6:19-20; 9:11; 10:19-20)."

b. We must hold to that confession for the additional reason that Jesus is a great high priest who, because of his experience of temptation, has compassion toward us in our state of weakness regarding sin. Through his identification with us he is supremely motivated in his ministry on our behalf.

c. Though Jesus was tempted, the writer states expressly that he was without sin. Since Jesus is God incarnate, there is a question about how his being tempted fits with Jas. 1:13, which says that God cannot be tempted. The answer seems to lie in the mystery of the incarnation, the fact that Jesus is both God and man. He has two natures that though separate are united in one person. The temptation involved his human nature.

2. Draw near to God (4:16)

a. Given the great high priest that Jesus is, the author urges his readers, and thus all Christians, to approach in their prayers God's throne of grace with confidence, with a bold frankness. Koester writes (p. 284): "Hebrews locates the throne of God in heaven (8:1; cf. Isa 6:1; 66:1). The idea is not that by mystical experience we should ascend into heaven, but that by prayer we should come before God, who is in heaven."

b. In coming to God's throne in Jesus' name, they will receive mercy and God's gracious provision of timely help. Guthrie writes (p. 176), "The author assures them that if they remain faithful to their confession and approach God through Jesus' high-priestly work, God will come through with help in a timely fashion." What an encouragement to all who are facing difficulties! Of course, the timing and nature of that help are matters of God's wisdom not ours.

B. The appointment of the Son as a superior high priest (5:1-10; 7:1-28)

1. Introduction: The son taken from among humans and appointed according to the order of Melchizedek (5:1-10)

For every high priest chosen from men is put, on behalf of men, in charge of the things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. ²He is able to deal gently with the ones who are ignorant and misled, since he also is subject to weakness, ³and because of it, he is obligated to offer [sacrifices] for sins for himself, just as for the people. ⁴And no one takes the honor for himself but [receives it] through being called by God, just as Aaron also was.

⁵So also the Christ did not glorify himself to become a high priest. Rather, the one [glorified him] who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you," ⁶since he also says in another [place], "You [are] a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." ⁷In the days of his flesh, [Jesus] offered with a loud cry and tears both prayers and pleas to the one able to save him from death, and [he] was heard because of [his] piety. ⁸Though being a son, he learned obedience from [the things] which he suffered, ⁹and having been made perfect, he became [the] source of eternal salvation for all the ones

who obey him,¹⁰ having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

a. Universal principles of high priesthood (5:1-4)

(1) High priests are chosen by God from among human beings; a human is chosen to represent humans in dealing with their sins before God. Thus, the Son became a human being.

(2) High priests serve their fellow human beings by offering gifts and sacrifices to God on their behalf. Though high priests shared in general responsibilities performed by all priests, they alone offered sacrifice for the sins of all the people on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur; Leviticus 16). Purification from sins (1:3) is the essence of the priestly role.

(3) The high priest is able to deal gently with those who go astray through ignorance, meaning those whose sin is not "willful" or "high handed" in the sense of Num. 15:30-31, because he himself was subject to the same kind of weakness and consequently was required to offer sacrifices for his own sins.

(a) No provision was made in the old covenant for sins committed with a "high hand," but it is not altogether clear what kinds of sins that encompasses. As Tremper Longman points out in his book *Immanuel in Our Place* (p. 95-96), sacrifices *were* available for some sins that it seems could only be committed consciously or knowingly, so sinning "high handedly" must involve something more than that.

(b) Longman concludes (p. 96):

The great modern Jewish commentator Jacob Milgrom brings his extensive knowledge of rabbinic discussions to this problem. On the basis of rabbinic discussions of Leviticus 5:20-26 and Numbers 5:6-8, he persuasively argues that "repentance of the sinner, through his remorse and confession, reduces his intentional sin to inadvertence, thereby rendering it eligible for sacrificial expiation." Repentance is the key to help us understand the difference between an inadvertent sin and high-handed sin.

(c) I think this understanding of "high-handed sin" fits well with the writer's purpose. Koester states (p. 286): "Speaking of the high priest's moderation toward the 'ignorant and erring' allows the author to stress the mercy available to penitent sinners, while warning of the rigorous judgment to be passed upon apostates (Heb. 3:16-19; 6:4-8; 10:26-31)."

(d) The reason the high priest could deal gently or patiently with such sinners was that he himself was subject to (or clothed with) the same

kind of moral weakness that resulted in his own sin. In that regard, of course, the old-covenant high priest differed from the Lord Jesus. As Bruce says (p. 92):

As our author points out later in the epistle (Ch. 7:27), this is one of the features which distinguish the Christians' high priest from those of the Aaronic succession: Jesus, being "holy, guileless, undefiled", had no need to offer a preliminary sacrifice for Himself. It is in enduring the common weaknesses and temptations of man's lot, not by yielding to them, that He has established His power not only to sympathize with His people but to bring them help, deliverance and victory.

(4) No one becomes a legitimate high priest by his own efforts. Rather, God grants to a person the honor of being a high priest by appointing him to that office.

b. The appointment of Christ as high priest (5:5-6)

(1) As with other high priests, Jesus did not put himself in that office. Rather, God the Father, the one who declared him to be his Son, gave Jesus the honor of the high priesthood. We know that because at another place in Scripture (Ps. 110:4) God declared him to be a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek. So Jesus is both the exalted and incarnate Son and a new and unique high priest.

(a) The Christ-Melchizedek parallel is discussed more fully in chapter 7. Melchizedek is the enigmatic figure who is mentioned in Gen. 14:18-20 and Ps. 110:4.

(b) Melchizedek was both a king and a priest, one who was greater than Abraham and whose priesthood was, at least typologically, everlasting.

(2) The writer does not say when Jesus was appointed high priest. But given that other passages include Christ's death in his priestly action (9:14, 26; 10:10), it seems the appointment was, at least in some sense, before his death. Hebrews 5:10 can be read consistently with this view. At the very least, I think the appointment involved a complex of events that began before his death (perhaps from his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane through his exaltation) and which are viewed as a single event.

c. The path to appointment (5:7-10)

(1) In the days of Jesus' fleshly mortality, during his earthly ministry, Jesus suffered the agony of facing death for the sins of mankind, and in that agony he cried out to God, the one who could save him from death.

(a) This seems to be a reference to the Lord's fervent prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane, though the Gospels do not refer to a loud cry and tears. Jesus asked the Father to remove from him the cup of suffering that was the cross, but he did so in submission to the Father's will.

(b) In other words, he was asking the Father, who is the God of the impossible, to spare him from being crucified, but in saying "not my will but yours be done" he also was praying for strength to endure the cross in the event it could not be avoided. In subjugating his desire to the Father's will, Jesus was a paragon of piety or reverent submission, and thus the Father answered his prayer to accomplish the Father's will by sending an angel to strengthen him, as we read in Lk. 22:43. That example has great punch for those being pressured to abandon the faith.

(2) Though he is God's Son, that relationship did not, as with ancient princes, exempt him from walking a path of obedience through suffering. Rather, he learned obedience and was made perfect by enduring the cross.

(a) When the writer says Jesus "learned obedience" and was "made perfect" he is not implying that Jesus previously was disobedient or flawed in some way. He means he experienced a new stage of obedience and completed the mission to which he was called by God.

(b) Hagner writes (p. 81-82):

As a son, i.e., even as God's Son, Jesus was not exempt from suffering. His obedience was not accomplished in ideal circumstances, but was learned "in the school of suffering" (as NEB appropriately translates). In this sense, Jesus serves as a model for the readers. This achievement of faithfulness to the will of God in adverse circumstances is a kind of learning insofar as it means arriving at a new stage of experience. The final stage of that experience is being made perfect, that is, when he accomplishes the greatest obedience at the cost of the greatest suffering, his death (cf. 2:10).

(3) Through his crucifixion Jesus became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, that being the sacrifice he offers on their behalf as one who was designated by God a high priest on the order of Melchizedek.

(a) Note that salvation comes to those who obey him. Biblical faith includes submitting to the Lord's will. It is not merely intellectual assent, merely believing something is true.

(b) This is especially relevant to those who are considering leaving Christ, ceasing to obey him. Guthrie writes (p. 191):

Just as Jesus "learned obedience" in his earthly suffering, he calls people to respond in obedience to his will. Just as Jesus persevered, reverently bending his will to that of the Father in spite of extreme suffering, so Christians are called to total abandonment to the divine will; this call does not change with the onslaught of persecution.