

Hebrews 5:11-6:12

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[0 : 00] God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.

For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then fall away, since they are crucifying once again, the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to be cursed, and its end is to be burned. Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things, things that belong to salvation. For God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love that you showed for his stake in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness, to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated.

Good morning, and God bless you. Let's pray. Father, thank you for this morning, this day, this gathering, this people, this text. Every day I will bless you. For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised. Lord, and we have indeed tasted and seen that you are good. We love you. Be pleased with our offering to you, and this your people this morning. It's our prayer in Christ's name. Amen. Dave mentioned graduation. In a matter of months, the Wyandotte High School class of 66, of which I was a part, will celebrate their, can you believe it, 50th year class reunion. Huh? Amen. Amen. 50 years out of high school. I was a member of that class, and it was in the fall of my senior year, that I took the first trip outside of a 50-mile radius from my home. For roughly 16, 17 years, my space, my roaming space, if you will, was Kansas City, Kansas, Kansas City, Missouri. My grandmother lived within 50 miles to peak at Kansas. Again, that was my space. But in my senior year, I roamed outside that space, went to Memphis, Tennessee. The Cajun, the National Convocation of the Churches of God in Christ. And one of the highlights of the trip there was to witness the burial crypt of Bishop Charles Harrison Mason, who was the founder of the Churches of God in Christ. It was in the confines of what was then the headquarters of the Churches of God in Christ known as Mason Temple.

[4 : 33] And if you know anything about Martin Luther King, it was there that he gave his last speech, I've been to the mountaintop. Well, for me, being at Mason Temple was like being on a mountaintop there, given its celebrated history. But etched on Bishop Mason's marble tomb, in the King James language, is the verse that we find in Hebrews 6 and 10.

For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love that you have showed to his name, in that you have ministered to the saints. I began on at that time to put that in my memory bank. Because here was a man who had imitated, he was an imitator of biblical faith. That kind of person had become my model. It wasn't until sometime later that I began to look at that verse within its context, within its setting, and I became aware that the verses of commendation at the end of the text is not how the passage actually begins. As a matter of fact, take a look, he's not commending them in chapter 5 and verse 11. And this we have, about this we have much to say, and it's hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing. That is not a commendation, if you will. There were challenge, he begins, not with a commendation, but he begins with a challenge because of their

immaturity. It begins with a challenge because they had room to grow. He began with the challenge because, as the text says, they were dull of hearing. They had become dull of hearing.

The word that is translated dull here in the ESV, it actually means sluggish, or lazy, or even negligent. And Peterson notes in the message that they had picked up on the habit of not listening. Not hearing. Not hearing. And perhaps even to take it a bit further, not hearing, as we've learned in Hebrews that they were to be hearing with faith. Their lack of spiritual perception had made it difficult for them to grasp the glorious truths about Christ that had been laid before them. And oftentimes, and we as preachers, we take great responsibility in trying to make the text clear. We labor in the text. Believe me. But sometimes it's not a problem necessarily of speaking. It becomes a problem of speaking. It becomes a problem of hearing. I believe that if we're really hearing well, hearing in faith, sometimes the Lord can take a mediocre message. And for the person who's really listening and hearing in faith, can do great and wonderful things. The hearts of those who are really, they had become dull of hearing. Then if you look in verse 12, they were students when they really should have been teachers. Did you notice that? For though by the time that you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again. And here it is, the basic principles of the oracles of God or

[8 : 53] God's word. And here's again, not so flattering word. You have need of milk, not solid food, huh? Their diet was that of babes. Rather than one of adults. And I really, really love what he goes on down to say.

He says, solid food is for the mature. And guess what he's going to give them as he begins to talk about Melchizedek. Matter of fact, he's setting them up for that. It's sort of like he's sort of clearing the way.

He has some solid food to give them. But in order for them to receive the solid food that he has for them, he has to chide them a little. He challenges them about their maturity. And hopefully by the time he gets to begin talking about the high priesthood of Christ being in the order of Melchizedek, he's sort of cleared the way for them to be able to hear well.

The words of verses 11 through 14 actually act as or serve as an indictment on their spiritual immaturity. There were ways, friends, in which they were stuck in the shadows of the Old Testament. They were having problems moving beyond the shadows into the substance that in fact was Christ himself. And so he challenges them in order that they might see the beauty of who he is. Again, the temptation and the pressure to go back a little bit. But he's urging them forward. Sort of encourage them really to see what is actually before them.

[10 : 43] Their inability or unwillingness to come to grips with the elementary things regarding the Christian faith caused their growth to be stunted.

where they actually were not moving forward dull of hearing in the way that they should have.

Theirs was, if you will, there was a spiritual learning disability described as dull of hearing.

And we know from our study of this book, this marvelous book, that the problem of hearing is not ultimately a problem of the ears.

It's a problem of the heart that he was targeting. Constant call of the book. We've heard it and we are hearing again and again to listen and to listen to his voice.

Today, if you will hear his voice. What? Harden not your heart. The condition exhortation in chapter 5 verses 11 through 14.

[11 : 54] Now comes the exhortation in verses 1 through 3. What's the exhortation? It's an exhortation that was good for them and it likewise is a good exhortation for us.

Two words. Grow up. Huh? Grow up. That's, look what he says. Therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on.

Here it is. Let's go to maturity. I've got some things. I've got some meat to share with you. I've got some things that will make you more mature if you listen to them, if you really hear them in faith.

Huh? Go on to maturity, not laying the foundation of repentance from dead works, the faith toward God and of instructions about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

Huh? Six things. He highlights and these things are actually rooted in Old Testament truth. Such things that go from the initial repentance all the way to eternal judgment.

[13 : 04] I mean, isn't that sort of like systematic theology of sorts? These grand terms, these grand themes? Repentance and faith turning from sin and the world and Satan unto God, the two of them together.

Conversion, two sides, one coin, instructions about baptisms, washings of various kinds that picture the reality of spiritual cleansing and even of covenant membership in the family of God.

Laying on of hands, acts of initiation and community welcome. Huh? Those are the things. Basic kinds of things. Good foundational kinds of things, but you need to really grow up.

You need to go beyond them. The resurrection of the dead and future eternal judgment. Huh? Think about Paul. We owned, in our staff retreat recently, we studied 1 Thessalonians.

Thessalonians. Paul was there just a brief time, roughly three weeks at best, and he gives them great, great truth, truth enough that allowed them to turn from idols unto the living God and to wait for his son from heaven when he returns.

[14:23] Huh? Doctrine in a nutshell. Paul gave them in roughly three weeks time. Huh?

Christianity 101 is what was in view.

They're good and right and proper for those in their early spiritual development stages and they're good for us to stay, but we've got to go beyond that. Milk is good, but you can't have a diet of milk alone.

We need meat. He said, you want meat? I'm telling you what this is. I'm telling you where we're headed. He's giving them a sneak preview. Meat is coming that will help you in your maturity.

Huh? This will happen and we can't go to maturity on our own. Chapter 6, verse 3. God allows it.

Can't do it on yourself. Dependence on God. But is there not a fitting word for us here today as we think about the word of old to the audience?

Huh? Two simple words as I mentioned, grow up. It's a call, friends, to maturity. You and I, we are people in process.

[15:39] And as people in process, we should be making, constantly making, spiritual progress.

Huh? And in order to make spiritual progress, friends, you and I cannot be dull of hearing.

Huh? We must listen with faith. We must, we must hear and see in a crystal-centric kind of way.

Can't be dull and make spiritual progress.

Huh? Conscious effort. Can't be spiritually lazy. Let's grow up. And in order to grow up, we've got to listen up.

First thing, pastoral challenge in the first verses. The pastoral challenge is to grow up, but then there's a pastoral warning in chapter 6, verses 4 through 8.

And though we have seen this challenge as it relates to immaturity, the warning is about apostasy that we see in chapter 6, verses 4 through 8.

[16:55] And here's, here's the progression, friends, and catch this. Persistence in spiritual maturity can be very, very spiritually dangerous.

Oh, we feel, we may think that, so what, that I've got a little bit of the spiritual blast. So what, that I'm not particularly keen on listening.

Oh, friends, that is so dangerous. So, so dangerous. And thus, he issues a warning that needed to be heard then.

And friends, it's a warning that must be heard today. Persistence in spiritual immaturity is spiritually dangerous.

The verses before us are probably some of the most challenging as far as biblical interpretation goes.

[17:59] Over the years, particularly because of the, of the four words that begin verse four.

Check it out. For it is impossible. Huh? The thought after going through verse five, it continues in verse six with the sense that it's impossible to restore to repentance those who have fallen away.

Huh? But before we try to land more or less, if you will, let's talk about the experience first.

Okay? You see, the experience begins in verse four. It's impossible if in the case of those who have been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God, and the powers of the world to come.

Huh? Five things, friends, come into view, come into focus in these verses. And in essence, what you have there is a God has smiled on me kind of experiences.

[19:27] That's what you have there. The experiences of those he's making reference to. First of all, there's the experience of enlightenment. Is this not something that happens for us in a Christian sense?

For certain, Paul speaks of having the eyes of our hearts enlightened. And Jesus declared himself to be the light of the world, and the one who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have

the light of life.

The church is a group of enlightened people, those who have come out of darkness into his marvelous light. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound.

Saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind. But now I see, huh?

Enlightenment, it's the experience of the child of God.

What about the experience of tasting, or again, experiences in view, of heaven's bounty? Christians are those who have received, if you will, otherworldly things.

[20 : 40] Just like the children of God, children of Israel in the wilderness receive what they call angel food, and that was in a physical and nourishing kind of sense.

Even so, God has given us from heaven his blessing and his bounty. we experience things from heaven, the heavenly gift, and various kinds of ways.

Certainly, Jesus is the gift of God. The Spirit is the gift from God. But it's a definite article there. The heavenly gift, likely a reference to the Spirit of God himself, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

He's spoken of as the gift, the gift of the Holy Spirit. You're tracking with me this morning, experiencing these things, tasting the heavenly gift, and shared in the Spirit, shared in the Holy Spirit.

As God's people, we all partake of that one Spirit, 1 Corinthians chapter 12. By one Spirit, are we all baptized into one body?

[22 : 00] His gifts, his fellowship, such as the portion of all of God's people, not simply a select few of them. As a matter of fact, Paul put it well in Romans chapter 8, didn't he?

If any man that doesn't have the Spirit of God, he what? Doesn't belong to him. Then the experience of partaking of spiritual food, probably a reference to God's Word.

Our experience as Christians includes being nourished by God's Word. Tasting of the powers of the world to come. Peter speaks about that.

Having not seen, you love, you're rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory. The writer is recounting the experience of a blessed people.

Those who had experienced God in a tangible life-giving and life-sustaining ways. Heaven had come near to them.

[23 : 03] And heaven had marked them. And the privileged people they were. So I ask you this morning, have any of the marks of heaven on your soul?

And in your life, have you tasted and seen that the Lord is good? You remember when the Lord rescued you? Huh?

Picked you up? Set your feet on the right way? Huh? Some of you were young. Some of us, like myself, were teenagers.

Others of you have come to Christ later in life. But your life is marked. Huh? I think of various ways over the years.

Oh, my 67 years came to Christ as a 15 year old, 52 years in the faith. God has smiled on me.

[24 : 11] you're looking at a man that's imperfect, but I bear heaven's marks, praise God.

And if you belong to Christ, you do too. It's not something that's simply reserved for one or reserved for some. The situation that is described in these verses before us rightly calls us to perfectly ponder what's in these verses that speak about an impossibility of the restoration of people who had experienced wonderful things from God that speak of the blessedness from the hand and heart of God.

So who are they? Well, there are four views that have sort of risen to the top. some would say they're believers.

Believers who are in danger of losing their salvation. You understand scripture that contradicts what we see elsewhere in scripture as it relates the security of the believer.

Nothing shall separate that those that God has called and set his love upon in eternity past. He will bring them to future glory in the day and age to come.

[25 : 51] Some feel that these were not true believers but professing believers who really haven't embraced faith though they've been exposed to things Christian.

Well it's hard to see these things as an experience of someone who really hasn't. I mean this is heavy stuff. Again, I mean beams of heaven have smiled on these folks and they've got heaven's marks on them.

Some see it as describing something that can't happen. They speak of it in somewhat of a hypothetical kind of case. Like if they fall away, which they can't, that seems to say something strong.

Charles Harrison Mason, African American founder of the Church of God in Christ. There's another man I want to mention this morning. J.

Dwight Pentecost. Passed away a few years ago, almost 100 years old. I was in Dallas Seminary for five years and there are very few chapel services that I remember.

[27 : 09] But I remember J. Dwight Pentecost because he spoke on this text. And the view that he put forth that day sort of settled over the years and confirmed even as I prepared for this message today.

what he would say and what I would concur as far as I can see, these are persistently rebellious believers.

True, they may have lapsed into babyhood, but a view that has much to commend it will have us look at the immediate context, what's being said here in our text, but in the broader context of the book, particularly his expositions, the writer of the Hebrews expositions of the Old Testament, particularly back in chapters 3 and 4.

He's recounting their experience and how they rebelled all the way from out of Egypt on up to Kadesh! redeem them!

They are out of Egypt, out from Egypt, redeemed if you will. That seems to be the idea of what is in the writer's mind.

[28 : 55] The blessedness has been described, and so we see what's in verse 6, and then have fallen away to restore them again to repentance as they are crucifying again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

If you recall, Numbers chapter 14, again, they tried to go, and they tried to repent and make their way onto the land, but God said, mm-mm, you're not going.

And even some of those who tried to go, they lost their lives. What you have here is these were people whose faith response, and listen to this, did not measure up or match their experience. Huh? God had done wonderful things for them, but their faith response did not match what God had done for them. It fell short of that.

It's a dangerous place to be in when our faith response is inconsistent with the kindness of God to us. Where the way our faith in God, our moving forward, our growth and our maturity, and moving forward in Kim, does not measure up to the kindnesses of God that he's bestowed upon us.

[30 : 18] And while there is clearly a warning here that's explicit, implicitly, this seems to be a call to you and me to spiritual stewardship. That is, living in a way that reflects that God, in fact, has smiled on you.

Huh? Does your living reflect a spiritual dullness? spiritual laziness in your life? Oh, be warned if it does.

Huh? What about restoration to repentance? What seems to be in view and consistent with the idea that those in view here are in spiritual rebellion is that they're forfeiting spiritual blessing and privilege just like it had ceased!

For the wilderness generation, the wilderness became their place of incarceration, no reversal, shut up, shut up, and relegated, if you will, to wilderness wandering, and does that describe you here today?

Wandering, no peace of God in your soul, not enjoying the blessing of God that you could, huh? They did not cease from being God's people, but they did forfeit God's blessing, experiencing the consequences of unbelief, huh?

[31 : 43] To go back to the old system, fall back, to apostatize, was to say that the work of Christ was of no avail, and such was the statement of those who shamefully crucified the Son of God.

You remember the religious leaders? Huh? He's a criminal, and those who go back, they chime in in a way, as far as diminishing the value of Christ, huh?

And to do so would retreat once again into the shadows, aside with those who saw no value in Jesus. Huh?

did you notice in verses 7 and 8, he gives a couple of illustrations or pictures there? The land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God.

Again, receptivity, the idea of hearing and the blessing that comes from it, two images that illustrates what he said, productive land or barren land, one that's received the rain, huh?
[33 : 01] And produced a beneficial crop akin to the good soil, those who hear and produce a crop, some 30, some 60, some 100 fold. On the other hand, you've got what's described in verse 8.

Thorns and thistles echoes back Genesis chapter 3, land that is cursed, a sign of judgment if you will. Watch out, was the pastoral word.

Grow up, watch out, and then there is press on. He commends them for their fidelity. He challenges them because their maturity. He warns them about apostasy, but here he commends them for their fidelity. Look, though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, I've given you a warning here.

Look at our history, so to speak, and see what's going on. But now, he said, though I speak this way, yet in your case, beloved, you're not there yet, I'm warning you, well, you could go.

[34 : 23] You don't listen, but you're not there yet, and praise God, we feel better things about you. I love this because it's somewhat like Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

You know how the Lord rose out there? He gives both condemnation and commendation. Similarly here, speaking to the church then, speaking to the Hebrew believers, and speaking to you and me. there are things in which he challenges us, he warns us, but then on the other hand, he commends us and encourages us. Speaking of we feel sure better things, things that belong to salvation, not to destruction, not to judgment, for God is not unjust.

Here's the Bishop Mason verse, to overlook your work and the love that you've shown for his name and there it is, you're serving the saints, you're in, you're in with them.

As a matter of fact, he's going to speak later about how you really put yourself in jeopardy in order to be on the ground, to be in the same league with the people of God.

[35 : 34] They're still in the game. Just like you and my friends, there's room for us to grow, but we must be sharing our lives in healthy ways.

verse 11 provides more encouragement in the line with what we've already seen earlier in the book. Press on and hope, look at it, and we desire each of you to show the same earnestness, to have full assurance of hope until the end.

Then he repeats a word, a form of the word. He says, do not be sluggish. That's the way he began. in chapter 5, verse 11, same word, but rather imitators of those who of faith and patience inherit the promises, things promised by God.

He's going to roll out that in a big time kind of way. So what's the message of this text on today?

Here it is. What he's saying is this, there's danger, folks.

and spiritual sluggishness. He begins with that, in a sense, he ends with that, and that's the message. Basics are good.

[36 : 51] Embrace them. Hold on to the sinless foundation, but you've got to go on to maturity, and he's going to give them this message that he really wants them to embrace. Embrace he's clearing the way for that. Message about Christ, and his glory, and his beauty, and his priesthood, and how he's so glorious in that.

Don't go back into the shadows, but press on, press on to maturity. There's danger in spiritual sluggishness. Spiritual sluggish people lose out on the Lord's blessing and subject themselves to the Lord's discipline.

That's the warning. blessing. That's what we see here. They lose out on his blessing and subject themselves to his discipline. Therefore, be alert and learn and grow and imitate people of faith, not those who refuse to trust God, and lose out on God's best.

One of the ordinary means by which God strengthens his people, of course, the preaching of the word, but also the Lord's table. We're going to eat a meal out, and the table is going to be open to whoever comes.

Thank you for those who prepared and brought things. but the table that we have here today is one that has been set and prepared and filled, if you will, through the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

[38 : 40] In the Old Testament, there were shadows of his coming, and here he is, he's fulfilled it through his death, burial, and resurrection. The bread and the wine is what was in shadow form in the Old Testament and various places.

Exodus chapter 12, particularly, perfected in Jesus, who, according to chapter 1 and verse 3, has made purification for our sins.

And according to chapter 2 verse 9, but we see him who was 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 every man.

And verse 14, since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partake of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. The table that we're going to enjoy after the service is for all. The table that we come to now is for all who are in the family of God, who have placed their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[40 : 13] The criterion is not perfection, none of us would take it. But on the other hand, this is a point where you and I can examine ourselves.

And can I encourage you on today to examine yourself? I examine myself in light of the text that has been presented before you today.

If you're spiritually sluggish, it's a time to repent. If you are, if your growth and progress and the faith is stalled, talk to the Lord about it.

Even as you come and are strengthened through the table on today. Ordinary means, God's word, his table for the strengthening and the nourishment of his people.

1 Corinthians chapter 11 speaks of this ceremony that we are about to observe.

[41 : 23] This is how Paul put it. I received from the Lord who I also delivered to you that the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread and broke it.

Huh? And when he had given thanks he broke it and said, this is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way also he took the cup after supper saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

The one who stepped out of the shadows of the Old Testament and the clear view open display is death is burial and resurrection for you.

And if you are part of the family of God, welcome to the table. If you're not, we're going to be through in a matter of minutes observe and think about what the people of God are doing.

[42 : 31] Through this we acknowledge our fellowship our union with him and our coming for strength. Let me pray and then Dave and I are going to serve you today. Father, thank you for this marvelous text and more than that your marvelous work for us through the person and work of Jesus.

I pray that we would be strengthened. I pray, oh God, that you would cleanse us from spiritual lethargy and laziness and sluggishness and that you would be glorified in us and strengthen us even through this meal today.

In Christ's name, amen. Welcome to the table.