

There is No Turning Back as a Christian

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] I thought it wise to preach on something different on Mount Me and Sunday than the Epistles of the Hebrews, but I find the Epistles of the Hebrews quite inescapable, and so I bring you back to the Epistles of the Hebrews, chapter 6, on page 205, and you'll need to follow it.

One of the most difficult passages in the New Testament, but always where you find great difficulties in Scripture, you can find great blessings as well.

So I want today to feature the blessings that come out of Hebrews, chapter 6, and to do a kind of quick guided tour of the chapter to be an encouragement to you in that which I take to be the basic message of Hebrews and of this chapter particularly.

One of the chief characteristics of Christian faith is that having started, you keep going. You don't stop.

You don't get waylaid. You keep going. That it's not just a matter that you have your orthodoxy firmly in mind, but that your faith keeps you going.

[1 : 30] When Moses crossed the Red Sea with the children of Israel, there was no turning back. When Abraham left his home in Ur of the Chaldees, there was no turning back.

When Jesus describes the kingdom and says, you put your hand to the plow and there's no turning back. And Jesus himself, when he came to Jerusalem and for the awful week that would end with his crucifixion, he was very much aware and set for us an example that for him there was no turning back in his obedience to the Father.

Saints in Hebrews 11, when we come to that chapter, it's just the story of how there was for each of them, whether it was Moses or Jephthah or any of them, there was no turning back.

And the chief characteristic of your life as a Christian is the awareness that for you there is no turning back.

If you think there's any way you can turn back, you're mistaken. You can. The only possibility, I suppose, that if you do turn back, it probably indicates you never started.

[3 : 08] That's part of the solemnity of Hebrews chapter 6. So, here it is. And it gives you this advice, and I have to pass it on to you rapidly.

The first thing is about you is that you can't go on asking questions. Leave the elementary doctrines of Christ.

Go on to maturity. And he describes what the elementary doctrines of Christ are. I think that that may have been the focus of their debate.

I think a lot of us feel that we can live the whole of our life in the contemplation of the imponderable questions. Why does God allow suffering?

Does God exist? Are not all religions true? How could there be a good God when this happens? And that we nurture our own spiritual life by asking eternally the questions which can never be answered.

[4 : 12] And so excuse ourselves from getting on with our lives. You can't go on asking the questions over and over again.

You've got to keep going. And that's the nature of life. You can't spend your life asking those questions or using those questions to justify not going anywhere spiritually.

The second thing is that if you have been enlightened, if you have tasted the heavenly gift, if you have been a partaker of the Holy Spirit, if you have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come, and that's a magnificent catalog of what Christian faith is.

Christian faith is enlightenment, the heavenly gift, partaking in the Holy Spirit, knowing the goodness of the Word of God, and tasting the powers of the age to come.

People get very excited when that happens to come. They keep asking, why didn't somebody tell me this before? The significance of it is that having come to this place, you don't turn back.

[5 : 42] You don't crucify Christ afresh and say, I'd like to look at this whole matter again in a different way. You keep on going.

In verse 9, he says to them, your record may not be that great as a Christian. Your record of accomplishments may not be that significant.

But God is not, verse 10, not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love which you showed for his sake, serving the saints.

You have done some of the duties that are your obligations as a Christian, but now you've got to show earnestness in realizing the full assurance of the hope that you have.

And so he says, your record may not be great as a Christian, but it's enough that you have the assurance to go on. I wrote a parish letter last week and somebody told me that they thought it unduly pessimistic.

[6 : 53] And I might say that from my perspective, I see lots of reason in the course of a week to be unduly pessimistic. But I want you to know that there is nevertheless the assurance of God's grace and God's leading and God's blessing so that there is no turning back for it.

We don't have to be dishonest about the problems we're having, but the unmistakable reality of God's goodness and grace demands that we go forward and that there can be no turning back.

Then in verse 12 of chapter 6, he says, so that you may not be sluggish, that is, suffer from spiritual exhaustion.

I just can't go on. And I guess a lot of us get highly worked up spiritually. We have pinnacles and mountaintops and we get all excited about changing the world at least by Saturday afternoon and we go after it very quickly indeed and end up with spiritual exhaustion where we can't read, we can't pray, we couldn't stand to go to another Bible study and we're just completely finished.

And he says that this condition of sluggishness is characterized by, and this is one of the commentators, he says, a lack of receptivity for Christian knowledge.

[8 : 37] You don't want to learn anymore. And secondly, you are in a state, a stale and exhausted spirit instead of the glowing joy of hope.

Well, that's what happens to us, this spiritual exhaustion. And some of you are, no doubt, so spiritually exhausted at the moment that when you are warmly and enthusiastically invited to go to the parish hall after this service to be counted in on the many programs that are involved in the life of this congregation, that your hands will hang down and your knees will wobble and muttering to yourself, come me out.

You'll walk out the back door. I'll be watching for you. Well, that is the condition for which the restorative medicine is faith and patience.

Hold on and carry on is the way it's meant to work. Then the last part of chapter 6 of Hebrews has to do with God's desire and you'll see this written there.

It's a tremendous sentence. and it's in verse 17. God does God's desire to show to the heirs of promise the unchangeable character of his purpose.

[10 : 41] God has his purpose made known to us in Jesus Christ. We are called to be disciples and followers of Jesus Christ.

The unchangeable character of his purpose is that he is going to go on and bring it to fulfillment so that for us there can be no turning back.

God isn't going to stop. His purpose is not going to be thwarted. The unchangeable character of his purpose stands and we must go with it.

So he says that he's done certain things for us to convince us of the unchangeable character of his purpose.

God revealed the unchangeable character of his life. There's a part of scripture that is very hard to read.

[11 : 46] I'm going to get to read to show you what I think is the basics of what is meant when he says by his oath and by his promise.

God revealed the unchangeable character of his purpose. Turn back to Genesis 14. Right at the beginning somewhere there.

I'm going to read it to you. It's chapter 15 verse 7. It's on page 11. And Abraham with the Lord and the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldees to give you this land to possess.

That was his promise. How am I to know that I shall possess it? That's the cry of all our hearts when we're told we've got to go on.

Where are we going? How shall we go? And the Lord said to him, bring me a heifer three years old, a she-goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtle dove, a young pigeon.

[13:10] He brought them and all these, cut them in two, laid each half over against the other. And the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, Abraham drove them away.

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abraham. Lo, a dread and great darkness fell upon them. Then the Lord said to Abraham, know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs.

That's the promise. It will be slaves then. They will be oppressed for 400 years, but I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve, and after they shall come out with great possessions. it's going to be a tough struggle. As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace. You shall be buried in a good old age.

Verse 17, when the sun had gone down, it was dark. Behold, a smoking firepower and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.

[14:29] All the meek was around it. animals cut in hand. I say it's an unpleasant message. The sun had gone down, it was dark, a smoking firepower and a flame passed between these pieces.

That day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham saying, your descendants I give this land. Well, we firepower that smoking firepower and that flame to hear to Abraham in a dream passing through between the pieces that were lying cut on the ground was the Lord confirming his oath to Abraham. That fire pot represented the presence of the Lord fire. fire. And the covenant was marked by the sacrifices of these animals, carcasses of which lay on the ground.

God confirmed his oath to Abraham by walking among the evidence of the oath and saying, this is my promise and this is my hope.

and for you and me right now.

[16:20] Jesus takes the bread and breaks it and says, this is my body which is given for you.

this is my blood which is shed for you. And in that body broken and that blood shed God meets with us and says, this is my promise to you.

This promise is of such a nature that it cannot be contradicted. my word cannot be violated. What I have promised I will do.

And the oath which goes with this promise is this broken body and shed blood. That's how chapter six ends.

God is this God with whom we have to do has made this promise and firmed it with this oath.

[17:53] faith and in this faith we are to go home because there's no turning back from such a promise from such an oath.

God has to be that I think has to be pulsing reality at the heart of our lives in response of our obedience to the God who has made himself known to us in Jesus Christ and confirms his oath and promise amidst the broken bread and the shed blood.

Let's prove to that. Be reminded of God's unconditional promise to us because of that promise and for no other reason there can be for us no turning back.

Let's kneel in prayer.