

Perseverance - Part 2

by Richard Owen Roberts

The sermon emphasizes the importance of perseverance in faith by understanding the superiority of Christ and the warnings against turning back to the world.

Duration: 1:16:26

Scripture: Hebrews 3:1-4, Hebrews 3:7-8, Hebrews 3:12-13, Hebrews 3:15, Hebrews 4:12, Hebrews 4:14-16, Hebrews 10:26-27

Topics: "Perseverance"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the urgency and importance of understanding the message in the book of Hebrews. He highlights the severity with which God dealt with His old covenant people and warns against being drawn away from Christ by sensationalism and worldly distractions. The speaker also references the story of a minister who fell into deep sin due to an inadequate understanding of Christ. He then discusses the Israelites' testing of God in the wilderness and how their disobedience led to them being denied entry into God's rest. Finally, the speaker poses a question about the superiority of men, Christ, and angels, leaving the audience to ponder their arrangement in order of importance.

Transcript

God, after he spoke long ago to the fathers, in the prophets, in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the world. And he is the radiance of his glory, and the exact representation of his nature. And he upholds all things by the word of his power.

When he had made purification of sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as he has inherited a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did he ever say, thou art my son today, I have begotten thee. And again, I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.

And when he again brings the firstborn into the world, he says, and let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels, he says, who makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire. But of the Son, he says, thy throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of his kingdom.

Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness. Therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy companions. And thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the

earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands.

They will perish, but thou remainest, and they all will become old as a garment and as a mantle. Thou wilt roll them up as a garment, they will also be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years will not come to an end.

But to which of the angels did he ever say, sit at my right hand until I make thine enemies a footstool for thy feet? Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to render service for the sake of those who inherit salvation? For he did not subject the angels to the world to come concerning which we are speaking, but one has testified somewhere saying, what is man that thou rememberest him, or the son of man that thou art concerned about him? Thou hast made him for a little while lower than the angels. Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor, and hast appointed him over the works of thy hands. Thou has put all things in subjection under his feet, for in subjecting all things to him, he left nothing that is not subject to him.

But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him, but we do see him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely Jesus, because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father, for which reason he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will proclaim thy name to my brethren in the midst of the congregation, I will sing thy praise.

And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, behold, I am the children whom thou hast given me. Since then, the children share in flesh and blood.

He himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death he might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might deliver those who, through the fear of death, were subject to slavery all their lives. For assuredly he does not give help to angels, but he gives help to the seed of Abraham, therefore he had to be made like his brethren in all things, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in all things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since he himself was tempted in that which he suffered, he is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus the Apostle and the high priest of our confession. He was faithful to him who appointed him, as Moses also was in all his house. For he has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house.

For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. Now Moses was faithful in all his house as a servant for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later, but Christ as a son over his house, whose house we are if we hold our confidence and the boast of our hope firm to the end. 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 cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, and yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.

He can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness. And because of it, he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he's called by God, even as Aaron was.

So also Christ did not glorify himself so as to become a high priest, but he who said to him, Thou art my son, today I have begotten thee. Just as he says also in another passage, Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. In the days of his flesh, when he offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to him who was able to save him from death, and who was heard because of his piety.

Although he was a son, he learned obedience from the things which he suffered. And having been made perfect, he became to all those who obey him, the source of eternal salvation. For when God made the promise to Abraham, since he could swear by no one greater, he swore by himself, saying, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply you.

And thus having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath is given as confirmation, as an end of every dispute. In the same way, God desiring even more to show the heirs of the promise, the unchangeableness of his purpose, interposed with an oath, in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us.

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast, and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek. And I would like to read on, but I would also like to make some statements concerning what we've already read, and I can't do both. I want to give you three words and ask you if you can arrange these words in order of their superiority.

Let me repeat that so that it's clear. I'll offer you three words and ask if you can arrange them in order of their superiority. Here are the words.

Men, Christ, angels. Sounds simple, doesn't it? But in order to answer it correctly, you have to ask a question. At what period of time are you speaking? Now just think of this.

Here is a very, very brief summary of the early part of what we read. At the time of creation, when man was made in the image of God, the order of the three words would be Christ, angels, slash, men. Or Christ, men, slash, angels.

Christ was obviously superior, but both men and angels were created beings, and therefore approximately equal. You could not place one above the other. But because of the fall, we have to make a reordering of these words.

Christ, angels, and men. Because fallen man is beneath created angels. But when we move into the period of Christ incarnate, Christ in the flesh, we have to reorder again.

Because now we have angels at the top, and Christ and men as one. But when we move beyond the resurrection and contemplate even the eternity before us, we once again see another reordering of things. Because now it's Christ, then men, and finally angels.

Isn't that intriguing and exciting? You would be foolish to suppose that at the present time you are altogether superior to angels, but there is a very significant dimension in which you are, even now, superior to an angel if you are a truly redeemed child of God. Because Christ did not come to die for angels, but for us. He made no provision for angels in terms of salvation.

You understand, don't you, that there were certain angels that fell. They are described briefly, but very adequately, in the book of Jude. We are told concerning them that they abandoned their domain, and they abandoned their domicile, and in some fashion marched against God in a rebellion, and were therefore cast out of the heavenly realm and consigned to the realm of darkness, where they remain to this day chained.

Do we have any hint that any redemptive work was ever accomplished on behalf of these fallen angels? No, most certainly not. And so even now, by the grace of God, we who enjoy the redemption that is in Christ Jesus enjoy a position above the angels. And yet still they are ministering spirits, touching and affecting our lives in ways that we hardly understand at all.

But let me just review what I've said by indicating once more that prior to the fall, it was Christ, angels, and men. But the eternal plan will have Christ, men, and angels. Now as I indicated to you yesterday, the book of Hebrews is constructed quite differently than any other book in our New Testament.

It isn't as if the divisions are marked out. You have to find them for yourself. They're easily discoverable if you're a thoughtful student of the Word of God.

But no other book is laid out quite that way. It's as if, you see, the author of this epistle is so caught up in the glories of Christ, so burdened to lift up, to magnify and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, that he's almost carried away with a holy eloquence in describing the Lord Jesus Christ in lofty language and in magnificent phraseology and in utterly glorious concepts. But at the same time, he is never forgetting who he is writing his epistle to.

And while he is longing that they may realize who their Savior is more fully and completely than ever before, he is alert to the fact that they are being sorely tempted to give up and to return to the nothingness of which I spoke yesterday. And so all the while he is lifting up Christ, he is burdened lest these people somehow turn back. So he keeps interrupting himself with these warnings in the midst of these glorious passages, demonstrating the infinite superiority of Jesus Christ over angels, over Moses, over Abraham, over Melchizedek, over Aaron, over the whole of the priestly system, over the whole of the Old Covenant, over the whole of the sacrificial system and the ceremonial law.

And the warnings take on deeper meaning when you realize that if you turn back, you're not turning away from that which is minor. The higher your concept of Christ becomes, the more dreadful and awful the concept of hailing him. Now unfortunately, we live in a world where the view of Christ is so degraded as presented in the typical church that people feel no consequence at all.

in turning back to the world. The world is in truth, for millions of professed Christians, much more attractive than Christ. But that merely demonstrates they haven't yet seen Christ.

Because if you see the Christ of Hebrews, how could you for a single moment think of going back to the world? Well, if you personally have been sorely tempted to turn back, or if your life is a pattern of going forward and going back, a pattern you have not yet corrected, then what you need to do is to get the high,

the lofty, the elevated view of Jesus Christ that Hebrews presents. You don't need an experience. We have all kinds of people chasing all over everywhere to gain an experience.

You can have the most amazing spiritual experience. You can laugh like a hyena, you can bark like a dog, you can roar like a lion, you can be slain in the Spirit, and you can have any and all of these, plus a dozen more of these. These are the experiences that have become popular in our day and still go back to the world.

The thing that will make a permanent difference in your life is an exalted view of Jesus Christ gained by an adequate spiritual comprehension of Christ as revealed in the book of Hebrews. All this nonsense called revival in Toronto and Pensacola would have no appeal whatsoever if people understood and loved Christ as he is. It's only an inadequate understanding of Christ that makes sensationalism attractive.

Most of the television evangelists would declare bankruptcy and quit peddling their cheap religion if Christ were known and loved by themselves and others. I can't think of anything more urgently needed in our society than a right view of Christ. But as I declared to you yesterday, I didn't come prepared to focus on the passages lifting up Christ, but on the warning passages.

But wouldn't it be a magnificent thing if all of us were to get the elevated view of Christ that this epistle presents? But now in the interest of the purpose that God put in my heart, really, I believe he put in my heart to show you the warning passages and how they interweave with the doctrinal passages. And as I stated yesterday, I had two great thoughts in mind, your welfare personally and the welfare of those that you minister to. I believe that our ministries are certain to be different when we understand Hebrews.

There's no way you can peddle cheap grace. There's no way you can keep calling for immediate decisions. No way you could believe in decisional regeneration.

No way you could ever be content with a system that has bad results. When you get the high and holy sense of Christ, Christ is too great, too wonderful, too far, infinitely far above us to cheapen his name and his grace and his gospel by peddling it as if we were merchants. By toning down the message to make it attractive to people who despise him.

The only ones who can peddle cheap grace are people, again I say, who don't know and love the Christ of Hebrews. So if you are a peddler of cheap grace, don't pretend that it's your love of souls that cause you to debase the gospel and produce false converts. Face the fact that it's your low view of Christ that enables you to conduct yourself in such an unglorious and Christ-dishonoring fashion.

When you know the Christ of Hebrews, you'll not compromise his name and his message. Now, as I indicated to you, there are six warning passages by my reckoning. But I hope I've made it plain that I'm not standing here as the last word on everything.

You might find seven. You might find only five. That's not the point.

I'm not here to get you to make a whole lot of notes and say now we got all that settled forever. I feel that my responsibility and privilege is to help you to sense what an urgent message we have in this epistle. And to rightly divide the word of God.

And to be so shaped and affected by it that not only is our own conduct permanently in the direction of Jesus Christ, but everything we say and do is glorifying to his name instead of drawing attention away

from him to our own shoddy methods and viewpoints. The first warning, as we noted yesterday in chapter two, verses one to four, deals with a critical issue of the severity with which God always dealt with his old covenant people. I went into this in some detail.

I'm taking a moment for review of what has already been said. I hope you have felt deeply the severity of God as you have read the old covenant. I hope I don't embarrass my good wife.

But when we first met, she was having a hard time with the God of the Old Testament. She really was struggling with some of the passages where God seemed so harsh, so severe. And it's quite probable that some of you are in that same struggle now.

I've had people say to me, I like the God of the New Testament better than the God of the Old Testament. And that's said often with sincerity and with feelings. There is a severity about the God of the Old Testament that is frightening.

But dear friends, if you tracked with me while we were reading the warning passages yesterday, you know that the author of Hebrews, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was portraying the same God of severity, Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, today, and forever. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God. There is no lightening of these matters in Hebrews.

If you have found the New Testament to be lighter and easier to bear, it only demonstrates you haven't read it yet with any care. You've missed the God of the Old Testament and the New Testament, who is one and the same, always severe, never, ever anything other than stringent, laying his requirements upon his people. And as I've said, the thrust of the first warning is, if God dealt with severity and harshness in handling the people of the Old Testament, look out! Because the way he's going to handle us will be all the more severe, because to whom much is given, much is required.

And what we have received is immensely greater than what those under the Old Covenant received. I hope you've gotten your heart and your thinking correctly adjusted here. When we say we're living in the age of grace, that doesn't mean we're living in an age of sloppiness.

That doesn't mean that God somehow has, oozing out of every pore, an inability to be himself. God is the unchanging God, always demanding of his people, never, ever making it otherwise. But, of course, the grace of which we speak is not a new feature in the New Covenant.

It is a biblical feature. God has always been a God of grace. He didn't become gracious in Christ Jesus.

There was grace in the days of Abraham. After all, he lied about his wife and yet experienced grace. There was grace in the days of Moses.

He murdered a man and experienced grace. All the way through the Old Testament, there's grace, grace, grace, grace, but never softness. Now, why do we imagine that when we come to the New Testament, God has somehow grown up, gained control of his emotions, no longer an angry God whose wrath is outpoured? That kind of thinking isn't even worthy of kindergarten children.

So, if we neglect the great salvation purchased for us by Jesus Christ himself, how shall we escape? What hope is there for us? The second warning is quite different, and yet of equal consequence. There's a sense in which the second warning really begins with verses 5 and 6 of chapter 3, although, clearly, verses 5 and 6 are also attached to the doctrinal portion. In other words, there's no exact division here.

They run together. As one is ending, the other one is beginning. Now, Moses was faithful in all his house as a servant for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later, but Christ was faithful as a son over his house.

Whose house we are if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm unto the end. Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked me, as in the days of trial in the wilderness where your fathers tried me by testing me and saw my works for forty years. Therefore, I was angry with this generation and said they do always go astray in their hearts.

They did not know my ways. As I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest. Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart in falling away from the living God, but encourage one another day after day as long as it is still called today.

Lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, for we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, while it is said today, If you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked me, for who provoked him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses, and with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness, and to whom did he swear that they should not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief. So the heart of this second warning is, Don't follow the pattern of ancient Israel in the wilderness when they kept hardening their hearts. Now, we had the story told by Dr. Brandt of a man ten years in ministry, who wandered into deep sin, destroyed two marriages, raised havoc in a Christian community.

There are people right here who are struggling right now. With husbands or wives who have strayed into deep sin. And certainly one of the most prominent questions that those of us who minister are being asked is, Why is there such a terrible increase of vile sin in our day? Do not harden your hearts.

In the record that we've just read, we are informed that for forty years these people tested God. We are likewise advised in numbers that they tested God ten times. So ten times in forty years.

Every four years they provoked God in an astonishing way. Is it any wonder that He swore in His wrath that they should not enter into His rest? Is it possible that someone here has been provoking God for forty years? Maybe you have already provoked Him ten times. But all those that have an elevated view of Christ, they don't want to provoke Him the first time.

They are unwilling to provoke Him the first time. They set their hearts on bringing Him glory, not in dragging Him down from His throne. It's a very instructive thing.

I wonder how many of you have done this, to take literally the passage we've read and the numbers passage I've cited and actually list the ten provocations. How many of you know what the ten provocations are? Well, there's a little study for a goodly number of you. I'll make it easy.

The first provocation, Exodus 14. Just when they came out of Egypt before the Red Sea, they were afraid. And God overlooked their provocation and the Egyptian army was drowned in the sea.

You would have thought they would have learned a powerful lesson in that glorious deliverance. But soon thereafter, Exodus 15, they provoked God a second time. There were only three days in the wilderness

when they had a problem with water.

They were murmuring about bitter water and Moses threw a tree in the water supply and sweetened it. That, you would have thought, would have settled the matter. Now they've had two grand deliverances.

You would suppose that they would say, we can't trust God. There's no reason why we can't. We don't have a single reason ever to doubt again.

We don't have one cause for murmuring. It will be perfectly safe and wise just simply to leave everything in His hands and receive whatever comes with a certain knowledge that our God is watching over us. But no, they didn't learn the first lesson.

They didn't learn the second lesson. They provoked Him again in chapter 16. This time in the wilderness of Zin on the 15th day of the second month out of Egypt when they were complaining about hunger and saying, oh, would to God we had died in Egypt where our days were full.

But again, God, in His long-suffering, sent manna from heaven but still they didn't learn because then in chapter 17 they provoked Him for the fourth time at Rephidim when they had no water to drink. And they declared in that connection, the Lord is not among us. No, we have proof He can't be with us.

We're thirsty. He'd never let us be thirsty if He really were. We can't trust Him.

He's demonstrated it. And so they were given water from the rock Horeb. And then in Exodus 32, Moses was delayed in coming down from the mountain and they built the golden calf.

And again, God, in an amazing way, overlooked their provocation. Only 3,000 died when God threatened to destroy every last man, woman, and child with the exception of Moses himself. The next provocation is recorded in Leviticus 10.

This time in connection with the consecration of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood when these sons, Bedab and Abihu, offered up a strange fire. And the fire of the Lord came down and consumed them. He could have consumed all of the people and done so with justice.

But He didn't. Again, His mercy prevailed. The seventh provocation is recorded in Numbers 11.

The people were busy complaining of the terrible adversity. They were under. And the anger of the Lord was kindled.

And a fire quickly spread among them, consumed some on the outskirts of the camp. But still they didn't learn. There's a second provocation in the same chapter when the rabble who were among them were expressing greedy desires and their contempt of the unsavory food that they were eating.

But once again, God spared the majority, though a plague ensued. In Numbers 12, another provocation. Moses married a Cushite woman.

And Mary spoke against Moses. And the Lord put leprosy on Mary. Another provocation in chapter 13 of Numbers.

When the spies were sent out and returned, and a great wave of unbelief swept through the people. Well now, I don't honestly know which ten provocations are referred to in Numbers, because one can find more

than those ten. But it's crystal clear from all of that that God is a God of mercy.

But it's also crystal clear that the day of mercy expires for a given people. And you know as well as I do that virtually all the people that were brought out of Egypt died in the wilderness. They didn't enter into the promised rest that's described in this second warning.

The latter part of it. God fixing a certain day and so on. But friends, the intent of the passage is not just to make us feel the horror of the circumstances of Israel.

The thrust of the passage is, don't harden your heart. Oh, beloved, we must not be so absurd to think that our hearts can be hardened and we will be spared. When Israel hardened its heart, it was not spared.

It was cut off. It's absurd to think that having received so much more than Israel received, we can go on in stubbornness and rebellion indefinitely and still be spared. But let's think now of our own hearts.

Is there some hardening of your heart? Is there an anger in your heart against some providence of God? I've lived long enough to believe that not everything that God does in my life looks good at the time. I know how injured I felt when we discovered our daughter had an incurable brain disorder. I staggered with that.

Where is the kindness of God toward us in this? Thank God it didn't prevail, but it lurked there momentarily. When we had a Christian school that owed us \$750,000 declare bankruptcy and we were informed we were not going to receive a penny of that money they owed us, and that plunged us into deep debt where we still remain. That was a hard blow.

But I don't think our hearts were hardened. We staggered under the weight of it for a moment. But by God's grace, we saw His providence.

We don't see it fully even yet. But we believe that our lives are in the hands of God. And God knows what He's doing even when we don't.

And we're also convinced what He's doing is vastly better than what we could do if we were in control. Even though there are moments when we could say, well, I wouldn't have done that. And there can be that surge of anger that rises in the heart.

Many a widow has expressed to me not merely a surge of anger over God having taken her husband, but a lingering anger that she has never dealt with. Don't harden your heart. It's a dangerous thing to do.

Never lose sight of what happened to Israel because she hardened her heart. I believe another way that many have succeeded in hardening their hearts is that their treatment of the Bible is so intellectual. I meet men who love theological discussions.

I'm in homes with pastors where it's impossible to maintain a spiritual conversation. Oh, we could discuss theology until three in the morning and there'd never be a lull in the conversation. But if you try to turn it off of some technicalities of theology and talk about something sweet and precious affecting the daily life and the glories of Christ, they get all uptight.

I mean, it's visible what happens to them. They can't handle a conversation that comes close to the soul. I wonder about you.

Do you hear a sermon theologically? Do you say to yourself, oh, that's an interesting truth. If you go away from my part in Cedars saying, wasn't it interesting the way Mr. Roberts divided Hebrews up into two pieces. If that's the end result, you may be well on the road to hardening your heart.

The purpose of all of this is not to make us more intelligent about the Bible. The purpose of all of this is to make us extremely sensitive to our Lord Jesus Christ and in deeper and deeper love with Him and devotion so that we will not fail Him, so that we will not detract from His glory, so that we will not lower His honor in the world. If you intellectualize truth, you'll be in severe danger.

Many have hardened their hearts by a contentment with a low level of spiritual attainment. I'm always shocked when I hear some men sound as if they've arrived spiritually. I don't know how you feel about yourself.

I feel like a pilgrim who has just started. My sojourn. You could ask me 5,000 questions about the Bible.

I might be able to answer 1,000, but there'd be at least 4,000 I couldn't answer. I hardly know anything yet. I'm grateful for the little bit of faithfulness God has permitted me to know, but I'm much more deeply grieved about the failure.

Oh, not that I'm pounding on myself. It's just that as my view of Christ is an elevating view, I'm longing all the more deeply to have served Him faithfully without any letdown whatsoever. I'm saying if you content yourself with a low level of spiritual achievement, of maturity, you'll be in grievous danger of hardening your heart.

Another source of hardening of the heart is spiritual disappointment when something happens to us contrary to our spiritual expectations. Dear friends, do you realize what's happened to the American church? We've sinned grievously against God to a large measure. He's turned His back upon us.

He's turned us over to a case of spiritual drunkenness, if you will. And instead of going on our faces, crying unto God and pleading with Him for the return of power in the church, we've hardened our hearts and set our faces saying, we're going to make the church go no matter what. And we've forced the church forward.

We've made converts. We've built huge sanctuaries. And in many cases, God is nowhere near.

God has nothing to do with a great deal of what's going on in His name. If you allow your heart to suffer spiritual disappointment, you can turn a corner. I was one time pastor of a very needy church in California.

It was not an honest church. At the time I became pastor, it had a huge sign out front saying Central California's Largest Church. Well, that was a gross exaggeration, but it was big, very big by the standards of that time.

And the lovely thing about it was it was a congregational church where they thought they were Lutherans. They didn't know anything. They never had the gospel preached to them.

Every single Lord's Day I had the pleasure of looking in the faces of numbers of lost people. Maybe 5% of the congregation knew the Lord. I'm not even certain it was that high.

And I tell you, I had the thrill of my life preaching to that needy crowd. But they hated me from the word go. The very first Sunday the deacons said, You can't preach that way here.

We won't allow it. I said, I've read the Constitution. The Constitution says the deacons are to assist the pastor.

Let it be understood that I am in charge. I'll give you the order. And they said, We'll put you out.

I said, You do what your evil hearts command. But while I'm here, I'm going to preach the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. And I had the most beautiful year a man could imagine.

It was sheer delight. Week after week after week. And all week long, people streaming through my office who needed the Lord.

I just sat there testifying of the grace of Christ day after day. At the end of the year, they threw me out just like they promised. And for a few moments, Maggie and I were crushed.

In fact, the very Sunday they put me out, my message was on the Lord's prayer, Deliver us from evil. And I'm sure they felt they had been delivered from evil. But we knew we had been.

Oh, we hurt at the loss of the opportunity to minister into those thousands of lost people. My heart is still pained when I think of how immensely needy they were. But our hearts were not hardened.

No root of bitterness grew up. We said, The Lord gives. The Lord takes away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. I wonder what the Lord has for us next. That was sure an exciting term.

But how do you handle spiritual discipline? Well, I need not pursue this further. If I do, I won't accomplish my purpose this morning. But the second warning is don't let your heart get hardened.

And if you do, then face the fact that as Israel was barred from the promised land, which is but a type or a shadow of the reality that is ours in Christ Jesus, we then will be barred from the eternal rest. And to be barred from the land of promise is as nothing in comparison with being barred from the eternal rest that is ours in Christ Jesus. Because if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end... Now look at the third warning in chapter 3, continuing on into chapter 4. I pick it up again at verse 5 of chapter 3. Well, really? You can't miss what's said in the first four verses.

Let me read them again. And therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly call, consider Jesus the apostle and the high priest of our profession. He was faithful to him who appointed him, as Moses also was in all his house.

For he has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. Now that's perfectly plain, isn't it? Moses was a man of honor, a man whom God exalted.

And Moses was faithful to him who appointed him. Oh, he was not perfect. All of us, I hope, remember the sad days when God at the end of His life said, go up into that mountain and look across and see the land of promise, but you lie down on the mountain and die, because you did not keep faith with me before the bread man.

Oh, he lacked perfection, but by the grace of God there was a faithfulness. But the faithfulness of Moses is shown to be as nothing in comparison with the faithfulness of Christ. And the house over which Moses ruled is as nothing comparing it with the house over which Christ ruled.

But let's pick up these urgent words now at verse 5. Moses was faithful in all his house as a servant. For a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later. But Christ is not faithful over His house as a servant, but as a Son.

And then get this glorious truth in verse 6. Whose house we are, if, oh friends, I put a circle around that if so I would never lose sight of it. We are of Christ's household, if. Now the Israelites were of Moses' household without an if.

They were of Moses' household. They were of the family over which Moses ruled. Whether they provoked God in the wilderness once or ten times, they were still of Moses' household.

But we are of Christ's household, if. Christ's household is an infinitely greater and more consequential household than the household of Moses. But our relationship to the family of God does have this big if in connection with it.

And see for yourself and contemplate carefully what is said. We are of Christ's household, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. Now that word confidence is speaking of open, bold, ongoing proclamation.

Some of us make a tragic mistake and we do vast harm to souls by suggesting to them that in the waters of baptism they make their declaration of Christ and are therefore and forever eternally secure. That's not what my Bible teaches. Oh, I'm not degrading baptism.

I believe in it with all my heart and I believe in it even though I'm a congregationalist just as you believe in it. But it is a grievous mistake to suggest that the only open, bold proclamation of Jesus Christ that's necessary to be part of this household is a proclamation made in the waters of baptism. We are of Christ's household if we go on making this same bold proclamation.

That's what this text says. A one-time proclamation is insignificant. A lifetime proclamation, having once proclaimed Jesus Christ as Lord, which I did when I was a boy of twelve years of age, I acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, but by His grace I've made the same open, bold proclamation of His Lordship every day of my life since.

And anything less than that is less than what's required. We do people a grievous injustice when we suggest to them that all they have to do is to make this one-time confession. But notice how this same theme is picked up again in verse 14.

We have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our assurance firm until the end. Now notice the distinction. The word confidence, as I said, in verse 6 is dealing with open, bold, ongoing proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord.

The boast of our hope, it says in verse 6, I keep saying to my world, you keep saying to your world, Jesus Christ is Savior. Every time I sin and the Spirit of God brings me to quick recovery, I have to say years ago I said, Jesus, if ever I was going to be saved, You would have to save me and I've just gone and proved again that You have to save me. You're the only Savior.

I'm not saving myself. I don't have any potential to save myself. I'm utterly reliant upon You, Lord Jesus Christ as Savior.

I don't believe the Lord wants us to sin, but it's a wonderful thing when we have sinned, to be able quickly to repeat this same open, bold, hope, boast. A hope, a boast of hope that we hold firm to the end. Jesus, Your Savior, I cling to You.

But in verse 14, it's talking about an inward assurance, holding fast to the beginning of our firm persuasion. So you see, two great issues are at stake here. The necessity of my ongoing, bold, open proclamation of Jesus Lordship.

Now friends, to be proclaiming to others that Christ is Lord and yet living in secret sin is the hypocrisy of which Dr. Branch spoke. And probably you're the only one that believes in yourself when you do that. Most people aren't so blind, but what they can see is right through our hypocrisy.

We've got to maintain a walk of holiness. And we read in Hebrews, holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. But these two great issues are a part of our belonging to the family of God.

Our open, honest, sincere confession of Christ as Lord and the internal assurance, the bold assurance that belongs to the children of God that Jesus Christ is Savior. Now I want to be very plain. I'm not going to get anywhere near done with what I planned on.

I might suggest we go till one, but somebody would be offended if I did that. I'll not be able to finish what I had in mind, but I can't leave this matter without somehow seeking to help someone here who has not yet gotten straight on this issue. You see, many of us, in the last two weeks, I don't know how many I've talked to with the same essential problem.

People lack assurance. And when you talk a wee bit with them, you realize that their lack of assurance is rooted in their conduct. They haven't been behaving very well.

They haven't lived up to their own understanding of what a Christian is. And so then they're dubious as to whether or not they are a Christian. Friends, we've got to learn to distinguish performance from faith.

I have grown to love 2 Peter 1. But in that lovely passage, oh, I commend it to all of you. In that lovely passage, Peter talks about having received. He said, all of you have received the same faith that we have.

Now, those who are being saved are those who have received the gift of faith. The faith that we have received is the very faith that Peter received. It is the faith that Paul had.

It is in actual fact the faith of Jesus Christ. He gives us faith. That's what saves us.

What has our performance got to do with that? The bold assurance of which Hebrews speaks in this chapter is that understanding that appreciation, that rejoicing in the fact that we have received the very faith of Jesus Christ. And that's what saves us. But in that 2 Peter 1 passage, it goes on to talk about adding to or supplementing our faith with seven essential qualities.

I won't go into the qualities. I would just urge them upon you. 2 Peter 1, 1 to 11.

And then after he's given the qualities, he says, if these qualities are in you and increasing, then you are never fruitless and never useless. And indeed, he goes on to close the section by saying, a glorious or an abundant entrance is assured you into the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. So don't confuse your performance with faith.

And don't doubt salvation because your performance is beneath your expectation or God's desire. You see, what happens to us is if we begin to doubt, if we begin to say, well, I'm not sure I'm a Christian at all. Well, I'm not even sure what it would take to be a Christian.

Once we get into the realm of doubt, then everything heads downhill. It's quite impossible to add the qualities of which Peter speaks when you're full of doubt. So our confidence, our assurance, our bold hope is in Jesus Christ, not in our conduct or performance.

But when our assurance is there, then by God's grace we can get busy and add the blessed qualities that accompany true faith. And then we'll never be useless and never fruitless and always ready to receive this abundant entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are of Christ household if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm to the end.

We have become partakers of Christ if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end. But today, brothers and sisters, today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked me. I sincerely believe that if the Church of Christ in America were to receive the message of Hebrews, we would experience the most radical turnaround imaginable.

And it could happen overnight. It's obvious with only one more opportunity I'm only going to be suggestive of the value of this book. But wouldn't it be appropriate if each of us set our hearts to master this book before the year... I'm speaking of the book of Hebrews.

I'm not... not proposing an overwhelming and impossible assignment. But it would be within the realm of all of our capacities to master Hebrews and to let Hebrews master us before the end of this calendar year. Lord Jesus, I grieve that my feeble words and my slow pace has kept me from getting farther on and more helpfully forward with this precious book.

But, oh, may Your grace accompany the message given. And may the dear brothers and sisters bow before You now. Never, never neglect the great salvation.

And never, ever harden their hearts. Oh, by Your grace and mercy, may we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end and go on openly, boldly, perpetually proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord. Help us, we pray.

In the grand name of King Jesus, Amen.

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