

**Record of Sermons delivered during the month of**  
**October 2018**

(added progressively after each Sunday)

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(see following pages)

## **A Terrifying Warning – Pt 2**

per S Olyott

(Review two weeks before)

(Continuing the third thing that needs to be said:)

- “I thought he was a Christian! Look at the way he's living now.”  
He treats Christ as if there is no good in Christ. (verse 8) He too is like the field that received the rain, but at the end of the day there's no fruit there. No corn there. At the end of the day as you look over his life you don't now see any sign of the Word or its effects. All that's ever grown permanently and finally in his life are thorns and thistles. He *is worthless and near to being cursed, ...*. Which in the Hebrew language context means: 'is of no use'. He's 'like salt without taste (savour)'. And his *end is to be burned*.

The two conditions (true believer and eventual apostate) initially look identical when side by side in the 'visible' Church – both as professing Christians. But the subsequent events show that they were not. One is proved to be different from the other. The only one who is truly changed by the Spirit by regeneration is the one who is permanently changed. The other – only temporally changed. A temporary change is evidence of no change at all. Because, at the end of the day he reverts to what he was at the beginning. What happens in between is of no account as you look at his life. In fact we are about to learn that his final state is worse than his beginning.

He's not truly changed. The proof that you are a Christian is not found in what you claim to believe. If you can agree to the statements of the Confession<sup>1</sup> – you do no more than the devil and his angels can do. That's not the final proof. The proof that you are a Christian is not actually in what you have experienced. Not all experiences of God are 'saving experiences'. True experiences of God can be had and yet are not saving experiences. That's the whole point of the Apostle's argument in Chapters three and four of this letter, when he talks about the people who came out of Egypt. They had mighty experiences of God: the parting of the Red Sea; the provision of manna; the miraculous provision of water; sandals and clothes not wearing out<sup>2</sup>; led by the Shekhina(h) glory! All these experiences of God, yet only two of the whole generation which left Egypt, reached the promised 'rest'. The 'Promised Land'.

The difference between the counterfeit and the true is in the provision of fruit. There are those who go on to develop a Christian Character. A developing Christian character. And there are those who don't. There are those who go on ... and on, and look at first wonderfully promising, but eventually go out. No

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1 The Presbyterian Church holds that the principal standard of faith (doctrine) is the 66 books of the Holy Bible – God's revealed revelation to mankind – with the convenient summary of this as the subordinate standard, being the Westminster Confession of Faith

2 Deuteronomy 29:5 I have led you forty years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn off your feet.

lasting fruit. The issue is one of eternal significance. Because one *receives a blessing from God* (verse 7) while the other: *his end is to be burned* (verse 8).

- Now we continue with the fourth thing that needs to be said, in relation to this passage.

There are some issues to clear up.

This passage is teaching that such people who walk out on the Gospel can never be restored.

(Verse 4)<sup>3</sup> Those with all the privileged knowledge of the Gospel, and those real and mighty experiences of God – of the Spirit – who nevertheless 'fall away' cannot go back to the starting point. For a professing Christian the starting point is repentance. They cannot come back to this. Why not?

Because what they have done is that they have committed, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> Jesus makes this plain in the Gospels. There He was: obviously sent from God. It was testified by His miracles<sup>5</sup>. He even was casting out 'demons'. Yet certain people when they saw that was obviously of God – they ascribed it to the devil. What was obviously good they called 'diabolical'. That's what these people have done. They know the truth about Christ. They know the goodness of the Word of God. They know there is a God who can be personally experienced. They know there is an invisible and eternal world – because they've tasted something of it. They know that the Gospel can change lives, because they know something of its power. Yet knowing all that – both intellectually and in their experience, they call the 'good', 'bad'. They call the 'best', the 'worst'. They call what was 'marvellous', 'indifferent'. they call what is 'saving', 'irrelevant'. They walk out!

The Apostle here is not referring to backsliders. The backslider from Genesis to Revelation is a very rare creature – perhaps but six in the Bible. Backsliders are not people who deliberately forsake the Christian Life and 'walk out' on it. They are people who let things slip. The proof of a backslider it that eventually they realise how wrong they are and they repent. They repent! Which is something the Apostate cannot do.

God offers mercy to all sinners. He says that if you confess your sins He is faithful and just to forgive your sins and to cleans you from all unrighteousness. The 'mark' of the Apostate is that he hears offers of God's continued mercy, but he never comes again to the point of repentance, because what is good, he regards, in his heart, as bad. What is saving he regards, in his heart, as something he is finished with.

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3 <sup>4</sup> *For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup> and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, ... .*

4 Matthew 12:22-32

5 Note that an official of the Jewish ruling Council, Nicodemus said at the beginning of his meeting with Christ: “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for **no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.**”

The backslider eventually hears the overtures of mercy. He avails himself of them, finding that God is gracious and long-suffering, slow to anger. He comes back to God, like the Prodigal – when he is a long way off – the father runs to meet him and throws his arms around him, receiving him with great rejoicing and joy. In heaven there is singing and music! So we are not concerned here today with backsliders.

Nor about spiritual immaturity. The Hebrews were immature and, yet the Apostle tells them in Hebrews 6, verse 9, that he's persuaded that what he's talking about is not true of them! So in our world there are many immature believers, but they are not Apostates. Some who are 'still on the milk' even after many years, have nevertheless never scorned the Lord Jesus Christ.

However the only certain guarantee that I have, that I am a true Christian is that I go on and on ... and on. Higher and further and closer to Him. Not to go on, eventually at least, is to go back. To stay as I am is eventually to go back to something that is bigger in my life than my faith in Christ. There is no safe course in this earth, except to go forward – for without 'holiness', we shall read in the twelfth chapter of this letter, no man shall see the Lord.

For those who do fall away and walk out, scripture says there is no hope. And indeed we are not even commanded to pray for such people.<sup>6</sup> (1 John 5:16)

Further clarification:

Don't think that the language of verses 4 and 5 is too strong to use for an unregenerate man. Some people say, in regard to verses 4 & 5: that could never refer to an unregenerate (unconverted) person. To such people we must (as we have already implied) say, "Consider again those people who perished in the wilderness."

Everything that is said here in verses 4 & 5 could be said of them, but they were barred from the 'rest' of the Promised Land.

What about the men in Matthew 7. who said, "*Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?* " They'd tasted of the good word of God! They'd tasted of the powers of the world to come. They knew something of the power of God in their lives. They would have 'passed', not only as Christians, but as great Christians – in any Church. But Jesus says, "*I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.*" (Matthew 7:21-23)

Again in John Chapter 7: <sup>2</sup>Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, ... <sup>6</sup>*If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.*

Our Lord paints the picture that there are people who 'appear' to be united to Christ – 'appear' to be part of the 'vine'. They're spoken of as being part of the

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<sup>6</sup> 1 John 5:16 <sup>16</sup> If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life –to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that.

vine, but they become withered – don't remain attached to the vine – they don't abide in Him. They don't bear fruit: they are thrown in the fire and burned.

How about that phenomenal passage in 2 Peter? We should read this, because too many people believe that harsh things should not be said about those who are lost in this way. (2 Peter 2:20-22) <sup>20</sup> *For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.* <sup>21</sup> *For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.* <sup>22</sup> *What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire."*

There Peter gives the reason why people go back. The reason that they 'go back' is because there has been no real change of nature.

If you think that the language of Hebrews 6, verses 4 & 5, is too harsh, you still have not grasped what the Bible says about how far it is possible to go and still be lost,

Bunyan was clear: He saw that even at the very gate of heaven that there is a little door which leads to hell.

But as we close our considerations of this harrowing passage, some necessary and welcome words of comfort.

Although these words in Hebrews 6 are intended to terrify us – as we listen we are in fear least we have committed this sin. It is intended that we fear. If this morning any of us is afraid that we have committed this sin and that fear leads you to repentance you cannot have committed this sin. If the fear of Apostasy grips the heart and that fear causes one to humble oneself in the sight of God; to confess your sins afresh; to go to the High Priest for mercy; to cry to Him for grace to help in this time of need. That is all the proof that you require: that you have not committed that sin.

To all sinners, we stress again. There is the free invitation to come boldly unto the throne of grace – the great throne that rules the world is the throne of grace. If I fail ten million times in the last hour alone, yet I may go to that throne for mercy. No matter how often I have fallen. How desperate my condition has been. There is always mercy at the throne of grace.

If I am afraid that I cannot stand another hour on my own (and I'm right to recognise this) I can go to that same throne of grace, to find grace to help in time of need. The person who is always at Jesus' feet has nothing to worry about.

The men and women we have been talking about are those who declare their independence from the Christ and will have nothing more to do with Him, because there is something else that means more to them. The warning is a real warning, but

like all God's warnings it is given in love.

When you heard the Gospel you heard about hell. You heard about eternal punishment. Some of you thought, "What a callous God, who would cast the wicked into hell." But you realised they were real threats and the power of God came upon you with the seriousness of the consequences of your sin. Which made you see the seriousness of sin itself. As you contemplated hell, your thought was "how exceedingly sinful, sin is." You repented from your sin – turned away from it; ceased to be a slave to it. It was the threats of God's vengeance as well as the promises of His grace, which eventually led you to run, flee and then embrace the Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel.

As you look back you see that those threats were as much a display of God's love to you as His kind promises.

It's the same in the Christian Life. God threatens us that if we do not move forward our end is – to be burned. And we may at times think, "What a callous teaching this is. What an awful thing to hear. What a hard God He is!" But you know in your own life that these messages about Apostasy, which come from almost all the books in the New Testament (we've had a sample from Matthew, Peter and John already today). They have been a spur to you, to run back to Jesus Christ and consider the great Apostle and High Priest of your profession. Hebrews chapter 6, verses 4-8, follows Hebrews 4:16. It is only after: <sup>6</sup> *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* Has been given that the very severe warning is given.

You must know now from God's Word that the person who is close to Christ has nothing to fear. Whatever a failure he is. However poor as a Christian he is. Whatever he has done. Whatever he has thought. Whatever he has spoken. If he comes to the great High Priest, he has nothing to fear. It is only wandering from Christ that damns.

[2382]

**May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.**

## **Two Truths Taught & Illustrated**

per S Olyott

Good news!

After all the dire warnings (particularly last week's) we come today and next week to a passage that is full of encouragement. Two truths are pointed out (verses 9-12) and these are followed up by two illustrations to confirm these truths. Clearly a great contrast to the earlier passages.

Remember the situation these Hebrews were in: They were Jews and they had become Christians. They were thinking of walking out of the Christian faith and going back to their Judaism. We need to stress that they hadn't actually done this! They were thinking of doing it. It was a living option in their minds. But they hadn't actually turned away from the Christian faith at this stage, back to Judaism. It was something they were contemplating.

The Apostle has warned them several times, as we've noticed, that if we walk out on the light of God's glory, in the face of Jesus Christ – you walk out of the light – you have only one place you can go: that is into darkness! Therefore if you walk out on the Christian faith you will be lost. Whatever profession you've made and whatever you have experienced.

So the only safe course of action for the professing Christian, is to make **constant spiritual progress**. To go on ... on and on. We do that by **prayer** as we come to the High Priest – every time we fall and ask for mercy; and every time we're weak, we ask for grace in time of need.

We do it by **exposing our mind and affections to the Word of God**. We can easily tell, says the Apostle, as we have learned, whether we are actually going on in the Christian faith: Do you understand more that you did? Not just do you know more, but do you understand more? Not only about the contents of God's Word but also how it works out in daily life. That is the test that shows whether I am going on ... .

Having said all that, as we have seen over the past two sermons, the Apostle has given a very blunt warning. Quite terrifying in fact! If you know the truth; if you've experience something of the power of the Gospel, and then if you walk out on it: you will be treating truth like error; you'll be treating the Lord Jesus Christ like an impostor; you'll be saying in effect, that Jesus Christ doesn't do, we helpless sinners, good. You'll be bringing Him to an open shame.

If you do that you can never return to 'square one'. You can never come again to the place of repentance. Instead God's curse rests upon you – whose end is to be burned.

It's after such a severe passage as that, that today's passage comes. It's quite different: filled with encouragement and promise.

When people warn you, you may think that they have 'got it in' for you. (Sometimes they have) When someone gives you a stern warning you may assume that that person is against you. Here the Apostle makes it plain in verse 9 that that is not his attitude when he gave the warning.

For the first (and only time) in the letter he calls them 'beloved'! He assures them of his love towards them. It was from a heart of love that gave them that warning. Now it is from a heart of love which is going to give the encouragement of this morning's message. There's a lovely balance in Hebrews. Some people are all encouragement – that often means it leads people to be less and less serious about Christian living. Some people are all warning – the people that listen to them are filled with blank despair. But the Apostle gives warning and encouragement in equal measure, with equal strength. In that way we are kept safely on the road to heaven.

In Verses 9-20 (today and next week) first of all he will tell us two things, which take us to verse 12 and then he will give us two illustrations to underline, reinforce and apply the things he's been telling us.

This week let us give our attention to verses 9-12. You'll notice in those 4 verses the two things he has to say:

In verse 9 he says, “We feel sure ... “ and that's a good summary of the first thing that he has to say. Then in verse 11 he says, “... we desire ... “ and that's a good summary of the second thing that he has to say.

So the first thing is verses 9 and 10. <sup>9</sup> ... *in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.* <sup>10</sup> *For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.*

In other words, “Although I've been saying awful things about apostasy. Although I've been giving you a genuine warning and telling you that if you apostatise, it is certain that you will be lost. Although I've done that, in fact I'm persuaded of better things as far as you are concerned. I'm persuaded in my own mind that you are not those people who are going to be lost! That you are saved people.

Now that's a phenomenal thing to say. Often in ministry people may come to a Minister to ask, “Do you think I'm saved?” Which is a question best left not answered by any fellow Christian. A believer's assurance should not rest on the opinion of another sinner. But here is a man actually saying to Christians, “I'm sure in my own mind that you are saved.”

Of course he can recognise that if they subsequently turn back from the faith, they will have proved him wrong in his opinion. Which is the reason for his warnings.

However now he's saying that as sure as a 'fallen' human can be, that they are genuine believers and not the people who are going to apostatise.

How come he had this level of certainty? That these Hebrews were genuine Christians? Was it because they had had some marvellous 'second experience', which he knew about? No. So how come he was sure they were Christians?

Because if we can answer that question we can learn a lot about personal assurance. Look at verse 10. "It's from looking at your lives that I have come to this conclusion. As I look at the fellowship of the church, I see you serving each other and this is not only what you have been doing but you are still doing it." ... *servicing the saints, as you still do*. "You are actually the servants of each other. You don't just do this 'when the fancy takes you'. It's a work and a labour with you. It's something which you constantly do. Disciplining your minds to do. Something that you constantly set about. And your motive," he says, "is love and concern for the good of God's Name!"

All in verse 10. "That's why I'm persuaded that you're Christians."

Can you see how his mind is 'ticking'? The 'fruit' of the Spirit is love. As he looks at this church, to whom he was writing, he sees that the people really did love one another with true Christian affection. Not the 'goopy', Hollywood feeling. This love is living for the good of the other, whatever the sacrifice involved. That's what they were doing. They loved each other.

You'll remember that when John wrote his first letter, he identified 3 'marks'<sup>7</sup> of a Christian:

- the doctrinal mark – they believe the truth about Christ;
- the moral mark – they seek to live by God's Law; but there's
- the social mark – Christian's love Christians.

So we know when we have 'passed from death unto life' because we love the 'brethren'.<sup>8</sup> So he saw that. "So I conclude therefore", says the Apostle, "that God is righteous and He won't overlook this. Therefore it is clear that you are Christians!"

Now that throws a 'new light' on those Hebrews:

Were they spiritually immature? Yes. – still on the 'milk', not on the 'meat'.

Were they thinking of going back? Yes – but none the less there was sufficient obvious change in their lives to bring him to the positive conclusion, and yet their progress in spiritual things was sufficiently slow for him to continue to warn them.

That's how assurance comes. Assurance is when I see how a Christian is described in the Bible and then I conclude – "That's me!" and the Spirit brings that conviction into my heart, so that it convinces me. So I see how a Christian is described. I see that's a description of me. That's how assurance comes about. That's how he was sure, this Apostle, that these people were believers. However they weren't sufficiently far progressed for him to give up warning them.

Which brings us to the second thing that he has to say in verses 11 and 12:

<sup>1</sup> *And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end,* <sup>12</sup> *so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of*

<sup>7</sup> Just as a physical birth can produce certain noticeable characteristics – 'birth marks'. So the 'new birth' comes with spiritual characteristics or birth marks.

<sup>8</sup> Greek: adelphoi – believers both men and women, 'brothers and sisters in Christ.'

*those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

“Today, you are in the church. You're faithfully serving each other. Well,” he says, “I want everyone of you to show the same enthusiasm in making spiritual progress. Without letting up! Right to the end. Until you come to the point where everyone's doubts are removed. Until you come to the point where my doubts about you are removed. Until you come to the point where your own doubts about yourself are removed. Until you come to the point where you realise that the 'hope' that you nurse, isn't a vain hope. It's a certain hope! It's securely founded.”

We should feel that we can enter really deeply into the spirit of verses 11 & 12.

“Don't be lazy,” he says, in verse 12. “Shake off this laziness which characterises so many Christian lives. Shake it off! Don't be slothful. Make it apparent that you 'put yourself out', for Christ. Or for His people or for the unconverted. Stop living as though none of this is necessary”, he says, “and become instead followers of them who through faith, and patience inherit the promises.

How wonderful it would be if changes would come about on any who are described in this passage as slothful and so on. How wonderful it would be if we could more effectively show that our faith is obvious (verse 12) How wonderful it would be if patience (or consistency) were obvious so that we, of our selves – and others, of us, would not have to ponder the question, “Are we (or they) really Children of God”. How wonderful it would be if the great characteristics that 'marked' out the godly men and women of many years ago, 'marked' us out too and were equally visible. How wonderful it would be if we were as certain of each other in inheriting God's promises as we are certain of how Abraham and others inherited God's promises,

What the Apostle has said up to verse 12 can be easily summarised now: He said, two things: He's warned them that if they go back they will be lost, but as it is at present, he says that he feels sure in his own mind that they are genuine believers. But Oh, if he could only have all his doubts about them and all their doubts about themselves, removed.

And that would happen if they were more like the godly men and women of years ago – the Old Testament saints.

That's a summary of verses 9-12: Two truths to tell. Truths that are frequently repeated in the letter. Go on in the faith and prove that you are real.

Next week we will find that the Apostle will underline what he has said so far with two illustrations. One is from Scripture – about Abraham and the other from daily life in the first Century and is about a ship entering a harbour.

[2053]

**May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name**

## **Two Truths Taught & Illustrated – Pt 2**

per S Olyott

Review of last week)

From verse 13 the writer of the Hebrews is going to underline the truths he has introduced up to verse 12 with two illustrations:

- One is from Scripture and is about Abraham.

Verses 13-18: Any difficulties that these verses present can be removed in the following way.

God gave Abraham a marvellous promise. Then God backed up His promise with an oath. But because there is nobody greater than God, when God took His oath He took it in His own Name, not in the name of any other. So God gave Abraham a promise and to underline, that He really meant what He said, He backed it up with an oath.

That's the way it is in the world also. Sometimes people have to make a statement of truth, but because there could be doubt that they really are telling the truth, they are obliged to take some kind of oath. It happens in the Law Courts. By and large we then believe what they say, 'under oath'. We believe what they say is true.

What was the promise that God gave to Abraham? (verse 14) *“Surely I will bless you and multiply you.”* That was God's promise. Abraham looked at his wife – it was Sarah – and she was 'barren'. Eventually he had a boy by his handmaid, Hagar. That boy was Ishmael. So Abraham thought, “O Lord, may Ishmael live in your sight. May he be the one through whom I will be greatly multiplied.” But God said, “No! He doesn't figure in my purpose.

So Abraham's faith was severely tested. God had give him this tremendous promise, backed it up with an oath and yet there seemed no human possibility. However Abraham despite – some vacillations in faith – basically continues to be God's man, He continues to trust and walk with God. Worshipping, communing with God and believing that what God said would happen. Never walking out on God he stuck to it. God had given him the promise and he put his whole weight upon it. He went on ... and on... with faith and patience.

At last Isaac was born.

Then his faith was tested again! God said, “Take the young boy and kill him!” But Abraham continued to follow God, worship God, commune with God and trust God. When he was about to kill Isaac, Isaac was spared and was received, figuratively, 'back from the dead'. At last to Isaac were born Esau and JACOB. Now the promise was well on the way to fulfilment – because as you will remember Jacob was to have 12 sons and a daughter. His name was going to be changed to 'Israel', thus his descendants would be the 'Children of Israel' – the original 'chosen people'.

But the promise was to have a much more marvellous fulfilment! Abraham was not just to be the physical father of the Jews, but the spiritual father of all believers – the elect.

The main point is that despite all the trials of his faith he went on and on – he didn't give up! He kept believing, trusting, following, communing and worshipping. He remained God's man through it all. That's the point that's being made. (verse 14) *“Surely I will bless you and multiply you.”* After he had patiently (consistently) endured, Abraham obtained the promise. Men invariably swear by the greater and an oath, for conformation, is the end of all strife.

How was it possible that Abraham could endure? He knew that God's promise was sure. God had said it! God had backed it up with an oath. Therefore he knew that the promise could never, let him down. Therefore he kept clinging to the promise. By clinging to the promise he eventually received the fruit of the promise. By patient endurance, he at last inherited the promise.

Now verses 17 & 18: <sup>17</sup> *So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath,* <sup>18</sup> *so that by two unchangeable things,<sup>9</sup> in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.* Now God's given you a promise as a Christian. God's holy character and integrity is as much resting on the fulfilment of that promise as the promise to Abraham.

God's given you a promise! The promise God gives you is as certain as the promise he gave to Abraham. So, when you hear that God invites sinners, you know that God means what He says. When God says, “I have a Saviour who is for sinners.” You know that God means what He says. When God says, “Follow Christ and you'll come safely into glory.” You know that God means what he says. The point to grasp from the argument is simply this: if you fail to get to heaven. If you fail to enter the promised 'rest', it will not be because the promise has failed. It will not be because God has let us down. It will not be because He can't keep His word. It will not be that God didn't mean what He said. It will not be that God's promise wasn't sure.

If you fail to get into the promised land, it will simply be that you failed to continue to hold on and on to the promise. It will be because you've let go. That you haven't patiently endured – come what may. It will be because you've stopped believing, what God has said. It will be because you've walked out and you've not shown the perseverance and the patience (constancy) that Abraham showed in identical circumstances. If anyone fails to arrive in glory, it's not because the promise was unsure. If anyone fails to arrive in glory it's because they released their grip of the promise.

That's what the Apostle is saying in those verses. By illustration from Scripture.

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<sup>9</sup> Two unchangeable things: the 'content' of the promise and the 'oath' that guaranteed it.

- The other illustration is from daily life in the first Century and is about a ship entering harbour. (verse 19, 20)

He's still talking about the hope we have in entering into heaven. The hope that the Christian life gives you. Which we have as the 'anchor' of the soul. Both sure and steadfast, to the inner place behind the curtain ... <sup>20</sup> *where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.*

Everyone in the first Century, Mediterranean world would have appreciated those two verses. They all knew and could picture what it meant. In every harbour of that Mediterranean Sea, about which the Roman Empire held sway, was a significant stone or rock outcrop. They can still be seen today. In some cases, where the harbour is sandy, a huge boulder has been 'manhandled' across the countryside and planted in the shore with metal rings attached to it. In other cases the harbour is in rock so the 'stone' is already there.

In every Mediterranean harbour in the first Century world there was a great 'stone' securely embedded. This stone was known in Greek as an ancora, [ἄγκυρα (ánkura)], from which we get 'anchor'. The idea was that the large vessels had their own anchors: they came into the harbour, put their anchor down and they were secure. However the small vessels had no anchor, so they came to the anchoria<sup>10</sup> (Latin).

The science of sailing was not so advanced in those days as it is today. The rudder was only just being developed and not in common use. Boats were 'steered' with oars used at the back of the vessel. The sails used could not be used into the wind (tacking). Thus when the wind was from the wrong direction the ship could not get into harbour.

When that happened one of the crew went into a rowing boat, rowing ahead into the harbour – that man was known (verse 20) as the 'forerunner'. From his rowing boat he pulled a rope which he eventually attached to the anchoria – which was *sure and steadfast* (verse 19). All they had to do on the ship once that line was sure and steadfast was to hold onto the line. Then if by patient and persistent effort they pulled on the line, the ship was drawn into the harbour, to safety: despite the counter influences around them such as an unfavourable

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10 In the ancient world, during the time of Christ, boat rudders had just been developed. It is believed that the Chinese invented them. But, before they were used it could be rather challenging to get your boat safely into the harbor when the wind was in your face. So, a number of the harbors built a large post on the land that was called an agkura. In Latin this was translated as anchoria and in English – anchor. Therefore, an anchor could mean the traditional anchor that is housed in the boat, or the secure post on the land. I believe that verse 19 is referring to the post on the land for this reason.

When a ship would come to a harbor, it would send out a small rowboat that would carry a rope, from the main ship to the agkura. The seaman would secure the rope to the agkura, which meant that the ship would now be anchored to the harbor. In spite of the wind that was in their face, all that the men on the ship would have to do is simply hold on to the rope and pull the ship toward the anchor. The effectiveness of their pulling and the certainty of their success were established by the immovability of the agkura (anchor).

wind. Provided they didn't give up they got safely into harbour – every time.

It is that illustration, so well known to his audience of the day, that the Apostle is using.

You nurse the faith which the Christian faith gives you. That hope is an anchor. It is a rock sure and steadfast. It's a faith of Divine origin and it's already within the curtain (the holy place of God – in the Tabernacle and Temple – the 'holy of holies', with the Children of Israel and now with Jesus Christ in glory on the Throne, in the great 'harbour' of heaven,)

The 'forerunner' has already got there – is home – and the 'line' has been faithfully attached to the anchor. All you have to do now, is to hold on to the hope of the Christian faith. All you have to do is never to let go. By patient and persistent effort – despite every contrary wind, which blows, if you never let go, never slacken the effort, but keep pulling on the rope you will arrive home. Everyone of you without fail. There is no need for difficulties to swamp any Christian. There is no need for special experiences to ensure that we get into heaven.

If you are lost now it will not be because the Forerunner hasn't done His work. He's already there and waiting. If you're lost now, it won't be because the anchor is insecure – it's sure and steadfast. If you're lost now, it's not because the line is unattached – it is attached. If you're lost now it will only be because you have given up – because you failed to hold on, you slackened off.

The High Priest, that's gone ahead is a High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. What that means we will have to see, God willing, next week.

(Addendum)<sup>11</sup>

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11 Some experienced pastors have recognised that constant reminders, to sincere Christians, of the need to grow and mature in the faith (as is exhorted forcefully in Hebrews) can bring a feeling of hopelessness on them.

Such Christians will not need reminding of what needs to happen in their lives to fulfil the promise that God recognises in them. The knowledge is already there. The problem is with being able to bring about the result that they and God hope for. Holy, more Christ-like lives.

The solution can be found in the earlier verse of Hebrews: (6:3) <sup>3</sup> ***And this we will do if God permits.***

This verse implies two things: that the task is difficult – as such Christians readily recognise; and it is (only) accomplished by the will and help of God.

The Old Testament record of the progress of the 'Chosen People' of Israel, shows that despite the rewards of the Covenant of God given for their obedience and the promised (and eventually delivered in the 'exile') curses of that same covenant for disobedience, by and large they failed.

The needed help that God provides has come with the Gospel, which supersedes that Covenant. The difference in the lives of 'born again' Christians who are 'in' Christ is that they, as a consequence, have His Spirit living within them. This is how God 'permits' that we will do what we genuinely desire but are exasperated to find that we fail to achieve in our own strength.

'In' Christ by His Spirit we are not alone. Though our task IS difficult, ***this we will do if God permits.***

**May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.**

## **A High Priest Forever**

per S Olyott

The Apostle has been making it plain that if your going to make useful progress in the Christian Life, you must understand what it means for the Lord Jesus Christ to be your High Priest.

He's told us earlier on in the letter, that the Lord Jesus Christ is a merciful High Priest. Very encouraging news to sinners. That He's a faithful High Priest. Then we read those most marvellous words at the end of chapter 4:

*<sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may **receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.***

Every time you've fallen, as a Christian, this past week, there's been a faithful and merciful High Priest. You've been able to come to Him for mercy. He never turns sinners away! And every time, in this coming week, when you're feeling weak; unable to cope; unable to go on; or your courage fails you, you can go again to this High Priest and always find grace to help in time of need.

One of the great secrets of the Christian Life is understanding that Jesus Christ is our High Priest.

However, three times so far in the letter, you will have noticed that the Apostle says that Jesus Christ is our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. It is this point (at last) which is explained now in Chapter 7.

The title then, of this fortnight's sermon, is: A High Priest Forever – after the order of Melchizedek.

How shall we start a study like this? Remember to whom the Apostle was writing: perhaps a Christian church like this, but all the members were Jews – having become Christians. But now they were thinking of giving up the Christian faith and going back to Judaism.

For 1500 years they and all the generations before them had looked to the tribe of Aaron – that is the Levites – to provide them with priests. Every Jew when he wanted a representative before God, went to an Aaronic priest. When he wanted to bring a sacrifice he went to an Aaronic priest. When he wanted to bring a gift to God –

likewise. But now they have become Christians and the Christian preachers have been telling these people that they no longer need the priests who are descended from Aaron. All they have to do now is treat the Lord Jesus Christ as their great High Priest.

That created a problem in their minds: Jesus was not from the priestly tribe (of Levi). The Kingly tribe was Judah and Jesus was from the tribe of Judah. They knew that Aaron had been appointed to be a priest by God. So it was a big step for them, to be told that they no longer needed Aaron or his descendants. All they now needed was the Lord Jesus Christ. A big step!

So if the Apostle is going to stop them going back to Judaism he's got to convince them that the Lord Jesus Christ has been instituted priest at God's command. And ... that He's a greater Priest than any priest descended from Aaron. A greater priest than even Aaron himself! He's got to establish that point in their minds, otherwise they are going to forsake the Lord Jesus Christ and they are going to go back to Judaism, the Aaronic priests, the Levitical ceremonies and all the rest.

So the purpose of Chapter 7 is to show to them that the Lord Jesus Christ is a superior priest, to any priest the Jewish religion can offer them.

That He is a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek and that being after the order of Melchizedek he is superior to any priest after the order of Aaron.

Many people when they want to understand Hebrews chapter 7, then go to a comprehensive commentary. Which may contain many pages and still only get as far as verse one. This can be discouraging except for dedicated scholars.

We on the other hand will not study every word and phrase exhaustively. But we will seek the central thrust of the chapter so to be clear about the 'mainstream' of the message. Basically the Apostle is simply saying five things. If we can concentrate on these the Chapter will then be of great use to us.

- Verses 1-10. Christ's priesthood is of a higher order than the priesthood of Judaism.<sup>12</sup>

Those 10 verses teach us one point: the priesthood of Christ is of a different and

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<sup>12</sup> <sup>1</sup>For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, <sup>2</sup>and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. <sup>3</sup>He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest for ever.

<sup>4</sup>See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! <sup>5</sup>And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers,[1] though these also are descended from Abraham. <sup>6</sup>But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. <sup>7</sup>It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. <sup>8</sup>In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. <sup>9</sup>One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, <sup>10</sup>for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

a higher order than the priests of Judaism.

There are two great priests in the Old Testament. Melchizedek and Aaron. Of these two priests, Melchizedek is the greater. Christ is greater than the Old Testament priests of the Jews, because as it is stated in the Psalm (110) He is a High Priest, not after the order of Levi, as they were, He is a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Now we read in Genesis 14 about Melchizedek: Abram had been to battle. He was returning. It had been a successful military campaign and he had all the spoils. As he returns, this man Melchizedek comes out to meet Abram. Melchizedek means king of righteousness, but he was actually king of Salem (which is later called Jerusalem) and he was priest of the 'Most High God'.

He comes out to meet Abram bringing bread and wine. He blesses Abram, telling him that his military success was due to God. Abram's response was to give to Melchizedek one tenth of the 'spoils' of the war.

Question: Where was Levi, when all this took place? Levi was a later descendent of Abram (Isaac; Jacob; the twelve 'sons of Israel' – Jacob. Levi was the 3<sup>rd</sup> of these sons.) Melchizedek then is obviously greater than Abram (Abraham), because he blesses him: <sup>7</sup> *It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior.* And Melchizedek is clearly greater than Levi because <sup>10</sup> *for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.*

Further, Melchizedek is clearly superior to Abram because Abram paid tithes to him. So therefore Levi, who was still in Abram's loins, effectively paid tithes to Melchizedek.

By these means it is clearly established that Melchizedek is greater than Levi. Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek, the Jewish priests were priests after the order of Levi.

Consider now verse 1: Melchizedek was at the same time a King and a Priest. Levi was only ever a priest. So Christ being after the order of Melchizedek is also both Priest and King.

Look at verse 2: Melchizedek's name means king of righteousness, but he was also king of Salem - which means 'peace'. In that respect he was a *type* – an Old Testament 'picture' – prefigurement<sup>13</sup> of the Messiah who was going to come.

Look at verse 3: When you read through the Old Testament do you read about Melchizedek's parents? No. Do you read about his ancestors? No. Do you read about his descendants? No. Do you read about his death? No. Do you

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13 To suggest, indicate, or represent by an antecedent form or model; presage or foreshadow:

read that he owed his priesthood to anybody else? No. Do you read that he passed his priesthood on to anybody else? No.

He just appears on the page of Scripture. He doesn't owe his priesthood to anybody. He doesn't give it to anybody. There's no record of his birth or his death. No record of his parents. No record of his successes and the picture that you have of Melchizedek, as a result, is a perfect prefigurement of the Son of God. Who doesn't owe His Priesthood to another, because He has it by right. And He doesn't pass His Priesthood on to another because he lives for ever!

Melchizedek, then is a *type* or prefigurement of Christ.

Verses 1 – 10 should now be clear: Christ's priesthood is of a higher order than the priesthood of the Jews. He's a priest of the order of Melchizedek, who is obviously greater than of Levi.

- The second point the Apostle is making is in verses 11 – 19: The central point here is that Christ's priesthood is more effective than that of the priests of Judaism.<sup>14</sup>

Christ can do what the Levitical priests and all the ceremonial 'washings' could not. All those Old Testament 'pictures': were to keep alive the better hope which was realised with the life, work and sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

While none were actually able to draw nigh to God by the Old Testament way, we now will, as we continue 'in' Christ.

[1475]

**May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.**

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<sup>14</sup> Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? <sup>12</sup> For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. <sup>13</sup> For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. <sup>14</sup> For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

<sup>15</sup> This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, <sup>16</sup> who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. <sup>17</sup> For it is witnessed of him, "You are a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek."

<sup>18</sup> For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness.

<sup>19</sup> (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

