



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

HEBREWS

Lesson 6

Last week we ended our chapter with the writer exhorting his readers to grow up and make some progress in their faith. They had allowed themselves to remain in a state of immaturity by only consuming the "milk" of the Word rather than partaking in solid food. They had become dull of hearing and spiritually lethargic, unable to discern good from evil. The writer continues this thought in chapter 6:1-3 and then moves on to what some consider the most "terrifying warning" in the New Testament. I like what Jeff Snell says about warnings. He wrote, "Warnings are intended to be productive, not pleasant. Let's view this material from the right perspective, though. In the midst of grave warnings is God's goodness. Good doctors tell patients what they need to hear, regardless of what they want to hear. Such is the truest expression of concern God could provide."

He goes on to say, "Biblical truth is not merely provided to help us win trivia games and solve crossword puzzles. God's truth helps us make the right decisions in everyday life. Hebrews 5:13 reinforces Paul's idea in 1 Timothy 3:16-17, reminding us that Scripture helps us negotiate the doctrinal and ethical crossroads of life. Without advancing in our faith, however, we lack the framework from which to make such decisions."

Remember to begin your study every day in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to give you spiritual understanding of the text and wisdom as you seek to apply it. Have a great week. Don't get frustrated if there are sections you don't completely understand. We are entering ground in which many have argued the meaning of for years!

First Day

1. Begin today's lesson by reading Hebrews 6:1-20. Observe the text and list the facts you find.

2. Are there any repeated words, phrases, or thoughts?
3. If you break the chapter up into sections according to the main points, how would you divide it? Give the verses of the sections and the main thought of each.
4. If you had to choose one verse as the key verse of the chapter, what would it be?
5. What would you pick as your "favorite" verse of the chapter?
6. What character are we briefly introduced to again?
7. Is the phrase "let us" found in this chapter? If so, what is the reader being encourage to do?
8. Although some of the chapter may be a bit confusing to you, what truth or thought speaks to you the most? What immediate application do you see for yourself?

We'll end here for today. I'm already excited about what's ahead, aren't you? Let's ask ourselves the hard questions that are posed in this chapter to determine whether or not we are simply growing old, or growing up!

Memory Verse of the Week: "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil..." Hebrews 6:19

Second Day

Work on your memory verse. Dwell on the truth of it.

1. Read Hebrews 6:1-20 again. Go back and focus on verses 1-3. The first word we find is "therefore." What is it "there for"? (Get it?)

As we read through this chapter, remember that verses 1 and 12 really summarize the main message: "Go on to maturity!" (NIV) and "We don't want you to become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Keep these in mind.

2. What six elementary or basic principles of the faith does the writer list?

The phrase "let us go on" can be translated "let us be carried forward." It also implies action and conveys the idea of actively exerting oneself to make progress. When we first learn to read, we are taught the ABC's. After we understand them we can move on to harder things such as words, sentences, and paragraphs. You don't "keep learning" the basics, you use them to go on to better things. This is what the writer is saying. He wanted them to build on what they already knew. The things that he lists as basics, however, give us a good indication of what the early church thought was essential to their faith. The writer doesn't explain them, but simply outlines them. F.F. Bruce wrote, "The items listed among the elementary teachings are as much Jewish as they are Christian."

3. Define "repentance." Why does the writer refer to repentance and faith as our foundation, which they had already laid? (Acts 2:38, 3:19; Mark 1:15)
4. What does verse 1 say to repent from? What does that mean?

We are called to repent from acts that "lead to death." (Dead works.) Repentance is a change of mind that results in right behavior. It means turning from something that is detrimental to our faith. No longer should we show interest in activities that lead to death or destruction. Sin brings about death, and we are to stay away from it (Romans 5:12, 21; 6:23; 7:11). Repentance must be joined with faith and trust in Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21).

Faith is a prominent theme in Hebrews. (I can't wait to get to the heroes of faith listed in chapter 11!) Kistemaker writes, "For the writer, faith constitutes complete trust as demonstrated by Joshua, who because of his faith entered the land that God had promised (4:8). Everyone who puts faith in the Gospel, says the author of Hebrews, enters God's rest (4:2-3)."

"Baptisms and laying on of hands" are the next two items on the list and have to do with "The person's relationship to the local assembly of believers." (Weirsbe) The word he uses for baptism can better be translated as "washings" or "cleansing rites." It's not the word usually used for baptism in the New Testament. Hughes writes that, "The idea here is that the Hebrew church employed the customary Jewish cleansing rites, as well as the Old Testament customs of laying on of hands, to teach the deeper, ultimate significance of Christian baptism and laying on of hands, namely the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:5; 1 Corinthians 12:13) and also commissioning and empowering for Christian service (Acts 13:1-3)." John Calvin declared that "At the time of the writing of Hebrews, after water baptism and a period of instruction in faith, believers received another rite: that of laying on of hands. This rite was intended as confirmation of their baptism and originated in the times of the apostles." Sometimes it was also used in healings (Acts 28:8).

Let's remind ourselves again that the point the writer is trying to make is that baptism is an initiatory rite and must not be regarded as fulfilling all that a Christian is expected to know or do. The laying on of hands also represents a beginning and not an end.

5. The resurrection of the dead was taught in the Old Testament (Job 19:23-27, Daniel 12:1-3) and the New Testament (Acts 24:14-15). In the New Testament, the Resurrection becomes even more significant. What does John 11:24-25 and Acts 1:22 say about it?

6. What does Paul say in 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 about Christ's Resurrection ? What does he mean?

7. The last topic on the list was "judgment" and had to do with the future. Read Acts 17:30-31 and 2 Corinthians 5:10. What do they tell us?

In order for the readers to progress in their faith, God must "permit" it or open the hearts of the people who received the instruction. They would definitely need God's help.

8. Is your faith progressing? Have you moved beyond the basic fundamentals and "actively exerted" yourself to move forward? I read a quote that said, "**Where there is life, there is growth.**" So take a look. What do you see? Maybe ask yourself the following questions:

1. Are you more knowledgeable in your faith than a year ago?
2. Do you live more wisely than you did last year?
3. Are your ethical and moral decisions based on the truth of Scripture more than they were before?
4. Can you relate the Word of God to your daily life more easily than before?
5. Is there more fruit growing in your life? Are you growing in holiness and faithfulness?

That's a lot to think about. I'm glad you have chosen to "actively exert" yourself by studying the Book of Hebrews with me. We are certainly, painfully growing! ☺

Third Day

Work on your memory verse.

1. Read Hebrews 6:1-20; then focus on verses 4-8. What is the main point of this section?

Well, this is the section that seems to make everyone nervous. There are varied interpretations of what the writer is trying to say. Is he talking about believers, and if so, does that mean they can lose their salvation? Is he talking about those like Judas, who "appeared" to be a believer but never had an authentic faith? The list of questions goes on and on. Let's begin by remembering a few things. First, the point of this chapter as well as the whole letter, is to encourage

them to move forward towards maturity. Don't look back, don't drift, keep on keeping on. This passage is talking about a person reaching a condition where they have no desire to turn back to God. **It is not a matter of God's willingness to forgive, it is a matter of the person's willingness to repent.** Also, the term "fall away" has been used in the church to describe a vast amount of spiritual conditions, so it needs to be better defined and perhaps not used so loosely to describe people.

If I may, I would like to quote from Ray Stedman's commentary on Hebrews on this section, because I appreciate the way he explains it. He wrote, "This solemn warning marks one of the greatest theological battlefields of Scripture. Here the clashing proponents of Calvinism and Arminianism have wheeled and charged, unleashing thunderous volleys of acrimony against one another, only to generate much heat and little profit. The Calvinists, mindful of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints (eternal security), seize upon the words 'It is impossible ... if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance.' 'These cannot,' they say, 'be truly regenerated Christians, no matter how strongly the descriptive phrases of verses 4-5 seem to imply they are, for otherwise they would fall away into incredible apostasy.' On the other hand, the Arminian forces focus on the descriptive phrases and say, 'It is impossible to portray true Christians any more powerfully and accurately than is done here; therefore, since they are said to fall away it is clear that regeneration can be lost after it has been obtained.' A third group of interpreters insist that the question of eternal salvation is not in question here at all, since it is only a matter of urging new Christians on to further understanding of their fellowship with Christ.' We are helped here by viewing the readers not as a homogenous group who must all be classified in one category or another. Rather, they are most likely a mixed assembly, among whom were many genuine believers needing a degree of prodding to go in their experience of truth. There were also some who professed faith in Christ but who gave no evidence in their behavior or attitudes that they were truly regenerate. Just like in churches today."

Kistemaker writes, "Theological questions about the genuineness of repentance and faith of people who fall away from Christ remain unanswered. The writer refuses to judge people, instead he warns them not to fall into the same error that the Israelites in the desert committed. He encourages his readers to grow spiritually and continue to obey God's Word."

The writer of Hebrews has already observed that disobedient Israelites died in the desert because of unbelief. They had put blood on the doorposts in

Egypt and eaten the Passover Lamb; they had left Egypt, consecrated their first-born males to the Lord, and crossed the Red Sea; they could see the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night; they had heard the voice of God from Mount Sinai when God gave them the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19-20). Yet the same Israelites hardened their hearts in unbelief, and because of their disobedience, they fell away from the living God (Hebrews 3:12, 18; 4:6, 11). Apostasy that arises from unbelief results in a hardening of the heart and an inability to repent, according to the writer of Hebrews (3:13, 4:2, 6:6, 10:26, 12:15).

Hughes believes those who fall away are not true believers, but people who appear so. I must say that I agree. Many make a profession of faith and have been received into fellowship with God's people, but later abandon their faith and even become enemies of Christ (Matthew 7:21-23). The parallel between his readers and the children of Israel in the desert is similar: They were enlightened, or had an "intellectual understanding of God's redemptive actions." Although you have to have knowledge to have faith, it doesn't always indicate that saving faith is present.

They also "shared and tasted" the Heavenly gift, which can be the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 6:4) or Jesus Himself (John 4:10). It could mean that they had shared in the Lord's Supper or had a working "knowledge" of Jesus. Also, they may have been a partaker of the Spirit by responding for a time to His "drawing power" that intends to lead people to Christ, as in a group setting when the salvation message is given. Many respond, but it doesn't mean that all who respond have a saving faith. They also may have tasted God's Word in a sense and were awed by the miracles He performed.

Jesus' parable of the soils show us that there are people who can look a lot like believers, but really aren't (Matthew 13:20). We can also look at people like Simon and Judas (Acts 8:9-24 and John 6:70). I also agree with Hughes that there are so many other Scripture references that support the doctrine of eternal security and the "keeping" of the saints. If you are interested in reading some, here is just a short list of the many: Philippians 1:6, Romans 8:38-39, Romans 8:29-30, 1 Peter 1:4-5, Jude 24-25, 2 Timothy 1:12, Ephesians 4:30, 1 John 2:19, Matthew 24:24, John 6:40, and John 10:27-28.

That was a lot to read, but hopefully made some sense to you. I don't know about you, but I plan to stay as close to Jesus as I can! I don't want to drift away because of unbelief or laziness. And I also praise God that no one can pluck me out of His hands, because I am safe in Him! (John 10:28)

2. Read Hebrews 6:4-8 again. How do you think those who fall away "crucify Him again and put Him to shame"?
3. How do verses 7-8 illustrate what the writer is saying in verses 4-6? How is this a warning with hope?
4. Take a few minutes and write your thoughts on this section. What emotions were stirred up?

Fourth Day

Are you working on your verse?

1. Read Hebrews 6:9-12. It seems like the writer reveals his pastor's heart for his readers. How does he now encourage and reassure them? What does he tenderly call them?

Although there were some readers he was trying to warn, he appears to believe that the majority of them are truly saved and wanted to exhort them to be diligent and patient and build up their confidence.

2. What "works" or "things that accompany salvation" does he commend them on? (Were they past or present works?)
3. The writer believes that a genuine faith will produce works. What does James 2:14-26 tell us about faith and works? What did Jesus say in Matthew 7:16-21?

4. "Authentic Christian life produces authentic Christian character." Explain this quote and describe some character traits and qualities that should accompany a true believer's life. Please use verses if possible.
5. Does verse 10 relate to you? Are you showing love and helping God's people? Are you showing them Christ's sacrificial love? (John 13:34-35) Do you have a "caring" lifestyle towards others? Does this verse encourage or convict you, or both?
6. How would you sum up verses 11-12 in your own words? (Does this quote help explain it? "If your faith fizzles before you finish, it's because it was faulty from the first!")
7. We know in context the writer is referring to Abraham (vs 13), but what people in Scripture can you think of who have shown faith and patience and are worthy of imitating?
8. Can you think of any people in your own life that would fit this description that have been examples to you? What have you learned from them?
9. Who is watching you? If you become sluggish, who are you in danger of stumbling or influencing? Can others put you in this category? (Are you "running hard" until the end?)

See you tomorrow, ladies! Don't be a sluggard!

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory.

1. Read Hebrews 6:1-20. Today let's focus on verses 13-20. What promise did God make to Abraham? (Read Genesis 12:1-3, 13:14-17, 15:4-5, and 22:16-17)
2. From what you know about Abraham, why does the writer use him as an example of patience? Read Genesis 12:4 and 21:5. Did he believe God's promise? How long did he wait? Also, read Romans 4:9-22.

Abraham was 75 years old when he received the promise that God would make him into a great nation in the land He would show him (Genesis 12:1-9). God appeared to him and promised to give the land to Abraham's offspring (12:6-7) and repeated that promise in 13:14-17. Abraham was 86 years old when Ishmael was born, but God told him that Isaac, not Ishmael, was the fulfillment of the promise (17:21, 21:12). Isaac was born when Abraham was 100 years old (21:5). He waited 25 years for the promise to be fulfilled, and 60 years after the birth of Isaac, Jacob and Esau were born (25:26). God tested Abraham's faith on the mountain region of Moriah by telling him to sacrifice his son Isaac, but did not require it in the end (Genesis 22).

2. Who did God swear by? Why do you think He swore?

God spoke to Abraham in human terms when He addresses him, "I swear by Myself, declares the Lord" (Genesis 22:16-17). God didn't have to swear to guarantee the trustworthiness of His Word; His Word is true, and God will keep His promise. But God adapted Himself to the ways of man and swore by Himself

(Exodus 32:13; Psalm 95:11). He is conscious of man's weak faith and wanted to give man added assurance of the complete reliability of His Word. Kistemaker writes, "The writer of Hebrews notes that man always swears by someone greater than himself; however, God has no one to excel Him. Therefore, He swore by Himself. The author constantly makes comparisons in his letter. In this instance, however, he admits, that there was no one greater than God to swear by!" God was obviously pleased with Abraham's act of faith. (Also read James 2:21-22)

3. Abraham is an example of faith, as well as hope. Why do you think the writer of Hebrews chose him in the context of this chapter?
4. Are you beginning to give up hope on a promise that God has given you? How does this section encourage you?
5. What does the phrase "the immutability of His counsel" mean, in verse 17? Who are the "heirs of promise"? (Galatians 3:29)
6. What "huge" and profound truth is taught in verse 18 and echoed in Numbers 23:19 and Titus 1:2?
7. According to verse 18, what should we "take hold" of?

As true heirs of the promise, we take hold of the hope that God offers us. We have fled as refugees and cling to the One who offers new life. God offers hope to us; it's up to us to accept it and hold on!

8. How do you and I "practically" hold on to hope? How do we appropriate it and accept it by faith?
9. Read Hebrews 6:19-20. How can hope be like an anchor? What does the

anchor do when a ship is being battered by waves?

10. Where have you placed your hope? Is it anchored in Jesus Christ? (If not, what will happen when the waves of life start to get rough?) Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if you've placed your hope in something, or someone, else.

11. The author changes metaphors, from an anchor to the veil of the Most High. Why was the phrase "enters the Presence behind the veil" so meaningful to them?

Remember that the veil was used to separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle (Exodus 26:33-35). Only the High Priest could enter on the Day of Atonement. Matthew 27:51 tells us that when Christ died, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. Hebrews 10:19-22 tells us that the veil was now Jesus' flesh, who gives us access into God's presence. These readers would be familiar with the significance of the writer's analogy, also associating the inner sanctuary with Heaven itself.

"The writer seems to single out 'hope' and encourages them to make that hope a priority in their lives. He tells them to cultivate hope, pointing to Jesus, the forerunner who has entered Heaven as High Priest and who, by His presence, guarantees them entrance. Hope is anchored in the finished work of Christ, who atoned for the sins of His people. **That is our hope:** That Christ has already entered Heaven on our behalf and stands ready as High Priest to impart comfort, strength, forgiveness, love, joy, and peace to any who flee to Him for refuge in time of trouble. Like an anchor which holds a boat steady in the midst of a storm, He can sustain and steady us when we are battered and beaten by life. He can do this FOREVER because He is of the order of Melchizedek!" (Ray Stedman) We will meet him next week!"

12. What impacted or ministered to you the most from this chapter?

