**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**Hebrews (17): The Book Of Better Things**

**“The Man In The Iron Cage,**

**And Reassuring Words of Encouragement”**

**Hebrews 6:9-12**

**April 28, 2024**

In today’s church there many people who are truly saved but live in fear that they aren’t. There are also people who are *not* truly saved and who live in the false belief that they are. The verses that we looked at in last week’s study were addressed to the latter group (Heb. 6:4-8; those who weren’t truly saved). The verses before us today are written to the former group (Heb. 6:9-12; those who are truly saved).

As we have seen, Hebrews 6:4-8 is a very sobering assessment of the unsaved “Christians” in the church. They have tasted and seen and learned much of the Christian faith, but eventually they turn their backs on Christ and take a hardhearted stand against Him. Such people, says our author, are “*crucifying the Son of God all over again*,” rejecting Him as deliberately and as publicly as His enemies did.

The warning issued to such people is alarming, to say the least. If those who have been so blessed fall away, it is impossible for them to be brought back to repentance. That’s not because God lacks the power to do so. It’s because he *refuses* to do so. This is the tragic plight of the apostate; and there’s no better illustration of this than the one we find in the Pilgrim’s Progress.

At the beginning of the story, Christian arrives at the House of the Interpreter. His host leads him on a tour of the House, room by room. Toward the end of the tour, they entered a very dark room where a man sat in an iron cage. Here’s how Bunyan tells it.

“*Now to look at him, the man seemed very sad; he sat with his eyes looking down to the ground, his hands folded together, and he sighed as if his heart was breaking. Christian asked , ‘What does this mean?’ Interpreter told him to talk with the man. Then Christian asked him, ‘Who are you?’ The man answered, ‘I am what I once was not.’ ‘What were you before?’ The man answered, ‘At one time I was a man who professed Christ and whose faith was pure and growing, not only in my own eyes but also in the eyes of others. I was, so I thought, fit for the Celestial City and even felt joy when I thought of my arrival there.’*

*‘Well, what are you now?’ ‘I am a man of despair, and I am locked up in it as I am in this iron cage. I cannot get out. Oh, I cannot. ‘But how did you get into this condition?’ ‘I ceased to watch and be sober. I allowed myself to be driven by my lusts, and I sinned against the light of the word and the goodness of God. I have grieved the Holy Spirit, and He is gone from me; I allowed an opening for the devil, and he has come to me; I have provoked God to anger, and He has left me. I have so hardened my heart that I cannot repent.*

*‘But can you not now repent and turn around?’ ‘God has denied me repentance. His word gives me no encouragement to believe. Yes, he has shut me up in this Cage, and not all the men in the world can free me. Oh, eternity, eternity, how will I ever bear the misery that I must face in eternity?’*

*Then Interpreter looked at Christian and gave him this charge: ‘Remember this man’s misery and let it be a caution to you forever.’ ‘Well, this is frightening!’ Christian responded. ‘God help me to watch and be sober and to pray that I may shun what caused this man’s misery.’”*

That’s the point the author of Hebrews wanted to drive home to his readers. It’s the real risk for all unsaved “Christians” in *today’s* church. If they begin to *drift* from the moorings of God’s word (Heb. 2:1-4), and then *doubt* the promises of God’s Word (Heb. 3:7-4:13), and then *depart* from the faith altogether, having once been so richly blessed, they may reach the point of no return (Heb. 6:4-8). Apostates cannot and will not be saved.

But in the verses before us today, our author shifts gears. He hastens to add that even though he has just spoken in this way, he is confident that most to whom he is writing were born again (v. 9). They fit into the category of the good soil (v. 7). His confidence is largely based on the spiritual fruit which he has seen in their lives (v. 10). Then he encourages them to press on to the very end, in light of the certainty of their hope, so that through faith and patience they will inherit everything that God has promised (vv. 11-12).

**A. The Word of Encouragement (v. 9):** “*Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case – things that accompany salvation*.” Yes, there is the possibility that some of their number are unsaved and might fall away. But the author is confident that most of them were truly born again. There are “better things” for them; that is, better than apostatizing from the faith (against which he has been warning them). The affectionate manner in which he addresses them also confirms his confidence in them, as well as his love for them. It’s the only time in the letter he refers to them as “*dear friends*.” But how can he be so sure that they are truly saved? Where does his confidence come from? The answer is found in the next verse, which is one of the most important verses in the entire letter.

**B. The Reason for Such Confidence (v. 10):** “*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*.” There are no less than three signs of the life-changing spiritual transformation that has taken place within the lives of these readers. They are the inevitable signs of regeneration, or the new birth.

*First*, they have a love for God’s name. What does that mean? It means they want God’s name to be glorified. They want Him to get all the praise and all the credit for every blessing they have received. They want Him to be the central focus of their worship, and their preaching, and the prayers which they bring before His throne of grace. Today, a church with this God-centered orientation is sometimes called a *vertical* church.

*Second*, their love for God’s name was evident in the “work” that they did “in serving the saints.” For them, loving God’s name *was* loving other people. The *vertical* dimension of their devotion spilled over to the *horizontal*. They wanted to be a church of compassion and love for one another, precisely because they wanted to love and glorify His name. Honoring God’s name and helping God’s people go hand-in-hand. It’s not “either/or,” it’s “both/and.”

*Third*, these were saints who didn’t simply work hard and love other Christians in the past. They “*still do*.” This was no momentary or passing commitment; they were continuing to minister to God’s people. This confirms what we have seen *repeatedly* in the book of Hebrews. The proof of genuine saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is an enduring, persevering faith. In the words of F. F. Bruce, “Nowhere in the New Testament . . . do we find such repeated insistence on the fact that continuance in the Christian life is the test of reality.”

**C. The Call to Perseverance in the Faith (vv. 11-12):** “*We want each of you to show the same earnestness* (or *diligence*) *in order to have the full assurance of hope to the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises*.” Clearly our author does not envision anyone coasting through the Christian life. His desire is for every Christian to be diligent in their love for God’s name by serving His people, in order to gain the certainty of the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. If so, then there are three important questions that we must ask of these verses.

**1Q.**  Just what is our “hope”? **A.** It is not wishful thinking about the future, which is how the world thinks of “hope.” Biblical hope is a *confident* *expectation* that what we want to come to pass *will undoubtedly* come to pass. That’s because it’s based in something God Himself has promised that He *will bring to pass*. Biblical hope is an *unshakeable* hope because it’s rooted and grounded in the faithfulness of God. As Christians, our “hope” is that God is for us, and that He will never leave us or forsake us, but rather help us and sustain us throughout the storms of life (Heb. 13:5-6). This hope is “the anchor of our soul” (Heb. 6:19-20).

**2Q.** Why must we be “diligent” in order to make our hope “sure” or certain? **A.** Because growing in the “*full assurance of hope*” (ESV, NASB) does not come automatically. It comes by being *diligent* to believe His promises, and trust His Word, and to serve His people by loving them and ministering to them. That’s how we gain a full assurance of the hope that lies before us!

**3Q.** What’s the relationship between gaining a full assurance of our hope, and living lives of “*faith and patience*” as we wait to inherit all of God’s promises? **A.** The relationship is one of cause and effect. The more we become fully assured of the certainty of our hope, the more energized we are to imitate “*the faith and patience*” of others who have gone before us. The greatest problem confronting these readers was “sluggishness,” and the antidote to their problem was to gain a full assurance of hope to the end. What the Hebrews needed more than anything else was an *infusion* of hope within their spiritual bloodstream! The same is no less true for all of us!

The greatest battle that we face every day is to stop trusting God, and to stop hoping in God! Or worse still, just start taking God for granted and think that we can coast into our inheritance of His promises. If this passage teaches us anything, it reminds us that we *will* inherit everything He has promised through faith and patient endurance. And that’s why all of us should be diligent to gain a full assurance of our hope!