



Better Things – Things Belonging to Salvation

Series: Hebrews – An Anchor for the Soul

Hebrews 6:9-12

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Pastor Nick Shelor

A “Slightly Lengthy” Introduction

I will never forget one of the most formative moments in my whole life. It happened when I was a plebe, a new midshipman, at the Naval Academy about half way through plebe summer. Plebe summer was a six week period, before the rest of the Brigade of Midshipmen returned, when everything that you thought you knew about life that you learned as a civilian was broken down and discarded and you began to be indoctrinated – and I mean that in a good way – in what it meant to be a midshipman in the United States Naval Academy.

Halfway through that grueling process, the 9th platoon commander – I was in 9th Company as a plebe – brought each of the plebes in the company into his room individually to discuss mid-summer rankings; how you stood relative to the other plebes in your company in performance. When it came time for my evaluation, I chopped – ran in a very uncomfortable, high knee kick sort of way – down to my company commander’s room, knocked on the door, and sounded off, “Midshipman 4th Class Shaffer, reporting as ordered, sir!” I took off my cover and stepped inside the room to see my platoon commander and my squad leader sitting there. “Have a seat and relax for a moment.” That should have been my first clue.

My platoon commander began by asking me how I thought I was doing. Like an idiot, I thought he wanted me to actually answer. Rather than saying one of the five prescribed and authorized responses, “I’ll find out, sir,” I said, “Permission to speak freely, sir.” He sort of looked at the squad leader and nodded slowly. And I spoke freely. I talked about how I thought I was killing it. I was performing near the top of my company – I had to be a little

humble. I was performing on the physical challenges, knew more than the other guys, always had the right answer when some other plebe answered something wrong. I had not gotten dinged once for my uniform appearance, was picking up the basics of seamanship pretty well. I was getting the hang of it just fine, thanks for asking!

That's when he looked at me and said something along the lines of, "Yeah, I had guys like that in my company when I was a plebe. Did great on the PFT, knew all the stuff they were supposed to know, looked great in a uniform, knew how to command a YP (Yard Patrol boat, like a mini destroyer with no guns), all that stuff. They thought that being a plebe was all about being the best, climbing to the top on the backs of their classmates, always trying to finish first no matter what and to stand out from the rest. Most of those guys never made it. The ones who are still here don't have leadership positions. We have taken all that into consideration and we have ranked you 32nd out of 35 plebes."

I was shocked and I'm not lying when I tell you that I was choking back tears. I put my arm out to request to shove off (that is to leave the room), but he looked at me and said, "Put your arm down, I'm not finished." He said, "I'm going to tell you this because I think you are better than that. Leadership is not about finishing first all the time; it's about making the people around you better, making the unit better. Yes, you should always try your best, but you need to make the people around you better, too. You figure that out and you listen to what I am saying, and you'll do fine but more importantly you will help your classmates to be better and you will be the kind of leader that I know you can be. I'm telling you this because I care and because I know you can be better than you are showing right now. I have seen signs of it. You've got what it takes. I believe that you can be a solid, strong, effective leader, but I need to see more from you. It's up to you to decide what you are going to do." I'll never forget that meeting. It changed my entire perspective at Navy. It was one of the most formative moments in my life.

Now why am I telling you that? Not because I like telling stories about myself when I was at Navy. In fact, I don't really talk about it much at all. But, I'm telling you this story because it relates to what we are looking at in this text in Hebrews. My platoon commander got my attention with some hard words, hard words spoken when I was going through the hardest thing I had ever experienced to that point, words I didn't want to hear and that shook me deeply, but words that made me better. And he spoke them, not to destroy me or to make

me quit, but because he cared about me and wanted me to succeed. He had seen glimmers but he wanted to see more.

He was a lot like, though in a much less significant way, the writer of Hebrews. By the time that we get to the text that we are going to focus on today, he has said some really hard things to a church that was experiencing some very challenging circumstances. There they were, facing persecution for their faith in Christ from every angle – from the Roman government, from their families, from their former friends, and from the society in which they lived. And yet, the writer of Hebrews saw the greatest issue that was facing them was actually their dullness of hearing the Word of God, their immaturity in Christ, their inability to distinguish good from evil. He is so concerned for them collectively that he warns them very pointedly that they need to repent of this growing sluggishness toward Christ and the Word of God.

And, as we read last week, in verses 4-8, he gives to them one of the strongest warnings anywhere in Scripture. **“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, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.”** (Hebrews 6:4–6, ESV) In other words, he is saying, “Listen to what I am saying to you. Heed the words of God that are coming through me. Grow up, mature, and press on. If you stay on this track that you are on, you are going to end up like the Exodus generation. If you stay on the path that you are on, it is going to prove that you never truly belonged to Christ. This path that you are travelling leads to apostasy.”

He warns them that there were some in the church who had outwardly professed faith in Christ, who outwardly appeared to be Christians, who may have had some kind of spiritual experiences, who joined in the worship of God’s people and walked with them, but who did not truly know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. At some point, either publically and vocally, or by the way that they lived and their lack of responsiveness to the Word of God, they were showing that they were decisively and conclusively rejecting the Lordship of Jesus Christ. They were failing to grow, failing to persevere and to be fruitful in their walk with Christ because they were not truly saved.

Those words were blunt and direct, hard words to hear, a bombshell. Because he loves this church, he had to speak the truth of God to them, even when it seemed severe. He knows these words are going to shake up the whole congregation – the true and the false. But his goal, beloved, is twofold. First, he wanted to lay open the hearts of the false believers who were headed toward apostasy so that they might repent of their unbelief before it was too late and they were beyond repentance. He desired that the Holy Spirit would use his words to bring them to true faith in Christ before they fell away.

But then second, his goal was that the truly faithful in the body would be shaken out of their spiritual lethargy and laziness and begin hearing the voice of God again and pursuing obedience and hope in Christ again, to return to a vibrant faith in which Christ was the center of their lives and the Lord whom they gladly and wholeheartedly served and worshipped. He does not for a moment believe that the majority -- the vast majority of them -- were apostate. They had become dull of hearing, yes, and they were weak as a result. But he gives them a spiritual “kick in the pants,” if you will to get them moving in the right direction again. His goal is not for the faithful to doubt their salvation. His goal is to get them to repent and to live out their profession of faith to the fullest. He wants them to examine themselves, for sure, but he also wants them to come around and to arrive at a place where they were assured of their salvation and standing boldly for Christ. He says so in verse 11, right? He wants them **“to have the full assurance of hope until the end...” (Hebrews 6:11, ESV)** He wants to encourage the truly believing in the congregation to be assured of their salvation in Christ.

Now before we get into this text, let me say a little something about assurance of salvation – being certain of our salvation -- so we are all on the same page. The foundational anchor of Christian assurance is that God has promised eternal life to those who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The assurance of our salvation is based in the promise that God forgives and receives as His own children everyone who comes to Him through faith in Christ. But experiencing the hope giving power of assurance of salvation, assurance that we belong to Christ is the fruit of a lifestyle of faithfulness to Christ. The modern gospel gets this wrong. Assurance is not found in simply repeating a prayer and claiming your assurance based on that prayer or “making a decision for Christ,” or “nailing it down” like some of us may have done in youth group when we wrote down our sins on a piece of paper and then nailed it to a wooden cross. It is not found in “serial rededication.” The Bible never

encourages any of those things at all. Assurance is the fruit of faithfulness to Christ. Assurance of salvation is something that we can have and that every Christian should have, but it only comes through active faith in Christ and it finds its strength and is made plain by the things that belong to salvation.

Things That Belong to Salvation (9) Look what he says in verse 9, ***“Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.” (Hebrews 6:9, ESV)*** He calls them “beloved,” a term of affection and endearment, an expression of his deep concern and love for them, and he says in essence, “Though I have had to say these hard and difficult things, I believe you are going to hear and respond to them rightly because I feel assured that the great number of you really do belong to Jesus, that you truly are saved, because I see in you the things that belong to salvation.”

In other words, when he looks at this congregation, he feels certain that they will respond rightly to his warnings because he sees in them the things that accompany real, saving faith in Jesus Christ. True salvation goes hand in hand with certain realities in the Christian’s life. There are certain evidences that accompany salvation. For instance, there is in the heart of a true Christian, real love for God. As Paul writes, ***“If anyone loves God, he is known by God.” (1 Corinthians 8:3, ESV)*** Lovers of God worship Him, and pray, and read, obey and treasure His Word. There is a fundamental change in character because a Christian is, in the words of 2 Corinthians 5:17, ***“... a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17, ESV)*** There is a corresponding growth of the fruit of the Spirit in a saved soul – ***“... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...” (Galatians 5:22–23, ESV)*** There is a new desire to live in surrender to Christ and not after the sinful desires of the flesh. Christians ***“... put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” (Romans 13:14, ESV)*** The Apostle John speaks about the evidences that lead to assurance that you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. He writes in 1 John things like: ***“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers...” (1 John 3:14, ESV)*** ***“Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.” (1 John 3:24, ESV)*** ***“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” (1 John 5:1–4, ESV)*** ***“If***

we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin... If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:7–9, ESV)

The point is that the writer of Hebrews is encouraged and he wants these Hebrew Christians to be encouraged because he has seen these evidences of grace in their lives –most of them, this fruit in their lives, evidences that give him encouragement and assurance and should give to them encouragement and assurance that their faith is sincere, though it may be flagging right now, and just needs to be invigorated.

And, see this with me, in particular he gives two intertwined reasons for his confidence – what they have shown and what he knows about God.

Two Reasons for Confidence (10) Look what he says in verse 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.” (Hebrews 6:10, ESV)*** Let’s first think about the work and the love that the Hebrew Christians had shown for God’s name. The writer of Hebrews takes a step back and says in effect, “I can see, you have demonstrated, you have shown how you love God and not the world, the genuineness of your love for Christ and for his glory and for him to be honored and loved and praised. And the way that I have chiefly seen it is in the way that you have loved and served and ministered to the saints.” He has in mind what he mentions later in Hebrews 10:32-34, where he describes how they were willing to identify with brothers and sisters who were suffering for their faith in Christ and were willing to suffer with them, enduring hardship for the sake of Christ and the gospel. He writes in chapter 10, ***“But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.” (Hebrews 10:32–34, ESV)***

What had motivated that kind of ministry? Love for God. That’s what it means to love God. We are to be so God-centered, so passionate for Him, that we are motivated to be poured out in love and obedience to Christ, for the sake of His name, right? And that love for the

Lord will always show itself in love for the saints, in ministry to our brothers and sisters, in encouragement, blessing and serving, sacrificing for the sake of the redeemed. The writer of Hebrews had seen them doing that and still doing that, and he expected to see them do so in the future, but it wasn't just he that had taken notice of them. God had too.

He says, ***God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints.*** He wants to encourage them to press on, to return to and to continue in their faithfulness and so he tells them, “God sees your work, the ways that you have served the saints, and the motivation for everything that you have done – love for His name.” From the perspective of the preacher, he is doing three things here. First, he is expressing his own confidence that God will not overlook, will not fail to reward and bless, work and acts of love that proceed from a heart that has been changed by His grace. Second, he wants to encourage his hearers by reminding them that God knows the reality of their spiritual lives and He will be faithful to bless and reward the love that He has inspired in them by His grace. And third, in an indirect way, he is getting them to do a heart-check on their motivation for their works and ministry to the saints. In other words, he wants them to make sure that they were ministering to the struggling brothers and sisters not because they were trying to earn their salvation or to prove that they were saved, but because they loved Christ, and they wanted God to be glorified. Sometimes we hear about people that “burn out” and fade away. But a great deal of what we call “burn out” is the result of doing things from the wrong motivation and not love from Christ, not maintaining and tending to our love and devotion to Jesus Christ. If we let other things steal time with God in His Word and in prayer, and if we do not direct our thoughts to His great love as shown to us at the cross, and if we have any other motivation than love for Christ as the reason that we minister, it will lead to disillusionment, disappointment, bitterness and burnout. You cannot minister from the strength of the flesh but only as an overflow of love for Christ and in the power of His Spirit. Many who “burn out” fade away.

This is the confidence that the writer has for the salvation of this flock, both the evidence in them of the things belonging to salvation and the faithfulness of God to all who are His own. How does he know them like this? Well, here's what I believe. I have come to believe in my study of this book that the writer of Hebrews is actually her pastor, who is right now writing to them from jail because of His open faith in Christ. I say that, first, because of his intimate knowledge of the church and secondly because of what he says to them in chapter 13, starting in verse 18: ***“Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be***

restored to you the sooner.” (Hebrews 13:18–19, ESV) I think he, along with some other leaders in the church, has been thrown in prison for his faith and he requests them to pray that he would have a clear conscience and act honorably – honor Christ as he should, and to pray that he would be restored to them. That word “restore” is a word that means “to be restored to an earlier condition” and I believe that earlier condition is that of pastor. That explains his earnestness, his forcefulness in his words, his longing to continue to instruct them in the faith and keep them strong in Christ, and his love for this flock. Let me just say, that if I were to write a letter like this – and obviously I can’t – but if I were, I can think of no one else to whom I could write like this but you, beloved. I just don’t have the same affection and earnest desire for another flock. And if he is the pastor of this church, it takes away the argument of “You don’t know what we are going through or how hard this is.” He absolutely does. That he is the pastor of his church, jailed for his faith, just makes sense and that explains

The Longing of this Pastor’s Heart (11-12) Look at verses 11 and 12. He says, **“And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” (Hebrews 6:11–12, ESV)** What is his heart for them? Simply this, that they would press on, in spite of the obstacles and hardships, that they would renew their fervency for Christ and for his word, that they would have the full assurance of salvation that only comes through perseverance in the faith, by God’s grace.

He wants them to press on and to be diligent, not settling for mediocrity or settling for their current sluggishness, so that their hope in Christ would be strong to the end. He wants them, like every true pastor does, to press on out of love for Christ, to know the full assurance of their salvation, and as a result to experience the joy and the peace that are alone found in close communion and fellowship with Jesus Christ. It reminds me of what Paul wrote in Romans 5 saying, **“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” (Romans 5:1–5, ESV)**

This is what this pastor wanted for this flock, so what was the plan for overcoming this sluggishness? He counsels them to overcome their sluggishness by becoming ***imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises***. He has already told them not be like the Exodus generation who fell in the wilderness and did not inherit the promises of God because of their unbelief. Now, he tells them to imitate the ones who did. Specifically, he has Abraham in mind, the father of the faithful, and we will see that next week, but let me just make this point today.

We ought to be encouraged by the truth that we are not the first to take on the challenge of the godly life, the challenge of faithfulness, the challenge of passionate and faithful pursuit, of hearing and believing God and entrusting ourselves to Him wholeheartedly. We are not the first. There are many who have gone before us and have been challenged, who have failed, who have stumbled, but who by God's grace have persevered. And we can look to those people and find examples to imitate.

You find yourself struggling and battling to leave behind the pleasures and treasures of the sinful world, to reject the longing to be approved by the world, to hold fast to and to walk according to the truth of God's Word in order to have the approval of God. You are in good company. So did Moses; learn from his example. You find yourself immersed in a culture that does not know God and you are finding it hard to be faithful to God, to be useful in this culture without becoming part of it. Daniel did too; look to his example. You find yourself in difficult circumstances, perhaps rejected by your family, all the odds seem to be stacked against you. You find yourself excruciatingly tempted by sin, perhaps have been the victim of unjust accusations and you find yourself at the mercy of God and in need of his grace. So did Joseph; follow his example. You find yourself in a situation where you are the only one that can speak the truth of God. You speak the truth in love and you are hated for it. You need God to act in power in order to open the blinded eyes and break the hardened hearts of those to whom you are testifying to Christ. Elijah did too; imitate him. You feel like you have failed to greatly, that there is no hope for you, that you have used up God's grace and you deserve whatever you have coming to you. So did Peter when he denied Christ three times, yet he found grace and forgiveness, true repentance and restoration at the feet of Jesus. Learn from his example. I could go on and on. There is nothing that we can face, that the faithful who have gone before us have not themselves faced and conquered through persevering faith and the empowering grace of God.

And if that is true of the merely human figures of the Bible, how much more true is it of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is not **“unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”** (Hebrews 4:15, ESV) The one of whom it is written, **“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him,”** (Hebrews 5:7–9, ESV)

Let me put it this way. There is no trial, no hardship, so tribulation, no sorrow, no difficulty, no temptation, no struggle, no persecution and no sacrifice that we can face of which it cannot be said, “Jesus was here... and He conquered.” Look to Jesus, in whom we find mercy and grace to help in time of need, the energizing and sluggishness-defeating grace to walk faithfully with God, through whom we find the strength to persevere in faith and inherit all the promises of God.

Look to Jesus, beloved, remember the gospel of grace, your salvation, remember the faithfulness the sacrifice of Christ demands of your own life, and press on.

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