

HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part twenty-nine

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WHY NO RELIGIOUS DEVOTION WITHOUT JESUS CAN GET YOU INTO HEAVEN

Hebrews 8:1-5 - "Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, [2] a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. [3] For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. [4] Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. [5] They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain."

This text gains impact when we reconsider our writer's original audience. His heart is troubled when he sees the potential diluting of the faith of these Jewish believers. These followers of Christ have not yet changed their minds about Jesus, but the language of this letter hints they were weakening in faith. They had family and friends - and their previous religious associations - all urging them back into their Judaic faith.

There is a New Testament urgency to the exclusivity of commitment to Christ alone that is missed by our inclusive religious culture - **Galatians 5:4** - "You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace."

We may wonder why our writer keeps going over the same ideas in this letter, but you would too if someone you loved - perhaps someone you had led to the Lord - was being drawn away from gospel faith and gospel truth. Remember, our writer isn't trying to compose sermon texts for worshipers at Cedarview Community Church. He's trying to rescue the perishing. He's trying to rekindle and preserve gospel faith in his beloved hearers. And this passion drives us directly into our first point:

1) **BIBLICAL TRUTHS AREN'T RECEIVED MERELY IN THE HEARING OF THEM**

Hebrews 8:1-2 - "Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, [2] a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man."

Even a casual glance at these verses reveals they aren't a new subject for our writer. At best this is a *restatement* of what he's already written in rather lengthy explanations.

What *is* important in the very first phrase of these verses is the way it maps out the *purpose of Biblical truth in our hearing of it*. Our writer hasn't changed subjects yet because he's not sure his lengthy explanation of the priestly ministry of Jesus has made *the impression it needs to make on their minds*.

When does spiritual hearing actually take place? What is the *goal* of hearing revealed truth? Our writer's audience would have this letter to read, sure enough. And the explanation of the greater priestly ministry of the Christ has been presented in detail. But does the doctrine as presented *capture the attention it deserves*? That's the issue being flagged in that opening phrase - "Now the point of what we are saying is this...." (8:1a).

But what is our writer worried about? Does he not trust his words thus far? Yes he does. He knows he's explaining inspired divine truth. But he also knows the explanation has been *long*. And he knows his explanation has been *involved*. We're reminded not all important truth is *simple* truth.

There's something else our writer knows. He knows he's comparing the priestly ministry of the Christ with the *old* priesthood, which was *visible* and *tangible* and *colorful*. Everyone could *see* all those Old Testament priests with their flowing robes and golden breastplates and fragrant incense. So our writer knows he's asking his readers to *reject* that tangible, visible priesthood and *embrace* the priestly ministry of Jesus, which *no one* could see or smell or touch. We are more influenced by what we *observe* - what we can *touch*, and *taste*, and *put into our wallets*

So the lengthy nature of the explanation, the complication of the subject, and our natural, fallen inclination towards the *visible* over the *spiritual* all work to lessen the *impact and impression* of this divine revelation of the heavenly priesthood

of Christ.

Our writer feels the urgency of his letter. He knows - and we need to know - the subject of this text is not just some information **about** Christianity. It is the heart of what Christianity **is**. It is why the Bible you carry to church has **two** testaments rather than just **one**. It's the explanation for **why we don't see Jesus anywhere on earth right now**. **Where** did He go? And **why** did He go. And what is He **doing**? It's why we all gather on **Sunday** rather than the **Sabbath**.

Our writer knows how easy it is to **hear Biblical truth** without **hearing it right through**. Our writer isn't content to explain truth without that truth **making an impression** on his readers. That's his main concern. There is nothing **faith-sustaining** in hearing truth - even **agreeing** with truth - merely as a point of some kind of religious **download**.

It's not just **knowing** divine truth. It's divine truth leaving a lasting **impression** - **"The point of what we are saying is this...."** (8:1). In the same way you can **hear an entire joke** and not **get the punch-line**, or, in my case, **watch a whole movie with Reni** and not **get the ending** - it's very common for people to **hear divine truth** without getting the **point** - seeing the **magnificence** - and being impacted by the **implications** of what they've so frequently heard.

The great **C. S. Lewis** scholar, **Clyde Kilby**, expressed incredible insight and great theology when he said, **"One of the great tragedies of the fall is the way it makes us tired of familiar glories."**

All Christians wrestle with this. It's like moving to Switzerland and being struck breathless with the view of the Alps and then, after six months, not even looking out your window. Our writer is concerned his readers are going to be drawn away from Christ and back into Judaism, not because they don't **know** better, but because they haven't **remained passionately impressed** with what they have heard about the ongoing priestly ministry of Christ.

When you think about the proper reception of divine truth you will see examples in the Scriptures you may have missed before. I only have time for one example - but it's a priceless one:

1 Peter 1:23-2:3 - **"...since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; [24] for 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, [25] but the word of the Lord remains forever.' And this word is the good news that was preached to you. [1] So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. [2] Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— [3] if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good."**
It's easy to miss what just happened in these verses. Did you catch it? It's a great passage on the preciousness of God's Word. It's **"living and abiding"** (2:3), and it **"remains forever"** (2:5), and it was **"preached"** to the people by the Apostles (2:5). Because of all these benefits it is **by the word** they will grow up into salvation - **"...that by it you may grow up into salvation"** (2:2). The **"it"** is the word preached to them (1:25).

So far, so good. And you would think the apostle would then say they have **"tasted that the word is good"** (2:3). But he doesn't. He says they have **"...tasted that the Lord is good"** (2:3). What they were to be savoring and tasting in the Word preached to them was not just the **goodness of the word**, but the **goodness of the Lord through the Word**.

It's easy to **not** do this. It's easy to **not** approach the Word like a **deer panting after flowing streams** - **Psalm 42:1** - **"As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God."**

The prophet Isaiah describes an approach - **not** to false teaching or idols, but an approach to **the word of the Lord** - that results in nothing but **distance** between the heart and God - **Isaiah 29:13** - **"And the Lord said: 'Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men....'"**

These people were spiritual **reductionists** who heard truth without **treasuring** God in what they heard and **fearing desperately** what they weren't applying.

I've taken too long on this opening point. But let me sum up with this exhortation. This is not a **small** point. It's massive in the life of your own soul. Develop the hard work of **meditating on divine truth until you sense it changing your life lens**. By that I mean I have learned divine truth too lightly until I **treasure what I see to the point that I can enjoy nothing else in life without it**. And, in the same way, **study every caution and warning in God's Word until you fear nothing else more than**

neglecting it.

When you pray, pray for these two things. Pray for the opening of the eyes of your heart. Pray you will always read Scripture with an eye to *seeing the point - the preciousness - the weight* of what you read.

2) **THE PRINCIPLE OF THE TABERNACLE WORSHIP NEEDS TO BE APPLIED TO THE HEAVENLY PRIESTLY MINISTRY OF CHRIST**

Hebrews 8:1-5 - "Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, [2] a minister in the holy places, *in the true tent that the Lord set up*, not man. [3] For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. [4] Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. [5] *They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.* For when Moses *was about to erect the tent*, he was instructed by God, saying, *'See that you make everything according to the pattern* that was shown you on the mountain.'"

It seems strange after telling us repeatedly that the Old Testament priestly approach to God was *"weak and useless" (7:18)*, and *"made nothing perfect" (7:19)*, our writer would quote these verses in chapter 8 where God insists everything about the tabernacle worship be done exactly to divine specifications - **Hebrews 8:5** - "They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was *instructed by God*, saying, *'See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.'*"

The point of these words is there is something about the pattern of the tabernacle worship that *reflects an eternal reality* that people might easily forget - or worse - willfully deny. And God divinely constructs a whole passing priestly/sacrificial system which, while never capable of removing sin - still made the eternal point that *God had to be approached in His prescribed way.*

Here's what we know for sure about the tabernacle and the priests and the Temple that would follow. If anyone other than a Levite offered the sacrifice it was an abomination. And if a Levite offered a sacrifice *in another location* other than the tabernacle it was an abomination.

And that whole system was designed to pre-define the eternal reality that the coming **Lamb of God** was God's appointed sacrifice and High Priest. There were no other options for sinners making approach to a holy God.

Don't miss the wisdom of progressive revelation here. The pattern of God's revelation is designed to disarm the constructed rationalizations of fallen mankind's proposed tolerance ignoring both human sinfulness and divine holiness. Human contrivance for what God might accept is eliminated under *both* covenants. Human opinion is dethroned in both covenants. Political correctness is divinely shunned under both covenants.

All of those divinely appointed shadows are fulfilled in the one Redeemer/High Priest, Jesus, the Christ - **Colossians 2:17** - "These are a shadow of the things to come, but *the substance belongs to Christ.*"

Our writer's theme has remained the same since his opening theme in **Hebrews 1:1-3** - "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2] but in these last days *he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed* the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. [3] He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...."