



18: Warning And Reassurance

The writer of the book of Hebrews has been giving his readers a very strong warning. He's said, you're baby Christians: you need to be taught the basics all over again. But instead of teaching them those basics he's said he's going to press on. He's as much as said, there's no point in going over the same things another time for if someone who's already been enlightened and seen the Holy Spirit at work falls away he can't be restored. By turning his back he's totally and publicly rejected Jesus: he's as good as said he got it all wrong and he'll have nothing more to do with Jesus.

A very strong warning indeed, and now the writer is about to reinforce it with an illustration from nature.

"For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.

But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

Hebrews 6:7 – 20

An Illustration

Imagine a plot of ground that's been thoroughly irrigated. If it produces useful crops it has been blessed by God but if it only produces good-for-nothing-but-burning weeds it's rejected and it's in danger of being cursed. The illustration is reminiscent of the vineyard song of Isaiah 5:1 – 7 and that's probably what it would have brought to the minds of the first readers of the book of Hebrews. The point is not hard to see. If that's true of a field how much more will someone who has been well-fed from God's word and yet produced nothing useful be rejected and in danger of being cursed?

Some people have been taught and understood the basic principles of the faith, they've seen the Holy Spirit at work, they've put their teaching and experience to use, they've built on what they've received, they've grown and they are living fruitful lives. Others have had the same teaching and enjoyed the same experiences and gone nowhere with it and they're in danger of being rejected, and destroyed in the end.

It's worth noticing the tenses of the verbs in verses 7 and 8. The rain *keeps coming down* on the land. The land drinks *all* of the rain it receives. The land either *produces and keeps on producing* fruit or *produces and keeps on producing* weeds. Notice too, of the unproductive land he only says it is "near to being cursed."

- ◆ *What does the writer mean when he says the land that "bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God"?*
- ◆ *What are the implications of this illustration for you?*

How Can I Be Sure?

It's hardly surprising that in verse 9 the writer turns to the burning question his warning has left in all our minds. "How can I be sure if I'm saved at all?"

"But, beloved..." Starting with an expression of his love for his readers the like of which isn't found anywhere else in the book of Hebrews, he asserts that in spite of everything he's said he remains convinced of better things concerning them. He reassures them. He's convinced. There is evidence that they are saved.

In verse 10 he says what it is that has him so convinced. He's convinced that they're saved because of two things. One, God is just and so will not forget their work. Two, they have been, and continue to be engaged in acts of service for their fellow believers: they have "ministered to the saints, and do minister." What's more, and I think this is important, those acts of service have been done as a "labour of love toward His name;" In the writer's mind then love for God expressed in acts of service to His saints is a hallmark of genuine salvation.

- ◆ *What are the implications of verse 10?*

You Must Persevere

But even though he's reassured them, the writer doesn't want his readers to think that his warning couldn't apply to them. There's still reason for them to be concerned. He warns his readers to be sure not to drift away from loving God and servicing His saints. He tells them they must persevere in those things right to the end of their lives lest they become sluggish (remember sluggish is where this warning started: chapter 5:11). They could yet end up among those who fall away and fall short of the promises.

So he urges them to press on, persevering in faith and with patience right to the end, not letting up until the promise of heaven has been attained.

- ◆ *In the light of this passage, how would you answer someone who asks, "How can I be sure I am saved?"*

The Promise Is Sure

In verses 13 to 19 there's more reassurance. We're reminded of the example of faithful perseverance that Abraham set, but the main point is to remind us how sure the promise God made to Abraham and has confirmed to us, the heirs of salvation, is.

God not only made a promise to bless Abraham, He confirmed His promise with an oath. And because there is nothing greater than God that God could swear by He swore that oath by Himself. In effect He said, this promise is as unchangeable as I am: if this promise should fail then God is not God. So the promise was guaranteed by two things that are unalterable: God's word and God's nature and what promise could be better guaranteed than that?

The promise of blessing made God to Abraham was for everyone who would inherit salvation. It's for every believer for all time. It's for us too.

Abraham persevered — patiently endured all that he did — and remained faithful to God on the strength of that promise. It was a “strong consolation” to him and it should be to us, to enable us to remain faithful to God with patient endurance.

We live in hope of the fulfilment of God's promise of blessing. It was the hope of that promised blessing that drew us to seek refuge in Christ and now the certainty of that hope is a sure, steadfast anchor for our souls that enables us to persevere and remain faithful.

- ◆ *How might you use and build on the teaching of verses 13 to 19 to help someone who is struggling to persevere through a time of hardship?*

With a clever twist at the end of the chapter the writer finishes his warning having brought us full-circle back to the point where it started. He has teed himself up to press on with that difficult to understand teaching about Melchizedek and Jesus' High Priesthood.