Jesus is Better 5

Hebrews 5 v 11 - 6 v 20
This passage seems to be a temporary diversion from the theme of Jesus as Great High Priest. As a person who occasionally (!) likes to "go off on one" it is encouraging to see that the writer to the Hebrews seems to do just that as he interrupts his thoughts on the Great High Priest after the order of Melchizedek with some advice about the trouble some of his readers might be experiencing.

It would seem that the letter was written to Christians - possibly but not certainly - in Rome, during a time of persecution. History tells us that there were two serious persecutions of Christians during the first century AD. One local and the other more widespread. In the early AD 50's Claudius expelled all the Jews (including those who had become Christians) from the city of Rome but in the reign of Nero (Claudius' successor) there was a much wider persecution of Christians. Nero died in 68 AD. It is likely then that the book was written sometime between AD 55, when we think Paul's letter to the Romans was written and AD 70 when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. Reference is made to "remember your leaders" as if some of the 'founders' of the church might have already died, and to remember the rituals of the Temple that clearly had not yet been destroyed.

After that diversion let's look at the diversion from **Chapter 5 v 11 to Chapter 6 v 20**. It would seem to fit in nicely with the theme of not falling away, especially since God's promises are always for certain when all around seems so uncertain - ring any bells? There is more than a gentle chiding here. These Christians should by now be more mature than they seem to have been. They were still 'spiritual babes' who were not really able to distinguish between good and evil or understand righteousness. Chapter 5 v 11 - 14.

Chapter 6 begins with another 'therefore'. This time it is a challenge to move on in commitment and personal training; their spiritual fitness regime. During lockdown we have a wonderful opportunity to deepen our understanding, to grow in our relationship with God and to develop our involvement with church. More about that later in our series.

Now we come to a really difficult idea. It would seem that there is a possibility of losing one's inheritance by falling away. Verses 4 - 6. It might be that this is the inevitable conclusion of the earlier argument about entering into a Sabbath rest. (See Study No. 3.) Land that drinks in the rain and produces a crop is blessed but land that doesn't use the resources poured out upon it and doesn't produce a crop is likely to be burned up - destroyed! A very solemn thought.

Nevertheless there is an important message for us from this. Instead of lamenting over the misspent resources it is good to encourage and bless each other. There have been some examples of both bad and good practice in this regard during the media coverage of the coronavirus crisis that affects the whole world now. I like Jeff Lucas' illustration at Spring Harvest this year. His golfing prowess is 'seriously limited', he says. After a particularly wayward tee shot his playing partner congratulated him - not for the result, but that he had hit the ball! Here in verses 9 - 12 we have a similar ministry of encouragement, encouragement that leads to diligence and effectiveness in the Hebrews Christian walk with God. Why?

Because God's promise is sure and certain. Verses 13 - 20. Clearly there is no-one greater than God so He swore 'by Himself' to Abraham that He would bless him. Two unchangeable things 1. Himself and 2. His oath. Abraham accepted the promise and after time (quite a long time) he received the promise through the birth of Isaac. The challenge, then to any who are thinking of 'giving up' under trying circumstances and in difficult times is to remember their roots, move on in their commitment, even when it involves a real struggle and to win through to receive God's commendation and promise. In other words, make sure your anchor is laid firmly upon Jesus (who is better) verse 19 for it is this that will benefit your soul. - Now, let's get back to Melchizedek!

During lockdown are you finding it difficult to maintain a routine? Try to find encouragement from studying the scriptures or simply reading a whole book (Mark is a good one to start with) straight through. You might be surprised where your encouragement comes from. We had a hilarious video from one of our neighbours! Look out for opportunities to bless and encourage others too.