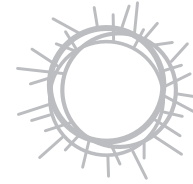


Forgiven





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RESURRECTION MEDITATIONS
FROM THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

TIM CHESTER

10 Publishing
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Introduction

We live in uncertain times. We've discovered how an unknown illness can turn our world upside down out of the blue. Our society is changing rapidly and many of us feel left behind. Older people can't keep up with dramatic cultural shifts while young people have little prospect of economic security.

Into this mix come our own personal challenges – our fear, guilt, shame and insecurity. Every sin we commit makes us wonder if we have a future with God. Every wrong we receive makes us wonder if he cares.

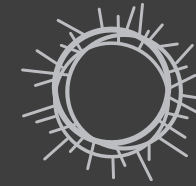
How can we face the future with confidence? The writer of Hebrews reassures our fearful hearts by pointing us to the Lord Jesus. One of his favourite words is '*confidence*'. He invites us to find in Christ the confidence of a clear conscience (9:14; 10:22; 13:18) and the confidence to approach God (4:16; 7:19; 10:19, 22; 13:6).

The opening chapters of the letter explore the *identity* of Jesus. They show how Jesus is the final word from God (1:1–2), the heir of all things (1:2), the creator of the universe (1:2), the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being (1:3), the king who is superior to angels (1:5–13), the true humanity (2:5–9), the pioneer

of salvation (2:10), and our faithful high priest (2:17–18; 4:14–5:10). Above all, Jesus is the eternal Son of God (1:2). That was the focus of the precursor to this book, *Fixated: Advent Meditations from the Book of Hebrews* (10Publishing).

The second half of Hebrews explores the *work* of Jesus. The letter describes what Jesus has accomplished along with he continues to be doing now that he has ascended into heaven. The writer invites us to find deep assurance in the finality of Christ’s work on earth. His sacrifice was ‘once for all’ (7:27; 9:12, 26; 10:11). So there is nothing left to be done and nothing that can become undone. The writer also invites us to find deep assurance in the on-going work of Christ. Christ remains as committed to us as ever. His forever intercession as our high priest secures our salvation forever.

So Hebrews 6–13 will be the focus of this book. It offers a great way of approaching Easter by inviting us to look deeper at the cross and find a new confidence to face the future.



Chapter 1

Jesus is the Firm Anchor (Hebrews 6)



Imagine a university student who can't read or a teenager living on baby food. Or imagine a soccer player who keeps wildly kicking at the ball rather than picking out a good pass. This is how the writer describes his readers:

- they are like pupils who have never got beyond the basics (5:12)
- they are like children who still live on milk (5:12–13)
- they are like athletes who never bother to practice (5:14)

It's not that they're stupid. The problem is 'you no longer try to understand' (5:11). The same word is used again in 6:12 where it's translated 'lazy'. They're not learning because they're distracted by other things. Jesus has slipped down their list of priorities.

It's time to move forwards, says Hebrews: 'Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity (6:1). The writer describes the ABCs of Christianity that his readers ought to have under their belt. 'Cleansing rites' (literally 'baptisms') and 'the laying on of hands' are probably references to baptism and church membership. And 'cleansing rites' are plural because for his Jewish readers this 'instruction' would include how baptism supersedes Old Testament cleansing rites. So the elementary teachings are:

- repentance and faith – the *internal* responses we make to Christ
- baptism and church membership – the *outward* responses we make to Christ

- resurrection and judgment – what's at stake when we respond to Christ

Now the writer exhorts us to beyond 'Christianity 101' and take a class in '*maturity*' or more literally '*perfection*' (12:1). We're to move towards perfection. Does it mean we've got to be perfect? No, that's an impossible standard. This letter is littered with references to perfection. Hebrews talks about Jesus as a 'perfect' priest' (7:28) who enters a 'perfect' sanctuary (9:11) through a sacrifice that makes 'perfect' (10:1). So this is not a call to live a perfect life. It's a call to press deeper into Christ. Moving forward to perfection means 'fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and *perfecter* of faith' (12:2).



Reflection

Is it time for you to move forwards in some way?



The interpretation of verses 4–6 is much disputed. Some people think they show Christians can forfeit their salvation. Because elsewhere, the Bible teaches that God will keep his people to the end (Phil. 1:6; Jude 24), other people argue that warnings like this are one of the ways God keeps us. But I think the writer is describing people who have experienced God in some way without ever truly turning to Christ in faith and repentance. Perhaps they've understood the message ('been enlightened') or taken communion ('tasted the heavenly gift') or been miraculously healed ('shared in the Holy Spirit') or been moved by a sermon ('tasted the goodness of the word of God'). But they've never personally entrusted themselves to Christ.

Verses 7–8 echo the parable of the sower (Mk 4:1–20). Sometimes the seed of God's word falls on rocky ground or among thorns. Initially it springs up. But it withers when troubles come or is overwhelmed by the attractions of this world because it's never really taken root in a person's heart.

A Satnav will often give you two or three possible routes to your destination: a route without toll roads, perhaps, or one with fewer turns. But there is no alternative route that avoids the need for faith and repentance. If you reject faith in Christ then there is no option B. There is no other way to be saved.

It's a sombre warning to entrust yourself to Christ in faith and submit your life to him in repentance. It's no good hanging around the fringes of church life. It's no good relying on the faith of your parents or spouse. You need to make your own decision to follow Christ. And coming to the front at a meeting many

years ago counts for nothing if you're not living a life of faith and repentance today.

But if you have entrusted yourself to Christ then there is no need to worry. Your salvation does not hang in the balance. The writer says to his readers: 'we are convinced of better things in your case – things that have to do with salvation' (v. 9). He's going to give them even more reasons to reassure them in verses 13–20.



Reflection

Through 'faith and patience' we will 'inherit what has been promised' (v. 12).