

Sunday October 28th 2012
The Letter to the Hebrews
Part Sixty Three

1). Heb 2:5 ¶ *For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. 6 But one testified in a certain place, saying: "What is man that You are mindful of him, Or the son of man that You take care of him? 7 You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, And set him over the works of Your hands. 8 You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him.*

a). The Book of Hebrews is a Book as we have seen through our study that has its focus upon a particular time – a time that is explicitly stated in v5 – ‘the world to come’ – or more correctly ‘the age to come’, the Millennial Kingdom of Christ.

b). But it is not just this future time that is its focus, it is also the role to be played by God’s creation, Man, within this time. In the Book of Genesis at the time of Man’s creation this role was made abundantly clear - Ge 1:28 *Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion.....*

c). And it is clarified still further here in our verses from Hebrews Chapter 2 - *7 You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, And set him over the works of Your hands. 8 You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him.*

d). God’s purpose for Man then is to rule over the earth with God’s Son – but we see from the final sentence of v8 - *But now we do not yet see all things put under him.*

e). That Man is not presently ‘ruling’ over the earth, despite what he might think, no, this still awaits a future day.

f). Throughout Man’s history God has given revelation to those with ears to hear concerning positions of rulership in the heavenly realm of His Kingdom and those who have heard have focused their attention on that coming future Day and organized their lives accordingly.

g). Heb 1:2 *has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;* This same revelation is now being made to Christians – those in this dispensation who have passed from death to life and now have the opportunity to avail themselves of God’s promises.

2). Rulership in Christ’s Kingdom though is not automatic - Heb 2:10 ¶ *For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.*

a). Becoming a child of God, passing from death to life, does not of itself qualify us to rule – rather we are in the process of becoming qualified as God Himself – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – works in us to ‘bring many sons to glory’.

b). But again this is not automatic and Christians have every opportunity to refuse to participate with God in this qualification process thereby relinquishing their right to rulership in the age to come –

Php 2:12 ¶ *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*

c). And it is with a view to ‘working out our own salvation’ so that we might ‘do for His good pleasure’ that the writer of Hebrews draws from the experiences firstly of Israel as a nation following the Exodus from Egypt, and then from OT saints, beginning in the earliest days of Man’s history, in a more specific sense.

d). And from the experiences of the nation of Israel out of Egypt we are presented with a series of cumulative warnings that have to do with our potential to refuse that which God has offered us with respect to rulership in the age to come – the potential we have to ‘draw back to perdition’.

e). These warnings have to do with - Heb 2:1 ¶ *Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.*

f). Heb 4:11 ¶ *Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.*

g). Heb 6:4 *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance,*

h). Heb 10:26 *For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,*

i). Each of these move us forward to the fifth and final warning in Chapter 12, a warning that brings us to the ultimate refusal of God's promises – the despising of our birthright.

j). The Day is coming when that seen in Romans 8:19 will become a reality - Ro 8:19 *For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.*

k). And as we have seen we may or may not be revealed as one of 'the sons of God'.

l). But the Book of Hebrews is not just a Book of warnings but a Book of enormous encouragement; and although we have seen the failure of the first generation of Israel to come out of Egypt we also see the success of the catalogue of OT saints in Hebrews Chapter 11.

3). 'By faith Abel'...'By faith Enoch'.....'By faith Noah'..... – this phrase 'By faith' is used no fewer than 18 times in this Chapter and what we will note is that from the earliest days of man on the earth, beginning with Abel, there have been those individuals who have heard that which God has said about a heavenly country and a city with foundations, those who have believed what they heard and have focused their lives on the heavenly calling, disregarding the things of this age.

a). And the faith that they exhibited is faith to the saving of the soul – faith with regards to laying down their lives in the present so that they may take their life up again in the future. Perhaps it would be helpful for us to add this phrase to our reading, just so that we may grasp its significance - 'By faith to the saving of the soul' Abel, Enoch, Noah – and the rest.

a). And even though that which God had promised with respect to this remained thousands of years in the future for them, God's promise, only visible 'by faith' was the greater reality that shaped the whole course of their lives – Heb 11:13 *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.*

b). And last week we had seen how faith to the saving of the soul for these individuals had resulted in very different outcomes - Heb 11:33 *who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.*

c). Heb 11:36 *Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—*

d). Now the point that we should immediately see here is that irrespective of the circumstances these individuals found themselves and irrespective of what their faith then required of them they continued to live 'by faith' – they did not turn back, turn away or accept deliverance – they kept their eyes focused on what lay out ahead – 'a better resurrection' and an inheritance in the New Jerusalem.

e). For ourselves there is an obvious lesson – the circumstances of our lives in the present are not the issue, what may come our way because of what we have believed is not the issue - but our faith with regards to the promises of God yet future is everything.

f). Let's remember - Heb 11:6 *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

g). Ac 20:23 *"except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. 24 "But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy,*

h). Heb 10:32 *But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: 33 partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; 34 for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. 35 Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.*

4). Hebrews Chapter 12 then brings all that has gone before, both the encouragement and warnings, to conclusion –Heb 12:1 ¶ *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance*

the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. 4 ¶ You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against [the] sin.

a). The opening words of this Chapter ‘Therefore we also’ immediately connects our own pilgrim journey with the experience of the OT saints we have just studied – ‘Therefore we also’, should live by faith just as they did – ‘Therefore we also’, should have the same level of commitment and the same level of determination as they had – ‘Therefore we also’, should reject what this world has to offer and to lay down our lives, even to the point of death if necessary, just as they did.

b). And we have encouragement that this is something we can do, ‘since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses’. This great cloud of witnesses are the very OT saints from Hebrews 11 – and clearly through the use of the words ‘so great a cloud’ there is a very considerable number of them as we might expect over 4000 years of human history – but we should keep in mind that no matter how large this group is it is significantly smaller than the number who had not lived as they did.

c). Now this great cloud are not witnesses in the sense of being spectators watching us in our race of faith, but rather they are witnesses to the fact that it is absolutely possible for ordinary people with a sin nature and a redeemed spirit to be successful in this race if they will trust God, they themselves being the proof positive of this.

d). Now although none of these have received their reward yet, and although none have been given a position of rulership yet, we can know categorically, without a doubt, by the context of their inclusion in Chapter 11 and the commendation God has given them - Heb 11:39 *And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, -* that they were successful in completing their race, and in that coming day they will receive the salvation of their soul and a position of rulership in the heavenly realm of the Kingdom just as Christ had prophesied - Mt 8:11 *"And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.*

e). They would have had the same certainty at the end of their lives that we see Paul expressing at the end of his life in - 2Ti 4:7 *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for*

me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

f). Do we desire to have this same degree of certainty having achieved this same level of success?

g). Well if we do let's go back to the beginning of Chapter 12 again and follow the instructions we are given there.

5). Heb 12:1 ¶ *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance [lit. patient endurance] the race that is set before us,*

a). We will see from our verse here that in order to run this race of the faith successfully we need to 'lay aside every weight', lay aside 'the sin which so easily ensnares us', and 'run with endurance the race that is set before us'.

b). Our pilgrim journey is likened to a race so that we may understand that it is a contest that requires effort and a contest that requires patient endurance. This is not a short race, but a race that extends throughout the whole of our Christian life – this is not a race that you take a break from, nor is it a relay race – this is us against the clock, so to speak.

c). Paul also makes reference to this race in - 1Co 9:24 ¶ *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. 25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. 26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. 27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*

d). And here in 1 Corinthians 9 we see that this race must be run in a certain way – a theme continued in - 2Ti 2:5 *And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.*

e). Now there are many things that can get in the way of running this race of the faith successfully and these are the things described in Hebrews 12:1 as weights. These are not literal weights and are not necessarily sinful in themselves, but should be understood as anything that gets in the way of our progress in the race of the faith – these could be circumstances, lifestyle, mindsets and even people.

f). Anything that dulls or deadens our sensitivity towards spiritual things, that keeps us out of the Word and from being continually filled with the Spirit can only be a hindrance to us and will prevent us from giving our

maximum effort, maybe even causing us to abandon the race if it goes unchecked.

g). What these weights are may well be different for each of us individually but, it is incumbent upon us to recognize what our weights are and then choose to lay them aside – and not to pick them up again later.

h). In the Parable of the Sower in Matthew Chapter 13 and Luke Chapter 8 the Lord identifies 3 areas that would be the kind of weights to hinder us in our race - Mt 13:22 *"Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.*

Lu 8:14 *"Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.*

i). So then, we see ‘the cares of this world’, ‘the deceitfulness of riches’ and ‘the pleasures of [this] life’.

j). Those sown amongst the thorns are in a position to produce fruit but one or more of these three areas conspire to block their fruit production making them unfruitful.

k). And the time and place we find ourselves in, at the end of this dispensation, is maybe a time when the ‘thorns’ abound in profusion. God told Adam, fallen man - Ge 3:17 ¶ *Then to Adam He said, "Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. 18 Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. 19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground,*

l). ‘The ground’ – the present world system under Satan can only produce thorns and thistles – but these do not need to be a hindrance to us, depending on how we handle them - Heb 6:7 *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;8 but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.*

m). The thing about thorns, thistles and briars in the natural is that they can easily snag you and can be very painful – and it is no different to thorns, thistles and briars in the spiritual. The difference in the spiritual though is that we choose to be snagged. These thorns can be very attractive.

n). The sharpest around at the moment is politics – but we are on a consistent and continual basis bombarded by the commercial world with all that we must have in order to have our best life now – what we deserve that is

going to make us happy – and Christians in their millions rush after these things.

o). Now we also need to know that there is nothing whatsoever wrong with certain activities in the world, such as having the riches seen in Matthew 13, but this, along with anything else for that matter, becomes a problem if we are so wrapped up in it [its deceitfulness] that it hinders our progress in the race. When this happens it becomes a weight, it becomes sin, and requires corrective action on our part – we need to lay it aside -Ro 14:23b.....*for whatever is not from faith is sin.*

1Ti 6:10 *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

p). It is not surprising then that we find in Chapter 13 - Heb 13:5 *Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have.*

m). Now please listen carefully, failure on our part to lay aside every weight, can only have the consequence seen in our example from the Parable of the Sower – unfruitfulness and therefore rejection from a position of rulership in the coming Kingdom.

n). This is a serious matter and we need to consider it very carefully – I daresay we may well all have at least one weight we need to lay aside. – but will we have the faith to do so?

6). And then along with ‘every weight’ we are to lay aside ‘the sin that so easily ensnares us’. This sin is not any old sin, but is so written in the original language to show it to be singular and particular – it is then a specific sin.

a). So as this entire Book of Hebrews presents faith to the saving of the soul, the sin referred to here, contextually, would have to be the antithesis of faith, which would be unfaithfulness – brought about through unbelief.

b). Just as our receiving an inheritance in the Kingdom is based exclusively upon our faith, so our being refused an inheritance would be based exclusively on unbelief –Heb 3:19 *So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.*

c). And we see from the scripture that this sin of unbelief ‘so easily ensnares us’ – and this is a troubling statement.

d). The phrase is a translation of the compound Greek word – ‘euperistatos, *yoo-per-is'-tat-os*’ – eu = readily, deftly, cleverly peristatos = to place itself around

e). The word then means that this sin readily and easily encircles us as we run our race, like a long flowing garment that would attach itself to our body ultimately causing us to trip.

f). Now, here is the thing – the any old sin – that area of our life where we find our greatest weakness remains a problem because of a lack of faith.

g). If we are honest we must realize that the occasions when we sin we now that what we are going to do is sin before we do it, we know it's sin while we are doing it and we know it was sin after we've done it. This being the case we have deliberately chosen not to act 'by faith' – we have therefore walked in unbelief.

h). The question we have to face is, 'What happened that has caused us to stop trusting God?' or 'Why have we chosen not to believe that which God has said about this particular thing?'

i). And then perhaps an equally important question, 'What are we to do about this sin of unbelief? How do we lay it aside?'

j). The answer to this question we need to know so that we can run the race set before us with patient endurance – remember, God has not set us up to fail, but to win the prize.

k). But this will have to wait until next time – if the Lord is willing.

l). So as we close for today let's remember the 'so great a cloud of witnesses' and view them in the light of these verses - 1Co 10:12 *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*