


ENCOURAGEMENT IN HARD TIMES

(“Hebrews”)

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CHEER ACROSS THE CENTURIES

JESUS CHRIST IS THE SAME YESTERDAY TODAY AND FOR EVER

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century church we have all the communication skills and life is lived at a frantic pace within our society. Preaching is motivational-and the great hope in an embattled world is the gospel and the return of Jesus Christ. Like Samuel Barnabas was a Levite and I consider that Hebrews is the torch of hope passing to you and me from the hand of this cheery writer.

The word “perfection” occurs once too often in this letter to be a slip of the pen. The cheery writer is engrossed with Jesus and with the best future imaginable. He will not let us escape undetected into Christian mediocrity. He will have us fix our eyes on Jesus and expect an extraordinarily joyful future (*Hebrews 12.2*) which in matters of scale bears no comparison with the life we now live-it is far and away better (*Hebrews 11.40*).

JESUS DREW DISCIPLES BY ENCOURAGING HIS FOLLOWERS

There was never anyone like Jesus. He did all things well. His motto was “Thorough” and nobody ever saw the heart’s need so truly or ministered to it so perfectly. When Jesus asked a man to follow Him he literally ran after him. Men would leave lucrative businesses and woman their stately homes to be near the Saviour and serve Him.

No-one inspired more faith and confidence than Jesus. He could brace cowards to win the world. He could pluck brands from the burning and set them in the vanguard of the church. As Napoleon said he could do by gentle words what an emperor could not do with the armies of a nation. Jesus knew the heart and loved to encourage his disciples. They loved him in return because He never failed. That’s the sort of people we need today and the way to get them is to reach out for the hearts of men and women and lift them up.

LIFT UP YOUR HEARTS

Before my Father set off for a day of hard work he listened to “Thought for the day”. Very often Hugh Redwood-that wonderful pastoral gentleman from the heart of London-who left a mark on many lives-would be speaking. His words often made Father chuckle and his signature tune set father singing

Morning has broken like the first morning
Blackbird has spoken like the dawn

JESUS SPOKE GENTLY TO THE HEART

Our Lord cast His encouragement into words reflected in the Old Testament text by a series of expressions like “Be strong” *qj* (*Mark 6.50 &10.49*) or “believe”

ma (Luke 8.48) or in Gethsemane “be girded and ready” rga (*John16.33*). In Mark 6.50 when the disciples were terrified by the seas and by sight of Him his words reflected a very soft touch of kindness from Isaiah “He spoke gently upon their hearts bl rbd saying, Be of good cheer”. This expression comes from Isaiah 40.2 when Jerusalem was assured that her battles were over. On this occasion their war with the waves was at an end. Thus the words of our Lord’s encouragements span times when we are to cease from concern, times when we are to trust Him for the future, times when He bids us move forward with boldness prepared for difficulties ahead. The particular word to the retiring lady whose illness had lasted twelve years was “be venturesome in faith -march for peace”.

BREAKFAST IS READY

I remember one day when our boys came to us chuckling over a colloquial phrase they picked up from their bible “Cheer up lads, breakfast is ready”. Thy were words from John 21.12 and they were very cheerful words indeed. The bible has many upbeat expressions and the Hebrew writer like the young puritan Mr. Shirley who built a chapel in Staunton Harold in the 17th century days of persecution did “the best of things in the worst of times”.

Our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ often said “Be of good courage”(Matthew 9.2,9.22,14.27, Mk.6.50, 10.49, Luke 8.48 & John16.33) though we are more familiar with it in its exhilarating form “Be of good cheer”. Paul used the term in the sense of “courage” in Acts 28.15. The Greek term is always **θαρσενω** which carries the sense “take courage” “cheer up” or in view of what is ahead “have confidence” or “take heart”.

TRUTH CHEERS YOU UP

Not being particularly musical I only ever once was co-opted into a choir. Like ancient choirs where the poorest singers were called “plates” rather for their position in the choir than for their sweet singing I took my place among the tenors. One of the pieces this male voice student choir sang was “*Who can cheer the heart like Jesus?*”

Who can cheer the heart like Jesus,
By His presence all divine?
True and tender, pure and precious,
O how blessed to call Him mine!
All that thrills my soul is Jesus;
He is more than life to me;
And the fairest of ten thousand,
In my blessed Lord I see.
What a wonderful redemption!
Never can a mortal know
How my sin, though red like crimson,
Can be whiter than the snow.

THE AUTHOR OF HEBREWS

Why was Barnabas so loved by the mother Church at Jerusalem? Surely it was because he sold a valuable holding in Cyprus and laid the proceeds at the apostles' feet in a time of austerity. We live again in a time of austerity and in this matter the circle of history finds the church back in a context not unlike that of the days when it was founded. In writing this devotional book I am seeking to invoke the spirit of Barnabas. Barnabas must have been very like Jesus. He moved to reach the Syrians in Antioch and God granted great success. He is rumoured to have had equal success in Egypt in later days and even to have encouraged the church in Rome as well. He brought joy and gladness to the eastern Mediterranean whilst Paul moved westward with the gospel. It may even be that we have the secret of his life and work in the letter we call "The epistle to the Hebrews".

NOTHING BETTER THAN A LETTER

When people needed a bit of cheer in the good old days nothing was better to lift the spirits than when a letter fell on the mat behind the door. It was no different in New Testament times when the writer of Hebrews-let's call him Barnabas- for that seems right because of the encouragement this letter brought amid cruel persecution and indeed *Tertullian* would have us know that the Son of Consolation wrote the letter.

The *Letter to the Hebrews* is by its nature akin to *Romans* in affording a significant body of doctrine to believers. This reflects the mutual body of teaching material shared and propagated by Paul and Barnabas. In the letter there are 21 exhortations which make up the devotional content of this CD label and bring something of the spirit of consolation of the writer to the church today. In exploring the fields of consolation of this epistle one cannot fail to be covered with the dew of doctrine that distils as one walks amid its exalted devotional thoughts.

CHAPTER 1

KEEPING TRYST WITH GOD AND MAN

1. HOW'S THIS FOR A CHEERY START (2.7-8)

"Encourage one another each day as far along as it is called 'Today' that not one of you should be harsh instead of sweet or stiff instead of supple or stern instead of kind from the deceitfulness of sin. We share in Christ if at all events we hold the beginning of our groundwork or subject matter-the grounding of Christ as God's son and the foundation of faith firm to the end." Very well then- how long is it we have to hold out? The Hebrew writer tells us that God held on to His purpose of redemption from the creation and through the time of Moses and into the era of David until that glorious day the angels heralded the coming of Jesus. Now we see Jesus back in glory having tasted the bitterness of death (2.9) and rendered useless or abolish him who had the rule and sovereignty of death-the devil.(2.14) Bengel gets it right when he says "The devil willing death, succumbed." He remains a "roaring lion" but he can hold no prey-Paul and Peter

went straight to glory. When the labours of saints end they enter a glorious rest in heaven and enjoy paradise-hence the powerful statement of Hebrews 12.23. Yesterday victory. Today Christ is supreme in life and death. Death holds no eternal danger or infernal company. This is a huge claim and this is what the Son of Consolation is saying. It may be he walked past the coliseum and talked with those who visited Peter and Paul in Rome. It may be he even met with the British royal family that came to reside in Rome after Nero's passing. The crown is Christ's he tells us. Christ is Lord shrilled Henrietta Mears in the Tag Mahal and indeed despite all the ravages of the lion the Lamb has conquered.

PAUL AND BARNABAS

In 1Corinthians 15.25 Paul quotes precisely the same Psalm 8 and he uses an aorist subjunctive of making death ineffective –abolished or brought to an end. Barnabas(in Hebrews 2.6-8) uses the same text but from the LXX not the Hebrew which Paul almost invariably uses. Paul stresses that *we do not see all things as yet subject* and of course the Father is excepted. Barnabas states specifically that *“nothing is left that is not subject or ordered under Christ”* outside the authority of the one who *destroyed Satan(Now Christ rules over His church and in the millennial kingdom Satan will be utterly chained)* as to his authority over death by his death. Thus when Christ passed to Sheol he took authority over all that region. There is nothing in all creation or any dimension of life-even Satan himself-that can withstand that authority. He is Lord and this writer sees the atonement as the supreme stroke of divine power in exercise.

CHAPTER 2

TODAY AND TOMORROW

2. CHEER UP-GOD HAS PROMISED (4.1)

The Man of Consolation describes the sort of thing that theology dislikes-apostasy-a falling away. In 2 Thessalonians 2.3 Paul warns of an “Apostasy”(αποστασια) connected to the Antichrist before the Parousia and our accompanying Jesus beyond to the great synagogue of glory. This standing apart from Jesus as Son of God is now a vast and abiding reality and through it multitudes are being deprived of the gospel and the promise of life in Christ. The Hebrew people of the first century could have been duped to stand apart from Jesus or retrace their steps to the teachings of the synagogue. The writer warns them to hold to the promise of Christ which is the heritage and final endowment of Christ in His will expressed in the Jerusalem interior of the upper room (John14.27 & 20.21 & 26). Whilst Jesus said we were not to be afraid in the sense of showing “faintheartedness” or “failure of courage”(δειλιατω) the cheerful writer advises the Hebrew Christians to be dismayed if anyone disowns Christ-to dread the thought-to hear the alarm bells ringing.(φοβηθωμεν). We had the gospel spoken to us exactly like the one who became apostate. The cheerful writer notices the fundamental difference which theologians count vital- ***“the word was mixed with faith”***.

THE SPIRIT ADDS VALUE TO THE WORD

So it is that the scriptures cannot reach the conscience and will to create a bond unless faith in adequate measure blends with the word. It is not unlike cement which is a bonding agent. The water of the word must be mixed with faith and repentance as surely as water with cement power and sand to act as a permanent bond. When the promises of the word are poured on a pinch of penitence and some grains of faith it is as if a bucket of water were poured on a trowel full of sand and cement. No bonding can be expected. As within cement there is gypsum so within faith there is love. God loves us and sheds abroad His love in our hearts. Without the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit salvation ends up being incredible and regeneration is impossible. (1 Thess 5.8 & 1 Timothy 1.14).

3. STUDENTS WANTED 4.11

“Let us hasten and apply ourselves to think it out (*σπουδαζωμεν*) in order to come right in to that rest that not one may fall in the same pattern of gradual or ‘little by little’ defection (*υποδειγμα*).

For an who have undertaken a long course of study there is a principle involved. You concentrate on the matter in hand and master it or else by gradual lapse of attention to work and lethargy you find failure staring you in the face.

The cheery writer is a man of instant action. To him “today” is precious. Like his brother Paul he will snap up every offered opportunity to serve Christ in the world’s market.

I stood looking at quite the most beautiful 18 piece china set I have every seen considering the price tag and was taken unawares when a buyer who had seen it a moment before to my astonishment asked for a 30% drop in price. Had my zeal been equal to the occasion my wife would have counted this her *piece de resistance* when we entertained. The lesson is “Act promptly”, “Nip things in the bud”, “A stitch in time save nine.” Paul himself says “Now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation”(2Cor 6.2). There just is so much parallel doctrine arising in the cheery writer’s letter that it would be passing strange if he had not taught alongside Paul at Antioch.

4. DON'T GET DOWN-GOD KNOWS ALL ABOUT YOUR TROUBLES 4.12-14

A Chinese gentleman on first studying the bible exclaimed “This book knows me!” The writer of this cheery letter puts it another way. He says “The word of God throbs with life and energy and cuts deeper than a Roman *gladius*. It can penetrate the division that exists between the soul and spirit-between how we think and acts for our own interests and how we balance them against God’s will in our lives. It can divide the head from the body (*αρμων[shoulder joint] τε και μυελων[skull & brain marrow]*) and distinguish between the thoughts and intentions of the heart. This is precisely because the Spirit of God is active through scripture.

The head of the Church is Jesus Christ and He has passed through the heavens. This act of Ascension to the throne was and is a stupendous act and will presently be matched by His Parousia and then in the glory of His advent. The matching miniature of the intimacy of God by His Spirit and the grandeur of His dissolution of distance was awesome to the early Church. The passage of Christ to the fountain head of the universe and the coming 40 days later of the Holy Spirit was quite the grandest sign of the enthronement of Christ at God's right hand. The corollary is "Let's hold fast to our confession that Jesus is the Christ-the Son of the Living God and that his death will bring us to our heavenly rest. Of that be in no doubt.

5. ALWAYS BE GLAD THERE IS A HIGHER THRONE(4.16)

Not many men or women of ordinary stamp seek access to their monarch. They go about their lives content to live and die without sight of sound of Emperor, Monarch or Premier. The Hebrew writer tells of one who is a King over us all and also has a heart for every one of us. Now, he tells us. That king rules in heaven and by means of prayer any Christian can speak with Him. There is something very special about Jesus-He submitted to every kind of trial-that of the flesh and that of the world and even the suggestive subtlety of the devil-and came out unscathed, spotless. "Let us", says the cheerful writer, "Therefore come with free spoken frankness(*παρησσιας*) to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace at opportune or appropriate times and seasons of need. What may we obtain and what shall we discover with surprise? We shall find mercy. An Old Southport gentleman once described "mercy" in a manner I shall never forget for he could not do it without withdrawing his handkerchief from his label pocket.. He likened it to the release of a man charged with a capital crime. The sentence on such a man used to be "You A.B. shall be taken from this place and hanged until you are dead". But as it happened on occasion a herald would appear with a royal pardon which was read out "It has pleased the king to pardon A.B. and acquit him. A.B. you may go free" Then we may ask what is "grace"? It is a remedy for our continuing needs, it is a windfall of the Spirit's provision, it is the Godsend of Jesus Christ who atoned and is now interceding for us.

CHAPTER 3

GROWTH BY UNION WITH JESUS

6. CHEER UP - INFANCY ADIEU! MATURITY AHOY! (6.1)

"Wherefore leaving the topic of the office or sovereignty or fundamentals of Christ let us aim at or reach towards or *hurry on to "perfection" (φερωμεθα)* or completion (*of the perfecter*) not laying down a foundation of repentance from dead works and faith in God -of the doctrine of baptisms, laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment decree." One feels uneasy that such great topics are to be bypassed. What is the writer thinking about? The answer is in his "laying the foundation"(*καταβαλλω*-"**to throw it down and leave it**"). Why is he asking that the foundation is "not re-laid". It is clearly not the case that the foundation is not reliable or important-but once it is laid as in

any building we can go higher. It is basic that we have been saved, baptised by water and in the Spirit; the fathers of the faith have laid hands upon us and we have risen in Christ from the baptistry as neophytes and the fear of judgment is passed away-for Christ died in our place. But why should we loose ourselves from seven fundamental doctrines that might appear on the statement of belief of any modern evangelical church? The God-ward answer is that the word “leave” has a substantive *αφιετης* - a person who leaves all else to stand **dedicated to God**. Our dedication must be to Christ. Though some adopt foibles that may not match the faith thoroughly understood and failures that deserve discipline that is not the end of the world. One thing is necessary-to sit at the feet of Jesus-one question only needs to be answered in the light of lapse and it is “Lovest thou me?” There is absolute need for diligence (v.11) and no place at all for “laziness”(v.12) and it is vital to learn “patience”(v.15 & 2Peter1.6) in order to pursue God’s promise of **blessing** and spiritual enlargement or **increase** as Abraham did (Genesis22.16).

7. DEFEAT-NOT LIKELY-THE HOSTS OF GOD MUSTER IN THE HILLS 6.18

“Open his eyes Lord that he may see” 2Kings 8.17.

We, who flee to fasten firm on the hope appointed as our future prize have help [*παρακλησις*] in battalions through two unchangeable covenant or treaty matters [*He promised and He swore by Himself*] in the centre of which God is unable to be false.

“Help” of the sort normally vested in a “Paraclete” is that of an attorney in a legal action in which the one helped in the defendant.

Our hope in this instance is “an anchor for the soul” which is secure and steadfast and enters behind the curtain where our forerunner Jesus has entered.

The cheerful writer is telling us that our Lord’s word and His name secure us so long as we have laid hold on the promise of eternal life in Christ. The writer is referring to a ship’s anchor. Should he indeed be the traditional writer Barnabas he would have sailed to and fro from Cyprus to Jerusalem year by year and doubtless to Egypt’s Alexandria and even to Rome. The vessels in which he travelled made copious use of anchors-most possessing anything from two or four anchors.

On the face of the Garden Tomb which history tells us was once the rear wall of a very early Church there remains after two millennia a visible anchor carved in the rock. The resurrection of Jesus our Lord is as our cheerful epistolary tell us is the one anchor we need for our souls. The anchor holds us in life’s stormy seas and holds fast to Christ our peace who is now in heaven and our anchor is fast lodged in the rock of His person and work.

8. TIRED TRYING? HOLD ON-HE WILL SEE YOU THROUGH 7.25

He is able to save “to the very end”(Rotherham). The word “Pantiles” which is the Greek here reminds me of a little set of shops in the Bexleyheath environs where there were shops of every sort. The word compares to the Latin “universus” and is also used of the number 10 as completing the basic numerals. Christ will consummate salvation. The key is “coming to God through Him”.

Engaging and approaching God by the mediation of Christ through the centuries has been an unqualified success for He lives and will suddenly light upon the Father for us-or meet with Him on our behalf. J.N. Darby estimated this encouragement was designed for believers. The adequacy and universal value of the death of Christ is very suggestive in this context of special favour extended to sinners or to saints according to the interpretation. It is very sure that

“All the way My Saviour leads me-what have I to ask beside?
Can I doubt His tender mercy who through life has been my guide?
Heavenly peace divinest comfort, here by faith in Him to dwell!
For I know whate’er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well.”

9. THE MAIN POINT-HE IS ABLE AND HE IS WILLING (8.1)

The summary substance or recapitulation of previous declarations reduces to the main head that we have such a high priest-one above Aaron, above angels, above death and Satan- who has sat down in the circle of the right hand of power of the throne of the exceedingly great shared majesty(*μεγαλωσυνης*) in heaven. It is important not to miss the main point or sum of any declaration and our cheerful guide to God and his will is telling us that just as we share the righteousness of Christ and ours is as true and pleasant to God as Christ’s so Christ shares the throne and His is as sure a part in its offices as the Father’s.

Christ has a ministry in concert with His position. He is a LEITOURGOS which is a Greek term for someone who can undertake from his own privy purse great events of state and sponsor orchestral occasions or nationwide schemes for his country. Christ is endowed with authority; Christ shares the power of the Godhead and Christ is able to supervise and develop His church worldwide and supply her needs-and this is the greatest task the Godhead ever shouldered-the redemption of souls and the eternal provision for the children of God.

CHAPTER 4

10. I CAN’T TELL ANYBODY -DEVOTION CHALLENGES THAT! 10.22

“Let us come[*to God*] (*προσερχομαι*) with genuine heart in full assurance (*πλεροφορια*-“full grandeur of carrying” or “conveying completely like a ship or cart” of faith).” We are described by the cheerful writer as priests who can approach God because we have been sprinkled by the blood of the mercy seat and cleansed by the washing of regeneration. This all encourages us to come with an “honest” or “real” heart to God. The call is for continual association and regular visiting of the throne of grace as we undertake His work and on account of the burdens we bear.

11. DON’T WOBBLE -HOPE IN CHRIST-YOUR ANCHOR HOLDS! 10.23

“Let us hold fast the confession of the hope without bending to either side(like a wobbly charioteer ready to crash out of the arena)-for He is faithful who promised once for all” The HOPE referred to is given in 6.18 and compared to an anchor which we cast into Christ. One of the Scots worthies spoke in his

testimony of “where I cast my first anchor”. In this context within Chapter 10 the idea is holding the reins of a horse. We are to travel on under the momentum of faith not swerving to the left or right or as we would say today becoming derailed but rather moving straight onwards towards our goal.

12. LET HIS “COMING” EXCITE A NEW LEVEL OF EXPECTATION 10.24

“Let us think a lot or deeply of one another for the purpose of spurring into self-giving love.” There is need to consider learn and understand one another for the purpose of provoking one another to a passion of love and good works-to excitement or to the point of being exasperated but not for bad reasons rather to promote good works. We are not to forsake meeting one another whilst being close at hand—the word occurs in the context of the cross “My God why hast thou forsaken me?”. This is not to be our ethos (custom or habit or ordinary way) but rather we are to continue gathering ourselves together as a preliminary to the great “episunagoge” cf. 2 Thess.2.1; Matthew 24.31; Mark13.27 and the lesser “synagogues” of Christ in Mk.1.33, Matt.23.37 & Lk13.34)) so much the more as you see the day of “our gathering to Him” approaching. The author’s appeal and entreaty in this context relates to the whole church and it is specific to some who have signally failed to draw together.

What a gathering what a gathering
What a gathering of the ransomed that will be
What a gathering what a gathering
When we sing and shout the victory.

This exhortation or cheery word reminded the Jews of Jerusalem of the Lord who would have gathered them as a hen gathers her chickens. It has within it acute appeal. We might even say it has precise aim. There are some who have neglected the thought of being gathered to Christ and so neglect large assemblies of Christians or even opportunities when nearby to have fellowship with those whose desire has grown cold or needs stoking up. There might even be in it a sorrow over Christian leaders who are somewhat estranged (It is highly significant that Luke mentions that there was a “paroxysm” between Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15.39 and Barnabas uses this same word “paroxysm” in this context. In the Acts passage Lukke says *Paul weighed up his value as one who had “left” them like an apostate*. Some think Paul was milder and put the pros & cons but this is not borne out by the text-and *the consequent parting is defined in the aorist passive as final*). Could it be that the heavy cross of Barnabas was an estrangement with Paul who once passed alongside Cyprus(Acts 21.3) and Luke writes “We sighted Cyprus” but he makes no mention of Barnabas who did so much to smooth his way into first meeting with Christians at Antioch. For us all the “Great synagogue of the air” is a spur to repairing all relationships and making it our custom to meet with believers. One thing we must observe is that the apostle Paul “received all” who came to his hired house in Rome and that he made John Mark especially welcome in those days as “profitable”. His last days and his open home at Rome showed God had put the same will to promote a “paroxysm” of Christian love and attachment in his circle as the cheery writer to the Hebrews possessed. The last word in the matter of Mark is seen in the gospel

that goes under his name and the church by his name in Venice and the work in Alexandria in later time.

CHAPTER 5

PROCLAMATION PATIENCE PAROUSIA

13. DON'T SELL YOUR CONFIDENCE UNDER CHEAP JACK DISSUASION

10.35

“You should not—you must not cast away your confidence.” There is a great “reward” that goes with confidence. The idea may be more “You should not sell too cheap your confidence for there are big wages to be earned from holding on to it.” The thought is complex but “frankness” and “boldness” are very valuable. Christians may win souls by being bold. By saying nothing little can be accomplished. There are wages to be earned by witnessing. Souls will be saved. We will gain from our hire. The gospel like business proceeds as being spurred on by confidence.

14. HURRAH FOR HABAKKUK WHO PLASTERED JERUSALEM WITH TEXTS 10.39

“Patience we need—often in a woman seldom in a man!”—so runs the proverb. Patience is “holding out” “enduring” and “abiding after”. The double quote used by the cheery writer comes from Habakkuk 2 where the just one who has committed himself to God by faith continues and awaits “the coming of the Lord”. Habakkuk who wrote Hebrew texts on tablets in Jerusalem in his day was the ancient foreshadowing of Basilea Schlink.

15. THE LIFE OF JESUS & CROSS INTRODUCE US TO PERFECTION 11.40

The cheery writer lists a cohort of saints(15 named and many more anonymously cited) whose lives turned around the fulcrum of faith. They all completed their faith testimony and for most their witness was at very high cost. They did not harvest the promise or win its prize. The promise was that they would one day be made complete. “Perfection” is the inspiration behind this book. Christ’s perfect sacrifice makes “perfect hearts” and brings in “perfection” when His kingdom is fully realised. They would not once for all be brought to completion for God had better for us and them. God in his foresight had a better plan by which they and we through the cross came into the good of the resurrection of Christ together with all those in Sheol. The gates of Paradise are open to receive us—what a glorious and undiluted encouragement.

Vain the stone, the watch, the seal;
Christ has burst the gates of hell;
Death in vain forbids His rise;
Christ has opened Paradise.
Lives again our glorious king;
Where O Death is now thy sting?
Once he died our souls to save;
Where thy victory O grave?

CHAPTER 6

LET NO HEART MELT-LIFT UP YOUR HEARTS

16. THE MORE YOU LOSE THE MORE YOU WIN 12.1

For **you** therefore (*τοιγαρουν*) and we have thrown round us or towering above us (Westcott) the very same cloud of witnesses let us be putting off or laying aside every dignity or conceit (*ογκος* such as hair knots) or weight and the sin that easily stands around like a crowd about the house and let us run with speed (or the race of our lives) with *patience* the **agony** or contest that is fixed settled and proposed by the Lord and in front of us. What the Christian faces is such a test as will require every resource of mind and body and spirit. We are in an arena where we are to run with others and there is a crown obtainable. The matters we are advised to consider is that we do not let worldly things or sinful relationships deny us the prize. Equally we must stay in the race and not think of retiring from it. We are to look away to Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith who in face of His agony endured all that was set before Him and has now sat down on the throne. As in the Greek national games the finish line is opposite their equivalent of the royal box. That is the greatest incentive of all.

17. HEARTS MELT IN AUSTERE TIMES- GOD'S ANGER IS MOMENTARY-HE LOVE IS LIFELONG 12.5

“Have you utterly forgotten or has that comfortable entreaty or appeal to exhort you as *sons and heirs* absolutely escaped your attention? The appeal comes straight from Proverbs 3.11-12 **where we read** “Do not be frightened by the LORD!

My son do not melt at the discipline of the LORD...do not be frightened at His rebuke”

Don't melt away from things of faith or reject them; don't fear when you wake up to his argument in conscience or rebuke. God is very direct yet He delights in his "David's". Do not be frightened by God's vision Jacob beholding the staircase to heaven or Pharaoh as he viewed the fat and lean cattle.

For whom the LORD loves He rebukes...as a Father the son in whom he takes pleasure. Solomon goes on to speak of the blessing of wisdom shared and of the right and left hand of God saying “ Length of days is in her right hand...

We may say that the right hand shows the blessings in this life and the Samuel or left hand [the covered or hidden hand-given as a pledge of promises] holds blessings prophesied of the life to come. Solomon ends his consolation statement thus “The spiritually wise inherit Glory ...and the reward of those who fatten themselves is shame.” How very important to see ourselves as “heirs” though for a short time we suffer rebuke or recognise the discipline of God. Solomon from whom our cheerful author quotes saw that discipline in the life of Elkanah and Naomi his great-great grandmother and David his father and doubtless traced it in his own life but he was sure of his standing with God and so should we be.

18. CHEER UP WE HAVE ARRIVED WITH THE NEW HEBREWS OF 1948 AT THRILLING TIMES! 12.22-28

This world is not my home I'm just a passing through
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door
And I can't feel at home in this old world any more.

These are among the brightest words of the New Testament. We are not as the Hebrews who after their escape from Egypt arrived at Sinai to receive the law. We have come to Jesus. He is the Mediator of a better covenant. With Him there is completion. Hebrews who cross over from this old Egypt of the world are destined for glory. There is Mount Zion above-the pinnacle of joy-the heavenly kingdom. There is Jerusalem above-the heavenly city of true peace. There are numerous angels. There is festivity and joy unadulterated and rapturous singing to boot. There those called out –the church of the heirs of glory-share the privileges of the Son of God. There is God Himself-father of all (*κριτης*) Whilst God has given all judgment to the Son who is the “righteous judge”(Greek law had dikasts” or a “single dikast” under the presiding judge Thus whilst God is judge Christ acts under the Father’s presidency. Paul tells us that Jesus tries or seeks out the heart (*1Sam16.7,1Chron29.17&Jer.11.20,17.10 with Romans8.27*) and He pleads for us. In heaven this cheerful writer says there are the spirits of the redeemed complete (*τελειος*) in mind and body settled in their new home. The writer warns us there is a great “shaking” coming upon earth. (*Psalms 68.8, Haggai2.6 and 21,Isa.13.13, Joel3.16*). This once more speaks of the “sailing away” of created things-which came about by God’s speaking. This shaking ends the earth and heaven and makes clear and plain that the things that cannot sail away remain. What sort of clarity have we here? It is not clarity about earthly but heavenly things!

Let us have thanksgiving in our hearts because we are receiving alongside a parallel world-a kingdom that is unshakable for God is a consuming fire (*cf. 1Peter3.12*) will first shake and then consign to fire -expend utterly or destroy completely (*καταναλισκω*) the creation we know whilst the Kingdom of our Lord continues in Glory.

CHAPTER 7

JESUS' WORKMEN ENTER THEIR ETERNAL REST- HIS PERENNIAL WORK CARRIES ON

19. CHEER UP JESUS NEVER CHANGES 13.1

“Let brotherly love continue”. This is one of seven biddings which exhort us to live out the life of Christ. The section encourages each of us to:-

1. Be friendly as brothers are (The New NIV adds “sisters”).
2. Be hospitable
3. Remember Christians persecuted or imprisoned
4. Respect marriage as husband and wife
5. Avoid mammon greed and avarice

6. Remember great leaders, the Word, Look up where they are & imitate them

7. Do not be carried away by strange teachings

In living like this we have the threefold **promise** of One who never leaves “I will never leave you or forsake you-never!”(Deut.31.6-8 & Joshua1.5) and the further promise of Psalm118.6 “I will not fear man-the Lord is my helper”. Besides “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and for ever”-that sort of friendship is solid re-assuring and most uplifting. We also have an altar-which is the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Others have ceremonial but we have a Saviour who forgives. This one **truth of the Cross** and our certainty that Christ rose and ascended as **our Great High Priest into the heavens** keeps us anchored against strange teaching.

20. JESUS CHRIST IS THE SAME YESTERDAY TODAY AND FOR EVER

13.8

This beautiful truth is able to stand alone but it is the inference from the words “Remember your leaders who chatted and murmured sweetly or spoke in dialect the word of God. The cheerful writer is recalling the Aramaic in which the message of Christ was first poetically conveyed. There was intimacy and heart-warming fellowship as Jesus shared and then the apostles who talked just as He did. All this fairly quickly was translated into Greek Koine. The author is keen that the indelible impressions to remain. The Speech of Christ was the “Word of God” He asks the Hebrews to then consider the “going out of the leaders”-their “sailing out” as ships-their “going out” as an army. They did not only leave all for Him –they were martyred and their dispersion was an obedience others were being asked to imitate. Their “rally” (ανάστοψη) is well represented by Peter’s famous “Quo Vadis” return to die in Rome along with the Christians. This appears to be among other things a reference to the courageous, noble and inspiring act on the part of this glorious saint whom Christ moulded into His perfect image.

21. EXTRA MURAL CHEERFULNESS 13.13

“Let us go out to Him outside the camp” (*παρεμβολη*) bearing His reproach”

The writer includes himself and seems to be taking up a leadership role when he says “Let us go”-it echoes the charge of Jesus –then bound for judgment and Calvary-in the garden of Gethsemane. This appears to be nothing short of a mission call to serve Christ in proclaiming the word worldwide. Was the writer in his references to the “bodies of offerings being burned” metaphorically referring to the saints whom Nero burned in his gardens? Was this call an echo of Jesus advice to leave Jerusalem- one of withdrawal in face of what was to come –the final clarion to the saints in Israel? Jerusalem of the hour resembled a camp or “barracks” of soldiers -but it was not the place for Christians any more-the author would have them drafted as reinforcements to the wider world. Whilst the zealots were recruiting to fight Rome at home it would appear clear that Barnabas was calling the saints to continue the mission for Christ in the Gentile world. About this time many withdrew to Pella in Trans-Jordan –and when it came under zealot

attack about this time a wider dispersion occurred-into which event the writer may be speaking. In the event, as the early church historian Leitzmann remarks,,, Cyprus hosted the vestigial remains of the Jewish church until the 4th century and other leaders as Philip and John continued the work in Asia Minor. Andrew died about this time in Greece. To exit would be to bear reproach from the zealots and for being a poor patriot-and it would be accompanied by jeers of “dog” and “pig” in Rome-such insults as these would have to be borne. The call of Barnabas may well have affected Hebrew and Aramaic speakers in Jerusalem and Antioch the first of which withdrew to Cyprus whilst the latter withdrew to Haurun and Beroea from Antioch. They were called Nazarenes and Ebionites and appeared to possess the gospel of Matthew in one form or other at this early stage.

22. CHEER UP LET US SING 13.15

The “sacrifice(*θυσια*) of praise” if we follow Homer’s use is a “drink offering” on the top of the sacrifice of service to Christ). This expression would seem to be borrowed from Paul although in itself intimately related to the procedures a Levite would know well. If borrowed it suggests that the life and death of Paul are in the writer’s heart. James had died earlier in 62AD. Leitzmann rehearses from Tacitus the July AD 64 background. A tremendous 6-day fire laid the greater part of Rome in ashes. Christians who were rounded up became scapegoats. Some died sewed up in animal skins to be mauled by bloodhounds, others were bound on oxen torn apart in the arena crucified or wrapped in cloth dipped in pitch and burned in the imperial gardens of the Vatican hill. Through all the things that were current in the Neronic persecution Barnabas calls for praise. This was how Christ encouraged his followers as they left the upper room and went out. This glory of “confessing lips” is nothing less than a thanksgiving to God for the Saviour and lately for the lives of the Christian leaders that Barnabas knew who had given all for Jesus.

All to Jesus I surrender
All to Him I freely give
I will ever love and trust Him
In His presence daily live
I surrender all I surrender all
All to Thee my blessed master-I surrender all.

23. CHEER UP –PRAY INTENSELY 13.18

“Pray for us-pray we may have good understanding or clear judgment (as to God’s plans) I call you alongside me to engage once for all in this prayer for us more exceedingly that I may be completely restored to you (*αποκαταστασις* is used of stars returning to their place).

The final anguish would be that the Christian church in Jerusalem would not take to its new leadership now that Peter and James were gone to Christ. The options the cheerful writer saw in stark contrast in the unsettled city afflicted by zealotry were settled witness and progress accompanied by compliance and consent to the younger leaders of Stephen’s generation. The names in Acts 6-Procorus, Nicanor, Timon and Parmenas are of Greek proselytes and of their Jewish counterparts we

are not apprised excepting that the younger apostles were initially present among them. The cheerful writer recognises a crisis in the Jerusalem-Caesarea-Joppa church if his appeal fails. He reminds the new leaders that they will give their account when they meet Christ who called His followers to leave the city. The alternative where the leaders groan sigh and complain amid the embers of judgment would be the final anguish of the Jewish church. In the event it would seem that Philip lived to encourage the growing Caesarean fellowships to develop whilst the bulk of Jewish Christians fled from the city as far as Pella on the east and Cyprus to the west- where Barnabas retained his base, and to Asia Minor to the north where history records that John the Divine and Mary the mother of Jesus came to reside. .

24. A BLESSING THAT CHEERS 13 20-21

The equipping of the church of the Hebrews now in disarray was the deep concern of Barnabas. He uses a term (*καταρτισαι [καταρτιον]* is the mast) which applies to a ship setting sail. He associates himself with the Hebrews and prays that the God of peace may “work *in us* that which is well pleasing” in His nearer presence through Jesus Christ to whom be glory in eternal ages, Amen”.

25. HOLD UP THE TORCH 13.22

According to early writings Barnabas appears to have been in Italy after the demise of Nero holding up the torch for Christ. It is understandable that Timothy who also was in the city and had been arrested but apparently survived Nero’s persecution would join Barnabas who had lately come to strengthen the brothers as now the senior figure of the East along with John. The last exhortation of the letter urges that the Jewish believers will hold aloft the torch of exhortation like a torch that headed up ancient processions (in this case beyond Jerusalem or inhospitable zealot strongholds). Whoever the carrier of the letter and to whomsoever it came it lives on. Its survival might be owing to the fact that its recipient joined Barnabas. Could it be that the church in the house of Mark’s mother had a new address and though Mark had been for a time with Paul in Rome he was now holding the fort in Cyprus? It would appear that *Timothy who had experience of Ephesus and Barnabas who was well settled in Cyprus* proved vital to the church in the interim as Jews moved away from the maelstrom of war raging throughout Judea and Samaria. The “word of consolation”(Hebrews) was not just a simple exhortation-it was and is scripture. “Hold it up” says Barnabas. He appears to make comment on his style of “brevity” or his writing during snatches of time available. He closes with the joyful note that Christians in the post Nero era in Italy embrace their Jewish brothers and asks that the Hebrews embrace their leaders and have affection that stretches to all saints whether Jewish or Gentile. This man is undoubtedly the Great-heart of the post Pauline era and the positivity he breathes into the church riding out the terrors of Nero in Rome and facing the internecine enormities of the zealots at home is the mark of one who had endeared himself to the whole church. So, learn from this letter to uplift others-to hold up the torch of hope.

FINIS