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MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Sermon

Analysis of Hebrews: Chapter 5



Part 7/23

God's Last Word: An Exposition of Hebrews By Derek Prince

In our study last week we finished Hebrews 4. The main theme that we dealt with there was entering into God's rest. I left in the note outline that was given to you at that time a form in which you could make a definite, personal decision to do that. I'm wondering—but I don't want to ask—whether any of you availed yourself of that. Ruth and I were talking together earlier today and she was looking in the mirror as ladies sometimes do—not, of course, that ladies are the only ones that do that! She said, "It's funny, I don't look tired. I've been working so hard." Because, we've been working overtime on a book that's due for a deadline date for the publisher. She said, "I don't look tired." I said, "Have you forgotten that you've entered into God's rest?" So, I trust that same is true for some of you, that you have in a new way entered into God's rest. This is a real experience, it's a reality.

Ruth and I have been almost, but not quite, complaining to the Lord, because He seems to have given us so much to do. I planned my winter and I thought I had just about the minimum time needed for everything. Then this book descended on us. I knew I was going to write the book but the publisher decided he wanted it by a certain date. And, because I feel the material in the book is very urgent I agreed with the publisher. There's been a terrific additional burden placed on both Ruth and me. Let me say that Ruth is responsible for two chapters in this book. When it's published I'll let you guess which they are!

When we were, shall I say, putting this before the Lord, He spoke to us very definitely and clearly as He does from time to time. He told us that He was the one who had arranged our schedule, that we were in His will and that He was permitting this that we might learn to operate not in our own strength or ability but in His supernatural strength and ability. I've found that consistently all through my Christian walk, that God gives me assignments which He knows are beyond my capability.

I remember when I was in Kenya in East Africa in 1958 or '59, I found myself involved in building a science laboratory. There are two things I know nothing about. One is science and the other is building. Because of the regulations in Kenya at the time, we who were responsible for administering educational funds were not allowed to build

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any new buildings. We were allowed to convert old ones. And having been in the British Army for nearly six years I am pretty adept at getting around regulations. I found older buildings and converted them into what I wanted them to be. I ended up converting this broken down old building, which had been a dormitory, into a science laboratory. I really don't know anything about science. One of the things I discovered is if you're going to have chemistry, you have to have some kind of a drain that prevents things exploding when they get out. I had no idea about that. It's good I discovered it before the building was complete!

The other thing I know nothing about is building. I said to one of my fellow missionaries who had been there a long while and knew a lot, I said, "I don't even know the difference between sand and sawdust." He said, "That's why the Lord has given you the job!" So I tell you, if ever a laboratory was prayed over, that one was.

I relate this to the glory of God. About one year later the government lady in charge of teacher training colleges was recommending all the principals of teacher training colleges to come and see our laboratory. But that was not because of our cleverness. I remember Lydia and I got up the night before it was completed and we went down and with our own hands we varnished all the tops of the desks. Anyhow, that's just by the way. The principle is God will stretch you, He will give you assignments that are beyond your capabilities.

It depends, of course, on whether the assignment is something that you've taken on yourself or it's something that God has given you. But when that happens, and it is truly God's assignment, then you need to bear in mind that He's teaching you not to rely on your own ability. You see, entering into God's rest does not depend on having a vacation every month or a five-day week. It depends on, basically, one thing which is what? Faith. Why could they not enter in the Old Testament? Because of unbelief, that's right.

As I say, there's no extra charge for that! That's just a little summation and application of the teachings of chapter 4. When my mind gets into Kenya it's difficult for me to get it out again. One of the things I was doing, the thing I was doing was training teachers for African schools. We used to give our teachers—those of you who have any acquaintance with schools—lesson plan outlines. Of course, some of you have heard of those. The last thing on every lesson plan was application. Do something to make sure that the pupils have really understood what you're teaching them. This is the application from last week, just in case you didn't realize it.

Now we're going on to chapter 5. I'm going to begin once again translating extemporaneously from the Greek text. Your outline is then in front of you, I trust. We're on Page 5/1. Just looking at what it says in connection with the first verse, this is the first occurrence of the verb for offer or offering and the noun for sacrifice. They go together. We'll take the verse.

> "For every high priest being taken from among men is appointed [or ordained] on behalf of men in things relating to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins ..."

We've already looked at that verse earlier on. It would be good just to turn back in your note outline to Page 2/3. I hope this doesn't confuse you. Right at the bottom of 2/3 where it says "Appendix to chapter 2," and then it goes to the Old Testament picture of the high priest, it then refers to Hebrews 5:1 and it says this: The function of a priest is to give man an ongoing relationship with God. To do this, he does two things: He offers sacrifices on behalf of man and he receives gifts on behalf of God.

In that context, I pointed out two things which are continually brought out in Hebrews. That God does not entertain an ongoing, continuing relationship with man unless two conditions are met. First, there must be a priest. Second, there must be a covenant. Without a priest and a covenant you may come to God in a moment of crisis or need, but you will never have a permanent, ongoing relationship with God because that is God's basic requirement which He will not vary.

I suppose probably many of you would realize this is true in respect of a covenant. I imagine it's probably new for most of you that it's equally true in respect to the priest. See, the unique feature of the revelation of Hebrews is that it depicts Jesus as our High Priest. Much of the New Testament speaks of the sacrifice that was made, the victim. This is the only part of the New Testament that I know of that depicts the priest. A victim without a priest is impossible. There has to be a priest to offer a victim.

So, the revelation of this epistle is in many ways—it goes outside the scope of much that we're familiar with in, quote, "Charismatic" or Evangelical Christianity. And, I would say without a doubt, equally so in Catholic or liturgical forms of Christianity. This is an area which is almost completely overlooked, according to my observation, by the great majority of Christians and churches today.

Now we will go back to Hebrews 5:1. I've translated that. Note the two things that the priest deals with: gifts and sacrifices. Without a sacrifice there's no approaching God. Without a priest, you can't offer Him a gift. You can't just walk up to God and slip something into His hand and say, "Please take that." That's not how God is approached.

Going on in verse 2, the high priest taken from among men must be able—the translation says:

> "... to deal gently with the ignorant and those who are going astray, since he himself also is surrounded with weakness ..."

I think the modern translations say "subject to weakness" if I'm not mistaken. "Beset with weakness." The King James says "compassed with weakness," and that is actually right in line with the original Greek. The word that's translated "deal gently," I've been trying to think of some other way to express its meaning. I think you could put "react tenderly" or "not overreact." In other words, when the man comes to the priest and says, "I've stolen," the priest is enough of a man to know that he himself is capable of stealing so he doesn't say, "Well, God will have nothing to do with you!" He's reminded, "I could have been that man." That's why the priest that God has appointed for us knows what it is to be a man.

I don't know whether as parents some of you may have been so far above the level of your children at some times that they could never come to you and tell you their problems. I'm sure that's not true of all, but it is a mistake that parents make. I've dealt with good many young people who've come to me at various times for deliverance and confessed to me the most horrible things. I've often said to them, "I want you to know something about God. He is un-shockable. It doesn't matter what you tell me, or Him; God will not be shocked. Your parents might. Your friends might, but not God." This is the point that's brought out here. This kind of a high priest is not going to get so shocked by your worst confession that he won't help you. The reason is he can say to himself, "There but for the grace of God go I."

As a matter of fact, in my own experience again, the longer I'm in the ministry the less I'm shocked by what I hear. Twenty years ago I couldn't have believed some of the things that I hear about people in churches. I've discovered that incest is common among Christians. I don't want to make an overstatement but I've heard confessions of incest, I would say, dozens of times. Homosexuality is much more common in churches than we're willing to acknowledge. Sometimes in the leaders. Years ago if I'd heard that I think I would have exploded. I've just come to see sin is sin. It's not to be condoned but it's not our business to condemn. We have a high priest who doesn't condemn us.

Going on now in the description of the priest in verse 3:

> "... and because of this [that's his weakness] he is obligated as for the people, also for himself, to offer for sins."

Put in the word "sacrifice"—"to offer sacrifice for sins." In the Old Testament every high priest in the Aaronic line, when he dealt with the question of sin, always started by bringing his own sin offering before he brought a sin offering for the people. A continual reminder that he himself was subject to sin.

Verse 4:

> "And no one takes this honor for himself, but only one called by God, just as Aaron."

That's a point that we need to absorb, I think, especially in our contemporary American culture. There are a lot of things in the ministry of God that are not decided by vote. No one voted for Aaron. God chose him. He didn't ask anybody's approval, He didn't put it before the Board; He just said, "Aaron is the high priest." When his high priesthood was challenged by leaders of the other tribes, He said, "We'll have an end to this once and for all. Tell every tribal head to bring his tribal staff into the tabernacle and put it out before the ark." Then He said to Moses, "Go in twenty-four hours later and take out the rods." Every tribal head had his name on his rod. When Moses went in there was one rod that had budded, blossomed and brought forth almonds in twenty-four hours. That was the rod that had on it the name of God's chosen high priest, Aaron. God said, "Let that be an end. Let there be no more dispute about this from now on."

I think it's very important in contemporary Christianity, even for people such as ourselves, that we learn to recognize where we don't make the decisions, where it's not a matter of a congregational vote.

Speaking about this, congregation—and this is merely an example—I don't believe the leadership of this congregation is up for voting. And anybody that has that attitude has got a serious misunderstanding of God. If a leader misbehaves—as unfortunately happens at times—there are scriptural ways to handle the situation. But the appointment is God's.

I had to deal with a very painful situation about two years ago that some of you here will know what I'm talking about. I don't want to speak about it in such a way that anybody else would identify the person. I had to deal with a man much younger than myself who was the head of a congregation that had once been a very flourishing congregation. But, through his misconduct and irresponsibility everything was going wrong starting with his own life, his family, his home, and then the people he was supposed to be caring for. I had been giving him oversight for a number of years. And eventually I had to go to this congregation, hold a meeting of the leaders, go into the various things that had taken place in detail—as a matter of fact Jim was there with me—and then say, "I can no longer give oversight to this congregation while this man leads it." I put the issue before the other elders. They disagreed with me and sided with the leader. About six months later they changed their minds.

Rather naturally, I think, I was concerned whether I had failed in my responsibility of giving oversight. There were people that kind of indicated in a round about way that shouldn't have ever happened. I certainly could wish it had never happened. I am not sure that I could have prevented it happening. As I meditated on this, one thing became very clear to me. I was not the person that put that man in charge of that congregation. God did it. Without a shadow of a doubt God did it. I was probably the only person, humanly speaking, that could undo it.

So there is a tremendous solemnity about leadership. Do not, please, deceive yourselves with the idea that you put leaders over God's people. It's not your choice. It's God's choice, just as it was with Aaron.

That does not mean that a leader can do as he pleases. He'll be a dictator. The responsibilities of leadership are tremendously solemn. "To whom much is given, of him shall much also be required."

I think perhaps it's appropriate that I mention tonight that incident in that chapel in Wales when the head of the land with his eyes followed the speaker, every move, every inclination. As leaders we need to bear in mind the head of the church is watching continually. This is so contrary to the democratic spirit of America. It's something that has to be contested. Why is such and such a person our leader? The answer is: Because God made him our leader. And if God didn't, we might as well close the store.

I'm not thinking now of this congregation. I'm thinking of a third situation which I don't need to go into. God's choices are not always man's probabilities. I'm glad they aren't.

When I went back to Cambridge University after World War II ... and before I left I was anything but a Christian. When I got back, some of the Christians discovered that I'd been converted and they said, "We would never have believed it would happen to you!" I said, "I'm glad God had more faith than you did!"

We're going on to verse 5.

> "So also Christ did not glorify himself to become a high priest; but the one who said to him, You are my Son, I today have begotten you. As he says also in a second place, You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek."

Those are two quotations from the Old Testament. We've already looked at them because they were quoted initially in chapter 1. Perhaps it would be good just to glance at them for a moment to have them before our eyes. Psalm 2:7. This is a picture of the resurrected Christ installed as king on the heavenly mountain of Zion. And then here prophetically in the psalm He's represented as saying:

> "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'Thou art My Son; today I have begotten Thee.'" So we see that the acknowledgment came from the Father to the Son. If you study the relationship of Jesus with the Father, He never took the initiative. It was always the Father's initiative and His response. So it is here. The Father said to Him, "Thou art my Son; this day I have begotten thee."

I'd like to give you another reference in the Old Testament just for a moment in Psalm 89. We will be looking at this again later on. Psalm 89, we could begin at verse 24. This is what's called a Messianic psalm—that is to say, it's a prophetic picture of the Messiah—and God is here talking of the Messiah. It's a beautiful passage.

> "My faithfulness and My lovingkindness will be with him, and in My name his horn will be exalted. I shall also set his hand on the sea, and his right hand on the rivers."

So He's going to have world dominion. Now listen to this.

> "He will cry to Me, 'Thou art my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.'"

Put that together with Psalm 2:7 and we have a conversation in heaven between the Father and the Son. First, the Father said to the Son, "Thou art my Son." And then the Son in return replies, "Thou art my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation." The point that I wish to emphasize which is brought out by the writer of Hebrews is the appointment was made by God.

Then in Psalm 110:4, the other passage that's quoted here in Hebrews 5. This is a picture of Christ again resurrected and exalted at the Father's right hand. Then the Holy Spirit makes this declaration:

> "The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, 'Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'"

Again, it's the Father that makes the decision and the appointment. We'll go on in Hebrews 5:7 which is a very significant verse.

> "Who [that is speaking about the Son, the high priest, Jesus] ... Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up petitions and supplications to the One who was able to save him out of death, with strong cries and tears. And having been heard because of his piety ... "

I think this translation says, we'll come to that word in a moment. I don't think "piety" is at all a good translation. So, in the days of his flesh (that is, while He is still on earth), Jesus is a priest. But He was not a priest in the tribe of Levi. As a priest He had to have something to offer because all priests offer. Because He was not a Levite He could not offer the Levitical sacrifices, that would have been out of order. What were the sacrifices that He offered in the days of His flesh? Prayer. It says "petitions and supplications."

A petition is asking for something but a supplication has a specific meaning. When you supplicate you are a suppliant, if you know that word. And a suppliant asks for one thing only. What's that? Mercy, that's right. Supplication is pleading for mercy.

In the Greek Orthodox Church, if I'm not mistaken, and there is probably somebody here that knows better than I do, at certain seasons or in certain ceremonies they repeat again and again the words kyrie elieson. How many of you have ever heard that? It means "Lord have mercy," Christie elieson means "Christ have mercy." There was a time when I reacted against that and I thought, This is just empty ritual —and furthermore, I don't like the smell of incense. But I'll tell you what. The longer I live, the more I see I need God's mercy. If I were in a church where they were saying that, I would say it with all my heart. "Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy. Have mercy on me that I'll never get so clever that I don't need Your mercy."

Jesus offered prayers and supplications. Let's just compare for a moment Hebrews 13:15.

> "Through him [that's through Jesus] let us offer up a sacrifice of praise continually to God."

There is the same type of sacrifice. As priests we do not offer cattle, but we do offer the sacrifice of praise, petition and supplication. Jesus is our pattern. That's what He offered in the days of His flesh.

This is a very profound verse. "He offered them to the one who was able to save him ..." I think the translation says "from death." It's a legitimate translation but my understanding of the events is it isn't what it means. I said "out of death." What's the difference? To save a person from death would be to keep them from dying. To save them out of death would be to let them die and bring them back to life. That is how God answered the cry of Jesus. He did not save Him from dying but He brought Him back from death.

We need to turn again to Psalm 89. I should have let you keep your finger there. Psalm 89, just verse 26 since we've already looked there.

> "He will cry to Me [the Father is speaking], 'Thou art my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.'"

That's the Son speaking to the Father. How did the Father become the rock of salvation to the Son? By what act? One specific word. Resurrection, that's right. He saved Him "out of death," not "from" death. That is how the Lord, the Father, answered the prayer of Jesus.

Let's go back to Hebrews 5:7, we haven't finished. It says that He was heard, hearkened to, and it means "accepted." It doesn't mean just that His prayer was audibly heard, but it means it was heard and accepted because of His piety. I don't like the word "piety." I'll show you another place in Hebrews where the same word is used as a verb. Hebrews 11:7. I'm going to quote to you the version which Ruth and I quote to each other, the King James.

> "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."

That same word is translated "moved with fear." The NIV, does anybody have an NIV? What does it say. "Because it is holy fear." I think that's probably as good as you can get. Not so much "piety" but "holy fear." It impresses me that Jesus was moved by the fear of the Lord. If Jesus moved in the fear of the Lord, how can you and I ever dispense with that?

Let me show you a prophecy about Him in this connection in Isaiah 11. Keep your finger in Hebrews, we'll be back there before the night is over! This is another Messianic prophecy. I want to go through it quickly but I want to bring out a point.

> "Then a shoot will spring up from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch from his roots will bear fruit."

The branch from the stem of Jesse is the Messiah, Jesus.

> "The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him ..."

And it's the sevenfold Spirit that's portrayed in Revelation 5. The first one is "the Spirit of the LORD." That's the Spirit that speaks in the first person as God. And then there are six more in pairs. The spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And the immediate result of the Spirit of the Lord resting upon Him is in the next verse:

> "He will delight in the fear of the LORD."

That really is a solemn lesson. If there's one characteristic which I should say is particularly lacking among God's people today, in general I would say it's the fear of the Lord. It's evidence that we're not really led or controlled by the Holy Spirit because where the Holy Spirit is in control, we will delight in the fear of the Lord.

If you want to study one day, take a concordance based on the King James Version and look up all the passages which speak about "the fear of the Lord." It will astonish you how many there are and I do not believe that there is anything in the life of a man of God to which greater blessings are promised than the fear of the Lord. "He that hath it shall abide satisfied and shall not be visited with evil." That would be enough if that was the only promise but it's one among many. "He that hath it shall abide satisfied and shall not be visited with evil." If you're discontented and dissatisfied, it's evidence you don't have the fear of the Lord.

How was the fear of the Lord manifested in Jesus in His prayers? We're going back to Hebrews 5:7. Are you there? It says He was heard [hearkened to] because of His "holy fear." When it speaks about Jesus praying with strong groans and tears, what scene immediately comes to your mind? Gethsemane, that's right. We are really directed to Gethsemane. If we wish to know how the fear of the Lord was expressed in the prayer of Jesus, we have to turn to the passage which describes His prayer in Gethsemane. We'll do that in Matthew 26. Matthew 26 is the more complete version of this particular incident. Beginning at verse 36, I'm going to read about nine verses.

> "Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane..."

I'm planning to speak on this as it now stands on Friday morning. It's very much in my mind. Gethsemane means "a press." Did you know that? What kind of a press? An olive press where they trampled on the olives and the beautiful olive oil flowed out. In order for the oil to come out, the olives had to be trampled, just torn up, torn to shreds. That's significant. The name is no accident. Gethsemane is the place where the olive oil was squeezed out of our Lord.

> "Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed."

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I mustn't preach my sermon for Friday today. It's such a tremendously moving thing. I think it's touching that he wanted three men with him. What a responsibility to be one of those three men and how they failed, they just went to sleep.

> "Then He said to them, 'My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.' And He went a little beyond them..."

That's a mark of a leader, did you know that? He goes a little further.

> "... and fell on His face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it is possible, let his cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt.' And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, 'So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.' He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Thy will be done.. And He came back and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more. Then He came to His disciples, and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.'"

It impresses me that Jesus had to say those words three times. I don't think that was vain repetition. I think when He said it the third time He knew it was settled, He didn't have to say it again. I wonder if you ever had to say something more than once to God? "God, take my life. God, take my life. God, take my boyfriend. God, take my boyfriend. Take my career. Take my career." Sometimes we're not sure the first time we really meant it. It isn't that God hasn't heard; it's that we've got to come to a place where we know there is no turning back.

He was heard because of His holy fear. You and I will also be heard if we have the same holy fear.

How is that fear manifested? Very simple. What do we have to say? "Not my will, but Thine, be done." We're continuing with the next verse.

> "Although he was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered; and having been made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all those who regularly obey Him."

We'll do verse 10 later. Possibly it might seem strange to you that it should be said of Jesus that He was made perfect. You might react by saying, "I thought Jesus was always perfect." So far as His sinless nature is concerned, He was and is. But this is speaking about Him becoming the source of eternal salvation. As the source of eternal salvation He had to be made perfect, He had to go through all the things that it took to make Him able to offer and be the source of salvation.

You understand that being perfected is not necessarily related to dealing with sin, although if there is sin we cannot be perfected without it being dealt with. The fact that we are in the process of being perfected does not necessarily mean that we have sinned. The other way to translate perfect is "mature." We are being brought to maturity, or completion, or fulfillment to be in God's eternal purposes the very thing that God ordained us to be. In that sense, every one of us has to go through the process of being made perfect, mature, complete. Jesus is the pattern, we have to follow in that pattern. I want you to notice two things. First of all, it involves suffering. It's my personal impression that anybody who is going to be made perfect will have to go through suffering. I don't think there is any way around the suffering. Again, I feel there are severe limitations to much of the presentation of scriptural truth which we are exposed to today in the sense that it suggests you don't really need to suffer. Well, Jesus, to my way of thinking, proved that to be incorrect. He needed to suffer. There was no other way that He could be made perfect. I'm personally inclined to believe that if you are going to be made perfect, part of the process will be suffering. If you want to avoid suffering, first of all, I doubt whether you'll succeed. And secondly, if you do, you will not arrive at perfection.

The other element in being made perfect is obedience. He learned obedience by what He suffered. I'll tell you a secret.

There's only one way to learn obedience. Do you know what that is? Obeying, that's right. I was listening to myself preach on the radio just a few days ago and I really sometimes say things I need to hear! I heard myself say, "There's only one way to achieve perseverance. That's by persevering." There are some very simple truths in the spiritual life that we would gladly evade but we can't. There's only one way to achieve perseverance. That's persevering. There's only one way to achieve perfection. That's by obeying. There's only one way to learn obedience. That's by obeying. Jesus never disobeyed but He had to learn what it is to obey.

The crux of all that He learned is expressed in what we read about Gethsemane. "Not My will but Thine, be done." I believe that's painful of every human personality. I was talking just recently with a brother who's a leader of a very fine fellowship in Jamaica and I was there just a year ago and offered them some counsel and he was telling me what had come out of that. Basically it was good. He said, "Things are going well, but," he said, "we have suffered inside." He kind of gestured somewhere at his innards. I knew what he meant. I wonder how many of you know what he meant. What is the essence of that suffering? "Not my will, but Thine, be done." There's no other way.

Notice the emphasis on obedience. He learned obedience. Through learning obedience He became the source of salvation. But, He is the source of salvation only to those who obey Him. There is no way around the issue of obedience. The tense used in the Greek is a continuing present tense. "To those who continue to obey Him."

Then it's summed up in the 10th verse:

> "Having been designated [or addressed as or called as] by God a high priest in the order of Melchizedek."

So we see that to become a high priest Jesus had to be qualified. It was not automatic. I pointed out in the previous session that His appointment was by God's decision, not man's. But, God chose Him because He met the requirements. So there's two sides to that truth.

I think that's something that needs to be emphasized. Jesus had to earn the place He now occupies. He did not get it because He was a favorite son. I think this is clearly brought out in Philippians 2. We just need to read verses 8 and 9. To get the complete sense we would need to go back a little further to the beginning of the self-humbling of Jesus beginning in verse 6. I only want to come to the climax so I'll read only verses 8 and 9.

> "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name."

Notice the "therefore." He earned His exultation. He fulfilled the requirement. It was not arbitrary.

Likewise, in this passage in Hebrews that we're looking at in Hebrews 5, He fulfilled the requirements to become a high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Now we're going to look in verse 11. Hebrews 5:11.

> "Concerning whom [that is Melchizedek] we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become sluggish [dull or lazy] in your hearing."

It says here "dull of hearing," but that's a spiritual dullness. I've learned by experience that in most cases the arbiter of what people get from a preacher is the Holy Spirit. Let me explain that. I can go to two different conventions or conferences or congregations. I can have the same message, the same note outline. I can spend the same amount of time in prayer. In one place I'm hardly able to get through what I have to say. In the other place I just can't stop. I say things and I say to myself, "How did I ever know that?" I've come to realize the difference isn't in me. The difference is in the people. The Holy Spirit is jealous of the treasures of God's Word. He doesn't cast His pearls before swine—even though we might try. It's an amazing thing.

Where I'm familiar with a congregation, as I am partly with this one, there are many other factors. But if I go to a congregation that I simply don't know at all and speak to them two or three times, merely out of what the Holy Spirit pours or does not pour through me, I can have a pretty good idea whether that congregation is walking in the blessing of God or not. Because, if people can't hear, what's the good of talking? I've said to people sometimes in my rather simple phraseology, "What's the good of trying to pour water into a bottle that has a cork in the mouth?" These people were really not able to hear. They were rebuked for it.

What's really remarkable to me is that a major part of this epistle centers around the high priesthood of Melchizedek. But if you look in the Old Testament (and the references are there if you want them), there are only three verses in the Old Testament—maybe you could say four—that speak of Melchizedek. Three in Genesis and one in Psalm 110. The carnal mind would say, "Well, then, Melchizedek isn't very important." That's quite incorrect. He's extremely important. He's uniquely important. He's really the only picture we have of the kind of high priesthood that Jesus has. So be careful when you read the Old Testament.

Another remarkable example is that the apostle Paul, in a way, really bases the whole doctrine of justification by faith on half a verse in the prophet Habakkuk. You might not even know where to find Habakkuk. It's good that Paul knew where to find him, isn't it? That's a kind of hint about how to approach the Old Testament.

Going on now in Hebrews 5:12:

> "For when by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you what are the elements of the beginning of the oracles of God."

There's various different ways of translating that. The way I think I would choose is "what are the basic elements of the oracles of God." It's important to see that there are basic truths in the Bible. Some truths are basic and some are more, shall I say, advanced. One of the lessons of this passage which will come out is you can't really advance to higher truth until you've mastered basic truth.

Again, I don't wish to appear negative, but from what I understand, the basic truth, from my perspective of the people in this nation who call themselves saved, I doubt whether ten percent have any grasp of basic truth that's worth mentioning. I think ten percent would be a generous estimate. I am not without experience, because I travel widely and meet people from many different backgrounds.

These people that I pointed out in the introduction had all the privileges. They were Jewish by background, they were familiar with the Law of Moses, the Ten Commandments, the temple service, the requirements of holiness. But, they had stagnated; they just made no progress. When they should have been in a position to be able to minister God's truth to others they found themselves back in grade one, needing someone to teach them. Where do you stand? I'm trying to speak in such a way that I don't look at anybody individually. Where do you stand? Do you know enough to teach somebody else?

I'll tell you one thing, and here is my experience with training teachers—it stands me in good stead.

You don't know how much you know till you try to teach somebody else. That's when you find out.

The writer of Hebrews goes on with this reproof, and it's a very stern rebuke. Going on in verse 12 he says:

> "... you've become those who need milk and not solid food. [verse 13] For everyone who partakes of milk is inexperienced in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe."

It's very obvious there that you can be a spiritual baby and gray headed. Or, have known the Lord for twenty years and still be a spiritual baby. It isn't measured by chronological age. Going on in verse 14:

> "But solid food belongs to the perfect [mature, grown up—that's the same word], those who through use [or practice] have their senses exercised to discern between good and evil."

So that tells us the only way we can achieve mature spiritual understanding is through regularly exercising our senses so as to distinguish between good and evil. Not our physical senses but our spiritual senses.

There's a passage in Philippians which I think really relates to this. Keep your finger there in Hebrews and turn to Philippians 1. I'm going to translate it myself because I don't find any English translations I've looked at that have really brought it out. I'm not sure I can do it either but I'll try. Philippians 1:9–11.

> "And I pray this [whatever it is he's been praying], in order that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and all discernment."

I don't know what word to use. Let me tell you that the Greek word is aisthesis, which gives us the English word aesthetic. It's that kind of a word. What's an aesthetic person? It's a person who is very sensitive to the fine points of art or music. It's a person who's cultivated his powers of

perception. He walks into a picture gallery and he immediately picks out the ones that are worth looking at. Or, he's listened to music to the point where he can discern music that really is of a high quality. I think you'd agree that it does not come quickly. It has to be practiced.

Going on. We're in Philippians 1:10.

> "That you may be pure [or sincere or guileless] and not the cause of offense ..."

How does it translate it in the other versions there? "Blameless and sincere." That's the NASB. Who's got the NIV? "Pure and blameless." But you see, I don't want to spend a lot of time on this, but the word means somebody who doesn't offend somebody else. You're not a source of offense to somebody else. If you don't cultivate refinement of spiritual perception you will not be able to avoid offending others. I'm sure most of us can look back at times in our experience when we've done that, when we've been spiritually coarse. Sometimes I hear preachers make jokes which are all right, they're not vulgar, but I don't think they indicate spiritual refinement.

Let me say there are times when preachers are witty and it's given by the Holy Spirit and it's very liberating. So I'm not narrow-minded.

There are times when our attitude towards somebody who needs help is legalistic and harsh and unresponsive. We haven't cultivated that spiritual sensitivity. I would say about myself—and of course, I don't have to say it but I think I'm more sensitive to God than I am to people. I know others who are more sensitive to people than to God. We need both.

Let's go on in Philippians. I believe the Holy Spirit has got me, as it were, in a groove here.

> "... that you may be pure and blameless [and not the source of offense] until the day of Christ; being filled with the fruit of righteousness which is through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

One of the points that emerges is that in order to be filled with fruit of righteousness we have to cultivate this spiritual sensitivity.

Going back now to Hebrews 5:14:

> "Solid food is for those who are mature [grown up, perfect], those who have their spiritual senses exercised ..."

And the word is the word that gives us gymnastics in English, or gymnasium.

> "... through use or practice to the result of discerning between good and evil."

One of the things that grieves me with Charismatics is that they can be fooled by almost anything. Sometimes when I've done my best and given them the very best I can I'm grieved that they can be so easily fooled by something else.

A friend of mine who is a preacher—as a matter of fact, he's the one who is going to be here tomorrow. He was preaching in a certain place and at the end a dear lady came up to him and said, "Brother so-and-so, I just love your preaching. You and Brother-so-and-so are my two favorite preachers." Well, if I name Brother so-and-so, those of you that know them both would see how totally incongruous it was. It was intended as a compliment, but it was an insult. That woman had not cultivated her powers of spiritual perception to any perceptible degree at all.

People deserve to be fooled. If there's one way I see people fooled—this is going to touch some of you! It's in the matter of offerings. A certain kind of preacher can stand up, put a tremor in his voice, describe the poor somebody somewhere that needs help desperately, and "God has shown me there are five people here that will give $1000 each." Brother or sister, if you fall for that, you deserve to! But it makes me sick inside. I've been in places where I've wanted to get up and walk out. I thought, How dare anybody play with spiritual power and exploit it for mercenary means?

Well, the solution is: exercise your senses. If you get fooled once, make up your mind you're never going to be fooled that way again.

Okay. We're going on to chapter 6. That's a real victory. We've got through one chapter in less than two sessions! Unheard of! Mind you, it was a short chapter.

We're now in chapter 6, verse 1.

> "Wherefore leaving behind [or moving on from] the word of the beginning of Christ, let

> us be carried on to perfection [or maturity] ..."

This is this if the fifth "let us" passage. If you turn back to 0/3, you find a list of twelve "let us" passages. Okay? And the fifth one is Hebrews 6:1. It is also the second passage of practical application. The practical application it recommends is going on to maturity or perfection which is right in line with the whole tenor of this epistle.

Now we're going back to the text.

> "Wherefore leaving the word of the beginning of Christ, let us be carried on to perfection [or maturity], not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God. "

Let me pause there because we'll look at those six foundation doctrines together as a whole. Let me just point out what is implied by that word "let us." I think your translations say "press on." But the Greek is in the passive, "let us be borne along." And if you want a corresponding passage, it's in 2 Peter 1:21.

> "For not by the will of man was prophecy ever brought; but men of God spoke as they were borne along by the Holy Spirit."

What does it say in your translations? Moved? Carried. Okay. Well, that's the same word that's used in Hebrews 6:1. Why I say that is because I think it makes it clear that it's not simply dependent on our will whether we go forward. We can only go forward if the Holy Spirit bears us on just as people can only prophesy if they're borne along by the Holy Spirit. And as you'll see, if we are going to go on and if the Holy Spirit is going to bear us on, we have to meet a condition. If we don't meet the condition I don't think we qualify for going on.

Now, let's look at the verses 1 and 2 which list these foundation doctrines.

> "... not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works, and faith toward God, of instruction about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment."

Many, many years ago God made it clear to me that there is a doctrinal foundation to the Christian faith and that this is it. At that time, around about 1964, when I first got involved with the Charismatic movement, one thing I realized was a lot of people were coming into the realm of the Spirit who didn't have this foundation. So I started a radio program in which I taught these six foundation doctrines. Out of that because there was a secretary in Boeing in Seattle, Washington, who didn't have much to do, her boss permitted her to start typing my script out and it ended up in seven books which are called the Foundation Series. I want to just remind you that they are available here tonight.

I just read a beautiful letter from a young Jewish believer of 20 who's been listening to my program on the radio for the past six months and he is obviously a young man of great discernment because he really thinks the sun rises and sets on Derek Prince! In particular, why should anybody read anything else but the Foundation Series and Faith to Live By? It's really a most beautiful letter. I'm saying it in a jesting way, but it's one of the most impressive letters I've received from a radio listener of what simple, basic teaching can do for people.

Ever since I've become a Christian I have been absolutely sure that if I can get people to listen attentively to systematic Bible teachings they would be changed. I'd discovered this when I'd been a Christian just a few months in the British Army. I came to know the Lord in the middle of an Army barrack room in July of 1941. By November I was in the North African desert. I was the only Christian that showed any signs of life in my entire unit which numbered about 200 persons. And after a little while I thought to myself, What do I do about this? So I said, "I'll start a Bible class." I'd never been in a Bible class; I didn't know which way up to hold the Bible or anything. So I announced to my fellow soldiers that I was going to hold a Bible class. Then I thought to myself, Where do I start? I'm always one of those people who start at the beginning so I thought, Start at the beginning of what? I thought to go all the way back to Genesis is a little bit too far, so I started at the beginning of the New Testament in Matthew with the genealogy and everything, we just plowed through it. We were meeting in the open desert in the shelter of a three-ton Army truck.

My closest friend at that time was a man of just about my age who had actually been the first one to find me a Christian because he woke up in the middle of the night and found me lying on my back in the middle of the floor laughing. That was how I became a Christian. It's not the way everybody becomes a Christian! It took me quite awhile to realize there was another way of becoming a

Christian! I just checked on people's experience. If they hadn't ended up on the floor laughing I couldn't believe that they were really saved.

Anyhow, he was a good friend of mine and fortunately was not religious. If he'd been religious I would have had a miserable life, but his attitude was, "Well, everybody does his own thing. So if that's what he does, he's still my friend." So when I started this Bible class, he attended. And we plowed all the way through the first seven and a half chapters of Matthew. And the very next thing I was going to teach on was Matthew 7:13 and 14, "Straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life, and few they be that find it." And he came to me in his very British accent and he said, "Derek, old chap, I'm sorry to say I won't be coming to your Bible class any longer." I said, "Why not?" And he said, "Because I know if I do, I shall be converted." You can smile, but it's one of the most tragic statements anybody ever made to me.

Years later after the war I met him in an underground station in London. Lydia and I visited his home, led his wife to the Lord, she became and is a committed Christian. I got a strange letter from him. He said, "I don't know what it is you're doing to me, but don't do it." I was praying for him. Whether I was right or wrong, I stopped praying. After that we drifted apart and I didn't see him for at least twenty years. One day when I was here in Fort Lauderdale I got a letter. He had obtained my address from an Assemblies of God minister in Britain and he wrote. I think Ruth saw the letter. He chronicled the most miserable list of failures. He's a gifted man, could succeed in various avenues but his life had gone steadily downhill. And he wrote to me to say, "Do you think you can help me?" I took time and made an appointment and met him in a hotel in England. His wife was like a flower that blossomed when she met me again. She just came spiritually alive in a few moments. But I was not able to help him. I don't know what the end of that story will be. But at the end, after I sat and counseled with him and talked with him I said, "I just have to tell you one thing. You're a rebel at heart." He said, "It's true." His wife said that's right. He was a good man, a good husband, a good father—and a failure.

I don't know that I've ever been more impressed with the solemnity of how you respond to God. He had his opportunity and he deliberately turned God down. I trust that God will yet have mercy on him, but I can't say I'm sure he will. See? Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father draws him by the Spirit." Don't imagine that just any time you feel like it you can put things right with God, because you can't. If God doesn't help you, you can't even start.

That's a long interpolation, but I think maybe the Lord wants that in this message because it seems to me somehow that no matter how hard I try I end up being very serious. And I think, really, God is serious. Do you know that? I think God is probably much more serious than most of us. And those of you that know me will know I'm not a particularly mournful or gloomy person. There's a difference between being gloomy and being serious.

What shall I do? Recommend you to the Foundation Series! I don't intend to go into these six foundation doctrines at length because they are really seriously available in the books. If you've never read them, they are there.

Let's begin and just look at the first two and then, God helping us, we'll continue with the list at our next session. The first one is what? Repentance. Let me tell you that that is inevitably and invariably the first step in approaching God. You cannot bypass it. You can get superficial results in the spiritual life without sincere repentance, but further down the road they'll catch you up. I think in counseling people, with all their problems—financial, marital, spiritual, demonic—my impression today is that fifty percent of those problems are caused by a failure to truly repent. It is the first foundation stone and there is no substitute for it, there is no way around it, there's nothing that will take its place.

What is repentance? Repentance is primarily a decision. It's not emotion. I've seen people get very emotional and fail to repent. I've seen people who've repented without any obvious sign of emotion. Although there is such a thing as "godly sorrow," which does lead us to repentance. I've seen that too. Repentance is not in the realm of the emotions, it's in the realm of the will. It's a decision of the will. The Greek word means "to change your mind." The Hebrew word used in the Old Testament means "to turn around." That's typical. Greek will always focus on the inward, Hebrew will always focus on the practical and the outworking.

Put them together. Repentance is changing your mind and turning around. You have been going your own way. You have been making your own decisions, setting your own standards, doing your own thing. You may have been doing it in a very religious context. You may have said, "Praise the Lord" every other sentence, but you've never repented because you've never changed your mind. Then you have problems. You come to some preacher, "Cast this demon out of me; straighten my wife out; help me with my finances." What I have learned is all that secondary help is vain if it isn't preceded by repentance. Because, get you

out of your problem, you'll be back again in a little while deeper.

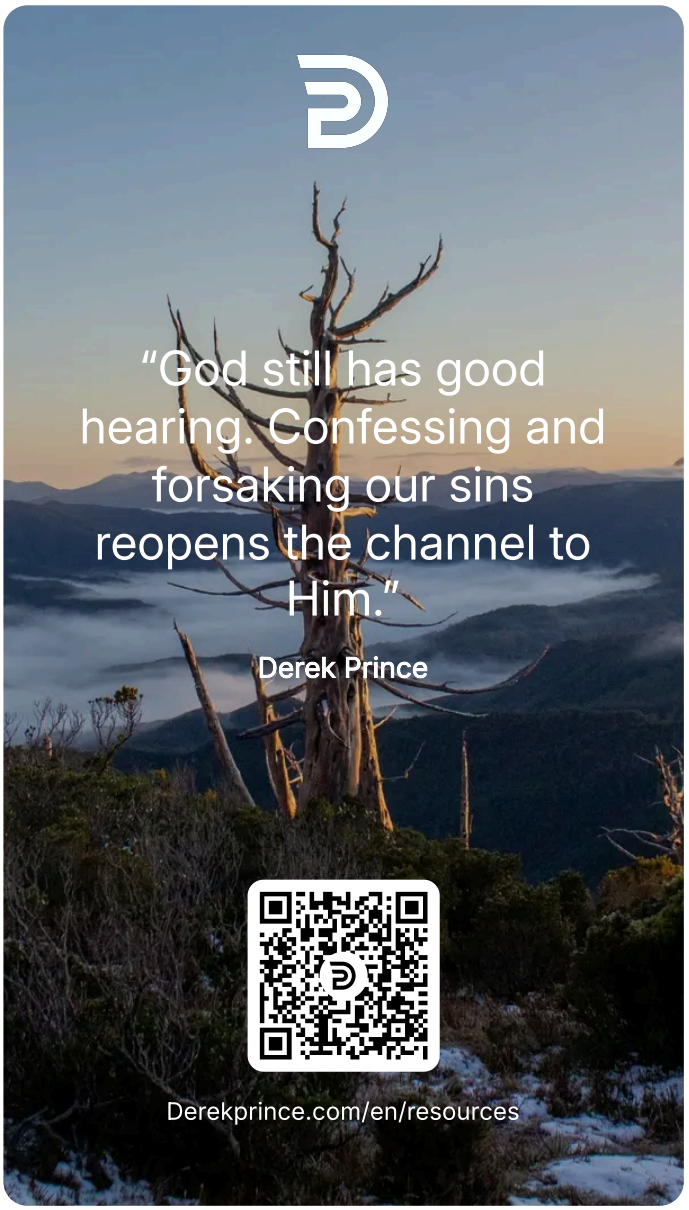
Repentance from dead works. What are dead works? I understand that anything that is not done in faith is a dead work. Romans 14:23 is the only Scripture we have time for tonight:

> "But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin."

Whatever does not proceed out of faith is sin. So everything you do that is not done out of faith is what? Therefore it has to be repented of. It's a dead work, there's no life. The only basis for righteous living is what? Faith. "The righteous will live by faith." "Whatsoever does not proceed from faith is sin." That's why everybody has to repent.

We'll close for tonight, the Lord helping us, we'll continue.

Sermon
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