



Part 38: Still Chosen



Opening Quotes

Word ALIVE



Paul (or a disciple) addresses the Hebrew Christians.

“In times past, God spoke to us in fragmentary ways to our fathers through the prophets; in this, the final age, he has spoken to us through his Son, the exact representation of the Father.” Heb 1:1

“Since he was himself tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are tempted.” Heb 2:18

“God’s word is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword.” Heb 4:12

“Let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and favor and to find help in time of need.” Heb 4:16

“You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.” Heb 5:6

“How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself up unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God!” Heb 9:14

“Christ was offered up once to take away the sins of many; he will appear a second time not to take away sin but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him.” Heb 9:28

“Faith is confident assurance concerning what we hope for, and conviction about things we do not see.” Heb 11:1

“We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses.” Heb 12:1

“Endure your trials as the discipline of God, who deals with you as sons. What son is there whom his father does not discipline?” Heb 12:7



Background Notes -

PURPOSE: To present the letter to the Hebrews (probably Christian converts from Judaism), in which Jesus’ unique situation of being God and man makes him the only true Mediator between God and man.

AUTHOR: Unknown; probably a close disciple of Paul’s.

DATE: Before 70 AD, since there is no mention of the Temple’s destruction.

STYLE: Sounds like a sermon, intended to lift up the morale of the community. Uses a very sweeping style. Christ is here seen as the ultimate High Priest, and his Passion and Resurrection as the ultimate Sacrifice.

the BIG PICTURE		← : LAW, History, Writings, Prophets		← : key covenants in our Father’s plan	
12 Periods ▼	Plot ▼	Other books related to period ▼		stories in each period ▼	
BC	☉ THE BEGINNINGS	GN 1-11	Ps 8, 104	Creation, Adam & Eve, Cain & Abel, Noah’s ark, Tower of Babel	
1850	♠ THE PATRIARCHS	GN 12-50		Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Joseph, Melchizedek	
1250	▲ EXODUS FROM EGYPT	EX		Moses, the burning bush, the plagues, passover, exodus	
1200	♣ JOURNEY TO CANAAN	NM, Jos	LV, DT	Sinai desert, 10 commandments, Levites, Law, Joshua	
1100	☠ THE JUDGE CYCLE	Jg	Ruth	12 tribes, Gideon, Samson, Ruth, Samuel	
1030	☆ KINGS & PROPHETS	1 & 2 S	1 Ch, Ps, Prov	Saul, David, Solomon, Jerusalem, the Temple	
1000	■ THE DIVIDED KINGDOM	1 Kg	2 Ch, Prov,	Israel (N), Judah (S), Elijah & Elisha, Isaiah, Assyrian exile	
721 587	☉ BABYLONIAN EXILE	2 Kg	2 Ch, Tob, Hos, Am, Hab, Is, Jer, Lam, Jl, Mic, Zp, Jon, Nah, Ob, Ez, Dan, Bar	Babylonians, “major” prophets, Isaiah (to Israel), Jeremiah (to Jerusalem), Ezekiel (to the Exiles)	
538	☼ THE RESTORATION	Ezr, Neh	Est, Judith, Hag, Zech, Mal, Job, Ecc, Songs	Cyrus, 2 nd temple, 2 nd Law, “minor” prophets, new writings	
163 63	🕯 THE REPURIFICATION	1 Mac	Dn, 2Mac, Sirach, Wisdom	Greeks, Maccabean revolt, Hasmonean Dynasty, Romans, Jewish sects (Pharisees, Saducees, Zealots, Essenes)	
AD	♠ JESUS CHRIST	LK	MT, MK, JN	Incarnation, Good News, New Law, Cross & Resurrection	
33 70	🕯 APOSTOLIC CHURCH	Acts	Rm, 1&2Co, Ga, Ep, Phil, Col, 1&2Th, 1&2 Tm, Ti, Phm, Hb, Ja, 1P, 2P, 1,2&3J, Jd, Rv	Pentecost, council, journeys, epistles, Body/Bride of Christ	



The Story of Part 38: Still Chosen



The Book of Hebrews opens with a direct placing of Jesus in the course of Jewish history. In the past, God had spoken in a fragmentary way through his prophets. But now, He has spoken definitively through His own Son, who is an exact representation of the Father. And because Christ experienced suffering, he can truly be said to have been one of us. This was no play-acting. Christ's suffering was no pretense. His tears and cries were real, because he was a real man. Being familiar with temptation, he is able to help us when we are tempted. In fact, Hebrews tells us that Jesus was "made perfect" through suffering. This has led people to ask how he could be "made perfect" if he was God. "Made perfect" means that he experienced temptation and suffering in the realm of time, although divinely speaking, he has always existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit. As God he was always perfect. As man, he was "made perfect." This is why he can help us during our trials. He's been there.

Notice, too, that since Christ was offered as atonement for our sins, this means that whenever we "offend God", we are, in a real sense, crucifying his Son. This is why the slightest sin is infinitely more serious than the largest natural disaster. But thanks to Christ's death and resurrection, sin and death have been defeated. Through faith in him and what he did for us, our own death will give way to resurrection. As C.S. Lewis said, even though our reason cannot grasp what sort of "spiritual technology" God uses to transform our belief into our resurrection, God has revealed through his prophets and specifically through his own Son that this is so. How can someone be saved without believing in the God-given means of his salvation? We do not know.

Of course, this does not mean we are finished being saved, or that sin and death no longer exist. He did not suffer and die so that we would not have to. But his suffering and dying fill us with hope in the midst of our own suffering and dying in light of his resurrection. Those who deny the resurrection and simply consider Christ a good man completely miss the renewing power of faith in Jesus and what he has done for us. We owe God the Father our created lives, and God the Son our *redeemed* lives!

The author of Hebrews takes this extraordinary dual nature of Jesus and puts in a context that the Hebrews could understand. In the old covenant, the Levitical priests would offer animal sacrifices on behalf of the people for the forgiveness of their sins (including the sins of the priests themselves). One of the rules of the animal sacrifices was that the animal be unblemished, perfect. After all, how can you offer a less than perfect offering to God? But these were nothing more than a preparation for the *real* sacrifice, one in which the Highest Priest would sacrifice himself on behalf of the people for the forgiveness of their sins. And of course,

no animal is perfect, and neither is the human heart perfectly pure when offering those sacrifices. But when Jesus' death is seen as the sacrifice, now we have the perfect victim (because he was God himself), a perfect heart (because his will was perfectly united with the Father's), and an unrepeatable sacrifice (because he is now with God the Father for all eternity). Every Mass we celebrate is not a new sacrifice, but a partaking in the one, unique sacrifice.

The author knew that Jesus was not really a Jewish priest, for he was not even from the priestly tribe of Levi. How, then, could he be a priest? The answer is found in a mysterious figure described in the book of Genesis, the Priest King Melchizedek. This Priest King offered to God bread and wine after Abraham had been victorious in the battle of the five kings. Melchizedek disappears from the story as suddenly as he appears, with no explanation of who or where he came from. The author of Hebrews calls Jesus a priest in the order of Melchizedek, for Jesus too was not a Levitical priest. In fact, as Melchizedek had no genealogy, Jesus did not have a human father. It is not coincidental that he prefigured his self-sacrifice to God the Father at the Last Supper in the forms of bread and wine. Imagine, God offering himself to himself. It is literally an offer the Father can't refuse! How little our faith must be to find ourselves bored at Mass, where that irreplaceable sacrifice takes place before our eyes. Who could compare with this High Priest of ours? Unlike the priests under the old covenant who had to make new sacrifices day after day, year after year, the sacrifice of Christ was a once for all, unending sacrifice. There is no further offering for sin needed. The priest is Christ's representative, not his replacement. With him we participate in the one, inexhaustible sacrifice by which all of mankind is saved.

Christ's being fully God and fully man also puts him in a unique situation. Although Mary and the saints can intercede for us, and although the priest can represent him in the Mass, Christ is the only mediator between God and man in the truest sense of the word.

And so, with our eyes fixed on Jesus, we run toward the finish line, as a great "cloud of witnesses" urges us on, our forefathers in faith, like Abraham and Isaac, and all the saints who have gone before us. A great company of angels and saints continues to spur us on towards the finish line, praying for us, interceding for us, to Christ. Confidently, we can approach his throne, for he himself was "not ashamed to become one of us in suffering." And so we embrace our suffering and join it to Christ's, taking our trials as the disciplines of a loving father toward his sons, which is exactly what we are. 📖



Defending the Faith: Mass Confusion

"The 'sacrifice' of the Mass is unscriptural. Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary was for all time (Heb 7:27). Some altars even have relics of dead saints. This, too, is clearly unscriptural and superstitious."

In the first book of the Old Testament, a foreshadowing of Christ's sacrifice to God in the form of bread and wine can be readily seen in the offering made by the priest-king Melchizedek (Gn 14:18; Ps 109). In the last book of the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi mentions a pure sacrifice to God offered "from the rising to the setting of the sun" and "in every nation" (Mal 1:12), but then graphically foretells the rejection of the old covenant priesthood and its animal sacrifices (Mal 2:3) because of their aberrations.

The seventh chapter of Hebrews sees Christ as the perfect, sinless victim, as well as the High Priest in the order of Melchizedek that offers the sacrifice. We can see Christ personally giving authority to his apostles to forgive people's sins (Jn 20:22-23) and to reenact the Last Supper ("Do this in memory of me"). The offering of sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins was a priestly function. And while the sacrifice at Calvary was unquestionably a once and for all universal sacrifice, the New Testament couldn't be clearer that the partaking of his body and blood in the bread and wine was only *begun* at the Last Supper: "*As often as you shall eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim his death until he comes*" (1 Cor 11:24-26).

The sacrifice of the Mass is therefore not an addition to Calvary, but is somehow Calvary itself, in a bloodless fashion, under bread and wine, offered in every time and place. Where else but the Mass do we find a sacrifice which is (1) the perfect victim, (2) offered in every time and place, and (3) under the forms of bread and wine? A practicing Jew will tell you that the Pesach (Passover meal) is more than just a retelling of the Moses story. It is a going back in time, an actual participation in the exodus journey. Likewise, we go back in time to the foot of the Cross every time we go to Mass. Little wonder that Paul takes the Eucharist so seriously (1 Cor 11:27-29).

Some have wondered why we often partake of the bread but not the wine. Two things should be noted. First, Jesus emphasized the bread as his flesh strongly enough (Jn 6:52) that it has naturally become the prevalent form of Communion. Second, the Church teaches, with an authority given by Christ, that the wine can also suffice as Communion in cases where someone may be hindered from eating (such as sickness). While the Church at times refrains from giving Communion under both species for practical reasons (the amount of wine and time necessary to distribute to large congregations, for instance), there is nevertheless a renewed interest in trying to have both, not as a requirement, but as a recommendation.

As for the use of relics, some privileged altars still include relics of a saint, but these are in no way objects of superstition. In the earliest days when the persecuted Christians celebrated Mass underground in the catacombs, the Mass was often celebrated literally over the bones of a martyr! Confident that the martyr was with Christ in heaven, intercessory prayers were often answered through these saints, often including miraculous healings. This is no more superstitious than the healings which took place on contact with Christ's robe (Mt 9:20), a prophet's bones (2 K 13:20), an apostle's handkerchief (Ac 19:11) or even an apostle's shadow (Ac 5:15)! Such practices are obviously superstitious if they are believed to have some innate power *apart from Christ*. But to the one who firmly believes that the Creator of all became a little baby, there is no difficulty in believing that He can also be present in bread and wine, or that He can bestow special blessings through personal devotions such as scapulars, rosaries, or even the simple yet significant sign of the Cross.



Expressing the Faith: Come, Worship the Lord

We come together to worship God, called to his perfection. We are all saints in the making.

***Come and worship the Lord
For we are his people, the flock that he shepherds.
Alleluia.***

*Come, let us sing to the Lord
And shout with joy to the rock who saves us.
Let us come with thanksgiving
And sing joyful songs to the Lord.*

(chorus)

*Come let us bow down and worship,
Bending the knee before the Lord our Maker.
For we are his people,
We are the flock that he shepherds.*

(chorus)

↗ **Next time: "Almost There"** ↖