

YOUR FAITH REVEALS THE SIZE OF YOUR GOD!

Today's Text: Heb. 6:1-19

Extracts:

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ...if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame...But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation... For God is not unjust to forget your work and labour of love you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end [Heb. 6: 1-6, 9-11].

In August 1997, I organized on behalf of the ILO¹ Bureau for Employers' Activities a Strategic Management Workshop for the Federation of Employers in a country in Southern Africa. At the time, I was the Director-General/CEO of the Nigeria Employers' Consultative Association (NECA), regarded in ILO circles as one of the leading employers' organisations in Africa. I was then also an employer-member of the ILO Governing Body in Geneva, Switzerland. On my arrival, my counterpart asked for my résumé. To my surprise, it was published in the local newspapers the following day. When the workshop opened a few days later, we had close to 30 participants, most of whom were expatriates from multinational subsidiaries.

*What made the difference? My host said that he had to publish my profile to convince his skeptical members that the workshop was "high profile" as he had promised them. Before my arrival, they did not believe that his counterpart from another African country could deliver a high-profile workshop for CEOs. The lesson of that story is that the way people see the God we believers preach to them depends on what they see of our faith. Do they see a grey-haired God who is now a dinosaur (relic of history) or an ever-living God, a dynasty? In today's Bible verses, the writer of the Book of **Hebrews** challenges us to answer that question. If you are claiming to be a child of God, do people see Him through you as a dinosaur or a dynasty? Are you stuck to the basic elements of your faith or you have advanced to bearing visible and profitable fruits? Let us find out!*

¹ ILO, the International Labour Organisation, is the only tripartite UN agency, since 1919, that brings together governments, employers and workers representatives of 187 member-states, to set international labour standards, promote enterprise development, social protection and social dialogue; <http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/lang--en/index.htm>

1. Background: Where is your faith?

According to evolutionists, the dinosaur was a huge creature, a reptile, that lived a long time ago and it has become extinct because it did not adapt to changing environmental forces.² ***The term is now applied to anything or anybody that is stuck in the past and unable to adapt to changing circumstances.*** At the beginning of each new year, most of us develop what we call “New Year Resolutions.” We spell out our hopes and aspirations; targets/objectives we hope to achieve before the end of the new year. By June or mid-year, however, we begin to hear people talk of “the good old days,” suggesting that our better days were now in the past, not in the future! What happened? Have we not thus become dinosaurs?

Most believers practise their faith -walk in like manner. Soon after water baptism, they bubble! They have testimonies to report. They read the Bible with relish. See, for example, the enthusiasm among the early believers soon after Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost. About three thousand people gave their lives to Christ and received water baptism. We are told that they continued “steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” [Acts 2: 40-42]. In addition [vv. 44-46]:

Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

But a few years down the road, when persecution came from far and near, the believers “were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles” [Acts 8:1]. You can be sure that some of those three thousand converts could hardly progress beyond “the good old days.”

The word of God says, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father He has declared Him” [Jn 1: 18]. When Philip, one of the twelve apostles once asked Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us,” He replied, “***He who has seen Me has seen the Father***” [Jn 14: 8-9]. After His resurrection, He told His disciples, “Peace to you! ***As the Father has sent Me, I also send you***” [Jn 20: 21], and “***Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age***” [Matt. 28: 20].

In His last prayer before His Passion, Jesus prayed for ALL BELIEVERS, that is, “those who will believe in Me through [His disciples’] word that they all may be

² For more, read <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dinosaur> ; and <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dinosaur>

one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, ***that the world may believe that You sent Me*** [Jn 17: 20-21]. Therefore, believers have the spiritual unction from above to show the world the Father and His only begotten Son, through their faith.

Salvation is ahead of us, not behind. Therefore, there is nothing like the good old days about it. You must tug on until you cross the finishing line at death. How can we do that and succeed? That is where Chapter 6 of the book of **Hebrews** becomes handy. The writer points out to us the perils of not making progress to spiritual maturity that leads to life [Heb. 6: 1]. Since we have found it difficult to move forward, we relish the past and remain hooked on it. But have you ever asked yourself why mighty dinosaur could not make it whereas tiny mosquito that humans “persecute” every day for spreading malaria fever has adapted and still exists? Therefore, it has nothing to do with your position in your family or place of worship. It has to do with refusing to move on and up in your spiritual walk. According to the book of Hebrews, in the Chapter under focus, we refuse to keep going and growing through the following ways:

a) *We may be stuck in religion*

The writer says, “Let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrines of baptisms, of laying of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment” [vv. 1-2]. In other words, some believers are stuck in religion! For example, ***what differentiates one denomination from another today is nothing but the mode of worship***. To make sure that members stay loyal, their leaders give the impression that only believers who do it their way will go to heaven! For example, as often as you change denominations, you must do your water baptism again and again! The danger of this show is that many of us steep themselves in rituals to the detriment of moving forward to grow their faith by Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit. They concentrate on impressing their pastors and elders than pleasing God.

b) *And unwilling/unable to move forward*

The writer states, “It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame” [vv. 4-6]. ***Some believers/ministries are like an empire that has declined or fallen***. Their testimonies are like history, relics of the past!

I remember an elder in our church who carried with him a needle that he had miraculously vomited during a crusade so many many years ago.

Every time and everywhere he preached, his only testimony of God's glory was that needle- and he did so for so many years. Then, one day, a little child (of about nine years) asked openly, "Is that all that your God can do?" The elder was stuck in the past and unwilling/unable to move forward. Compare that with Paul's experience in the school of Tyrannus. He spent just two years there and "all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles." Unusual miracles followed: the name of the Lord was magnified and "many of those who practised magic brought books together and burned them in the sight of all." The value of the burnt items totalled fifty thousand pieces of silver and "***the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed***" [Acts 19: 8-19].

c) *Therefore, we need faith and patience to keep on course*

The writer then shares with believers his confidence concerning them "for God is not unjust to forget your work and labour of love which you have shown toward His name in that you ministered to the saints... that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who ***through faith and patience, inherit the promises***" [Heb. 6: 9-12].

Faith has building blocks³ for it to mature and be fruitful. You must glory in tribulation that in turn produces perseverance, which produces character, and character, hope. Hope "does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" [Rom. 5: 1-5].

In the words of our Lord, Jesus Christ, "Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." But the broad way with a wide gate leads to destruction. Yet, Jesus recommends that we enter by the narrow way [Matt. 7: 13-14]. That suggests that ***each of us will have to run his/her race to salvation***. There are no records to set or to break; each track has its finishing line! ***Therefore, if the way to life is narrow and difficult, it suggests that many of us who cannot meet the absolute standards may drop off along the way or attempt to shortchange the process and get themselves into eternal destruction***. Would you consider that a viable option? So, what size of God does your faith reveal to those around you? What does today's message mean to you in terms of your journey to salvation?

2. Implications for the modern believer

Here are a few critical issues that you must address in your Christian walk:

a) *It is a race against self!*

³ http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume_14/Thebuildingblocksoffaihv0114No33Feb2013.pdf

You may be familiar with the following Bible characters: Abraham, Job, Judas Iscariot and Peter. Abraham was called (as Abram) at the age of 75. The child of promise, Isaac, was not born until Abraham was 100 years old and his wife, Sarah, was 90 years old [**Gen. 17: 17**]. How many women do you know that can be pregnant at the age of 89? Today, Abraham is regarded as the father of all those who believe [**Rom. 4: 9-16**]. Job was the richest man in his days. He feared God and shunned evil. Yet, God allowed Satan to test his faith. Within a short period of time, he lost his seven sons and three daughters and all his material wealth. Yet, he could say during his ordeal, “I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth, and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God” [**Job 1: 1-22; 19: 25-26**]. Judas Iscariot was one of the twelve apostles chosen by Jesus [**Matt. 10: 4**]. Yet, he was a thief; he kept the money box and he used to take what was put there without being questioned [**Jn 12: 6**]. As if that was not enough, he went on to betray Jesus for a mere 30 pieces of silver. By the time he realised what he had done, he committed suicide [**Matt. 27: 3-5**]. Peter, one of the twelve apostles, was chosen by Jesus to be the “rock” of the church [**Matt. 16: 17-19**]. Yet, he denied Jesus thrice during His trial but repented bitterly [**Matt. 26: 69-75**]. Christ forgave him and he indeed became the head of the apostles after Christ’s ascension [**Acts 1: 15; 2: 14**].

If you examine all four of them, they took different routes, each of which was unique. Those of them who won their races (Abraham, Job and Peter) made mistakes along the way but they repented and kept their course. But Judas Iscariot might have felt that his sin of betrayal was unforgivable. So, he killed himself. *The lesson for us is that the race of faith is against self. The only one to look up to is Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith* [**Heb. 12: 2**].

b) *The standard is absolute, not relative*

Since the race course has only one track, yours, there are no standards to set or to break. All that matters is that *you have to keep moving forward!* You may be hard pressed on every side but not yet crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed. What counts is that people can see you “always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in [your] body” [**2 Cor. 4: 8-10**].

When people see you, they see a mighty God through you. For example, when Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian king discovered that his fiery fire could not kill the three young Jews that he had thrown in there (but instead saw four beings, one of whom was like the “Son of God”), he set them free and made a decree “that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego

shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because ***there is no other God who can deliver like this***” [Dan. 3: 8-30]. Their faith revealed a powerful and ever living God!

c) *And leave behind a dynasty!*

For daring to preach the name of Jesus in the porch, called Solomon’s and heal a lame man in the name of Jesus, the Jewish leaders arrested Peter and John and put them in custody until the following day. In the morning, they brought them before the Sanhedrin. We are told that Peter, “filled with the Holy Spirit,” gave the glory to “Jesus Christ of Nazareth” whom they had crucified but God had raised from the dead. We are told, “When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marvelled. And ***they realised that they had been with Jesus***” [Acts 3: 11-4: 13].

When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, He introduced Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob [Ex. 3: 15]. King David came from the tribe of Judah, one of the twelve sons of Jacob. When archangel Gabriel came to Mary to announce the coming birth of Jesus, he said He was the “***Son of the Highest***” to whom the Lord God will give the throne of His father David “***and of His kingdom there will be no end***” [Lk 1: 26-33]. Through Jesus, therefore, the kingdom of God has become a dynasty!

From the forgoing, it is by faith, we too can do it. Even if your faith is as small as a mustard seed, it can do exploits for God and His Christ. ***All it takes is for your faith to keep growing day by day until the day you are called home to eternity. When people see your faith, they will see the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Father of Jesus Christ and of true believers of today and those yet unborn.*** That is the message for us all in today’s study.

3. Conclusion: Make Jesus the anchor of your soul!

After His death on the cross, the veil in the temple in Jerusalem was torn in two from top to bottom [Matt. 27: 51], implying that the high priest would no longer go behind that veil each year with the blood of animals. ***Jesus, the Anchor of our souls, has become our High Priest forever*** [Heb. 6: 19-20], ***the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last*** [Rev. 22: 13]. When by faith we focus on Him, He will show us His Father. When others see our faith in action, they will see God’s Dynasty. They will be careful not to hurt you, the apple of God’s eye.

Alleluia!