

The Right Choice

Rev. David Lipsy

Scripture: Hebrews 11:23 – 12:3

As I thought about what to preach this morning, my mind went back thirty-six years. I was, at that time, about the same age as some of you, young friends. I well remember that sermon as if it was preached yesterday. It was so powerful and so blessed by the Lord, that we remember coming out of church and seeing young people weeping in their cars. I will not preach that minister's sermon. That would not be right to do. But I will certainly try to convey to you some of the lessons we learned from it so many years ago, praying God would truly bless it. And may I ask you to silently pray that this message might have a lasting, an *everlasting* effect on many of us here today!

The text we will be considering is Hebrews 11:24–27, “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.”

1. A choice affecting the present
2. A choice affecting the future
3. A choice affecting everything

The history of Moses is not just a nice Bible history that we want to teach our younger children. The writer to the Hebrews places this man of God right in the midst of a gallery of faith-filled saints found in the Old Testament. He puts Moses and the others there as examples for us, people who faced incredible challenges but who, by the grace of God and the faith God gave them, overcame these enormous challenges. In a recent sermon, we heard about some of the challenges you face, especially young people today. Challenges that, in some ways, are like challenges all young people have faced, but in other ways, challenges that are unique to your generation, especially with the digital revolution we are witnessing.

I have chosen a part of Moses's history because in some ways it relates to our times, perhaps more than many Bible histories. Why do I say that? Well, the answer to that is the rest of this sermon.

A Choice Affecting the Present

You know the history of Moses, I trust, or at least a lot of it. As verse 23 alludes, Moses was born in a time when Pharaoh had commanded that all Israelite baby infants should be killed. At first Pharaoh wanted the midwives to kill them at birth, which is eerily prescient of the holocaust of abortion we see today. When that plan failed, Pharaoh wanted the baby boys thrown into the Nile River, which was a god the Egyptians worshipped. It makes us wonder for what gods our fellow-citizens are willing to sacrifice their unborn children. Moses was just such a little Israelite baby, and his parents knew that they would not long be able to hide him from the Egyptians. So Moses's parents did something very daring—really an act of faith. I say that because verse 23 tells us a couple of things that challenge us.

First, it says Moses's parents saw that "he was a proper child." Literally, the word "proper" means "of the town" or "of the city," the idea being, well-bred or even very handsome in a special way. Of course many parents think their little ones are cute and all, but we're sure Scripture isn't talking about Moses being cute. Rather, in some other way his parents saw him as special.

But second, verse 23 surprises us in another way by these words, "and they were not afraid of the king's commandment." And we understand all of this better when we consider that the verse begins with the words, "By *faith* Moses was hid three months of his parents." The faith God gave Moses's parents was stronger than any fear they might have otherwise had, even of Pharaoh's murderous command. It was that faith that enabled them to send Moses down the Nile in a water-proof basket, committing his future to the Lord.

Parents, we need a faith like that, don't we? I know that our natural inclination is to steer our children as long as we can so as to prevent as much sin and danger as possible. But we all come to that point—some sooner and some later—when we need to surrender our son or daughter to the care of the Lord. Oh yes, we prayed for them long before that time, but we had our hand of care, of love, of discipline on them as well. But whether they still live at home or are off to university or away for some kind of work, our hand cannot hold theirs indefinitely, can it? "By faith...his parents"—may those words become precious for us!

The rest, as they say, was history—*God's* history—as are all our histories. Moses was found, pitied, and adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. What an environment for an Israelite child to be brought up in! How much could Moses possibly have learned from his mother in the short time before he was weaned and before he was returned

to Pharaoh's daughter? But learn he did—in Pharaoh's court! Stephen, in Acts 7, tells us, "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was mighty in words and in deeds." Egypt was the center of learning in that era of history. To this day we marvel when we study, for example, the pyramids. How exact the measurements, how enduring the structures, how they could ever get such massive stones so high up in place, not to mention how they reached the building site so many miles, it is supposed, from where they were quarried!

Young friends, I think it's safe to say Moses had quite a promising future in Egypt. He certainly didn't have to start at the bottom (as they say) but was near the top from his youngest years. The Egyptians wouldn't have taught him all the wisdom Egypt had to offer if they didn't have some grand plan for his life. Look at who his benefactors were! It's quite evident he was a favorite of Pharaoh and certainly of Pharaoh's daughter. And Stephen didn't say Moses was only taught but rather that he was learned, meaning he *had* learned his lessons.

Now just step back a minute, young friends, and take a good look at Moses. He was given a world-class education though not a Christian education. Talk about power and influence! It was not only what he knew, but whom. It sounds like Moses was on the fast-track to power, fame, riches, maybe even a position of leadership. Stephen adds that Moses was well-spoken and powerful in action, a man of deeds. This would be today's equivalent of being the son of Jeff Bezos, founder, chairman, and CEO of Amazon, the richest man in the world. Yes, we could say Moses had a lot going for him, in worldly terms. But I say worldly terms because Pharaoh and the Egyptians were entirely ignorant of the living God, the God of Israel. At least, they were for now. Instead, they worshipped things—objects that the true God had created.

How about us taking a look at ourselves at this point? What do you see? Are you strong? Are you skilled? Are you good looking? Do you have a decent job or are you doing pretty well in schooling? Maybe you're not the best in school matters but perhaps have gifts in other areas—singing, cooking, a trade. What is the plan, young friend, concerning your future? A nice car or truck? A good-paying job? Marriage perhaps? Anything else? I mean is anything missing from that list?

Verse 24 of our chapter appears to be quite abrupt. “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter.” Refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter? What!? Wasn’t Moses thankful for all the help he had received? After all, Pharaoh’s daughter saved his life, raised him, gave him a first-class education in all worldly skills and learning. For nearly forty years he hobnobbed with a world leader in the court. And would he now just dump it all? And for what?

Thankfully, Stephen fills in some of the blanks for us. We read, again in Acts 7, “And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.” I have to confess, as many times as I read this history, I don’t recall noticing these important words, “it came into his heart.” Does this mean Moses just woke up one day and thought, “I think I’ll go out and visit the people of Israel”? Perhaps he did. But much more likely, “it came into his heart” would be like the words in Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son, “he came to himself.” In other words, God put this thought in Moses’s heart. How Moses knew the Israelites were his brethren we’re not sure, but when he did go out to visit them, what he saw was not pretty.

Stephen recounts the history of Moses seeing an Egyptian beating an Israelite and Moses responding by killing the Egyptian and burying him. The next day, when Moses

tried to settle a dispute between two Israelites, he learned that what had happened the day before was now public knowledge. Why would Moses try to intervene on both occasions? Stephen explains, “For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not.” Already at this time, the thought was put in Moses’s heart that he had to do something to rescue his people. But the problem was he thought to do it his own way. But God had other plans—another way.

If this would be all we knew of the history, we would say Moses tried his best to do what was right, using his influence to rescue his fellow Israelites. Maybe that explains why he walked away from the court of Pharaoh. Maybe he was just fed up with the abuse Egypt heaped on his people. And that same motivation might explain ninety percent of most humanitarian efforts today, trying to bring about social justice. It just seemed like the right thing to do.

Maybe you, young friend, think of yourself as a pretty decent person. Oh, you know you’re not perfect. You know we’re sinners and all. But in the day-to-day scheme of things, do you really think of yourself as a totally-depraved sinner who deserves hell? One who is in desperate need of God’s salvation? Did you ever see yourself in that way? Did God ever put that into your young heart?

You see, there are any number of young people who believe they are saved. I am in no position to judge and possess no special power to do so. But when you look at Moses, he seemed to have the right motives. He seemed to do what he could to help. After all, he put his own welfare on the line for his people. He thought they would have understood what he was trying to do. And so it is, if the standard of what salvation looks like becomes very low; and when sin isn’t all that painful; and when holiness isn’t

all that radical; and when being a Christian means doing many things non-Christians can also do becomes normal; it's easy to think I'm a Christian. After all, we certainly don't want to be stuffy hyper-Calvinists or legalists, right?

But Moses actually wasn't a philanthropist or a social justice warrior. He became, by God's grace, someone far more radical; and what happened to him was far more life-changing than just good humanitarian sentiments. "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." Why? "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

"Choosing rather to suffer affliction...than to enjoy the pleasures of sin." How could anyone choose affliction over pleasure? Only by faith. If we were to make two columns on a piece of paper or spreadsheet, one called "Egypt" and one called "Israel"—to compare them—what would we find? Let's see, in the "Egypt" column we have *power*. Israel? *Weakness*. In the "Egypt" column there's *wealth* and *status*. Israel? *Poverty* and *slavery*. Moses dined in the court of the king. The Israelites had to make bricks without straw. Egyptians held the whip. Israelites were beaten with the whip. Moses was Pharaoh's daughter's adopted son. Israelite boys were drowned. Seems rather lopsided, doesn't it? Not much going for Israel was there? What then really *was* the reason Moses chose Israel over Egypt? And while we're asking that question, may I ask which choice would you make, young friend?

There are lots and lots of pleasures to be found in the world. I'm sure you know that and maybe tasted a number of them. But then there's that Christian thing, *that* way of life.

To answer the question why Moses would make such a choice is actually quite easy. Scripture tells us. Moses saw things one could not see with just natural eyesight.

“Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the *people of God*, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of *Christ* greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.” Moses saw Israel was *God’s* people. He saw Christ among them. Let’s consider this a moment.

When God works His grace in us we receive new life, and with it, faith. One of the effects of spiritual life and faith is that we see life differently than we did before. That which the world values (and we perhaps valued) doesn’t seem to have the same attraction it used to. The things of God that we maybe didn’t see much value in before become, over time, more and more real and important and desirable. We no longer pick up our Bibles because we have to or ought to. We pick them up because we feel we need to for spiritual food. We don’t go to church because Mom or Dad *say* we have to, or in order to save face among friends, but because we want to worship God. Do these things describe you, young friends? Do things like this live in you?

Faith is the only explanation for Moses’s choosing affliction over pleasure. But it’s not just affliction he chose; it’s affliction with the people of God. By God’s grace, he wanted to be one with them, not one with the world. Have you ever become jealous of God’s people? Wanted to be one with them? Moses also didn’t just turn away from all pleasure; it was the pleasure of sin that he saw through and rejected. Being a Christian—making the choice of Moses by faith—isn’t doing away with pleasure. No, it’s pursuing a far greater pleasure. Blind spiritual eyes don’t see it that way but the eyes of faith certainly do.

Scripture goes on to say Moses saw even more. He saw Christ. “Esteeming the reproach of *Christ* greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.” In ways that may be hard for any of us to fully understand, when Moses looked at this suffering people, he saw the suffering Christ. How

can that be? In the same way Jesus said to Saul of Tarsus that when he was persecuting Christians he was persecuting Him, Christ. So can we honestly say that Moses lost everything by his choice? Was his choice made because he was ungrateful to Pharaoh's daughter? No more than a young person like yourself turning away from the worldly lifestyle of an ungodly family you may have grown up in so as to join in with the people of God in their worship of God and their quest for glory. No, the only things Moses lost were death and damnation. And what did he gain? Affliction for the moment, perhaps, but something far, far greater—something everlasting.

A Choice Affecting the Future

“Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.” These words might still be a bit hard to swallow. When we hear *reproach* we think of being made fun of, people not wanting to hang out with us anymore, being mocked, ridiculed, even threatened or persecuted. Esteem *that*? How can anyone really value such things? God gives us the explanation we need in verse 26b, “For he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.” The Greek word translated “had respect” means to turn from all else and fix one’s eyes on something. In other words, Moses was *focused*. Focused on *what*? On the “recompense of the reward.” *Recompense* means compensation, making up for what you lost. *Reward* has the sense of the prize at the end of a race. Putting it together, God is telling us the reason Moses made the choice he did is not because he would immediately benefit from it. No, Moses, with the eyes of faith, was fixed on something else—something beyond the immediate. Moses saw the eternal perspective.

So you get a good job, marry your sweetheart, make money, own a really nice car or two or more, have a nice house, lots of entertainment to keep you busy and keep

you laughing, lots of people you call friends who make you feel good. Welcome to Egypt. I'm not saying all these things are necessarily bad or sinful. Not everything about Egypt was sinful, for that matter. But Moses saw the end of a life lived for what Egypt offered. Do you see the end of a life lived for the things of this world or do you see something better? The reward at the end? Glory? Do you know the best of friends? The love of all loves? The safety, security, love, friendship, and assistance that Christ gives? Eternal life vs. life in Egypt? What life are you living right now? Are you sure you're living for the Lord? Hating sin? Loving Christ?

For Moses there was no middle ground: a little with Israel and a little with Egypt. It couldn't happen. It didn't happen. A choice had to be made. The choice natural sight makes is easy—Egypt. The choice faith makes may be accompanied with challenges, but it's sure—Christ.

A Choice Affecting Everything

Moses, we read in verse 27, *forsook* Egypt. Note the word *forsook*. Yes, he left Egypt but in a sense he left *all* behind. It was “goodbye Egypt.” Moses didn't look back. He didn't think twice. The day came and he was gone. Maybe some of you aren't there yet. When Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress* felt the burden of sin, Evangelist pointed him toward the wicket gate and from there to the cross. When Evangelist asked him if he *saw* the gate, all Christian could say was, “I think I do.” Is that where some of you are this morning? You *think* you see it, but you're not quite to the point where you're ready for reproach, for affliction. You so value being accepted, being liked, being affirmed, that you won't turn from Egypt to embrace Christ?

My wife and I recently came across a hymn we really like. Let me quote from it:

From the love of my own comfort
From the fear of having nothing
From a life of worldly passions
Deliver me, O God!

From the need to be understood
From the need to be accepted
From the fear of being lonely
Deliver me, O God!

From the fear of serving others
From the fear of death or trial
From the fear of humility
Deliver me, O God!

Can you relate to that, young friends? I hope you can. I can! But what is the refrain of this hymn? The chorus? “And I shall not want, I shall not want, when I taste Your goodness, I shall not want.” *That’s it*, young friend! That’s the difference I’ve been trying to preach about. Love of comfort, fear of having nothing, a life of worldly passions—*Deliver* me, O God, from those! The need to be understood, to be accepted, the fear of being lonely, etc.—*Deliver* me from those too, O God! But then in comes the Lord Himself and we sing, “I shall not want, I shall not want, when I taste Your goodness, I shall not want”—as in, “I shall not lack.”

But after making his choice by faith, we don’t read that Moses was taken to heaven right away. Forty years of training in the wilderness of Midian followed, tending sheep. Not much glory in that, was there? Then another forty years leading an impossibly difficult people out of Egypt and through a waste-howling wilderness. At one point in that wilderness trek, Moses became so low that he literally prayed this, “I am not able to bear all

this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.”

Nobody ever said being a believer was easy. But we are not alone, beloved, not even in the deepest, darkest moments of our Christian life. Listen to these beautiful words at the end of verse 27 in the text, “for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.” How could Moses see someone who is invisible? You know how and you know *who* he saw, don’t you? And you can see Him too, young friend. After all, this history was recorded in Hebrews, and the writer included many others who lived and died by faith, some of whom suffered so very much for their faith. Yet these all died in faith because they all lived by faith.

And you? What should you do if you wish to be one of them? “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1). How can we do that? “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2).

Why is Jesus such a wonderful Savior? How is it that He understands us? He endured the cross and all that went with it. He knows the shame. But He too, by faith, saw the joy that was set before Him, after the suffering. And without Him—not just at the beginning of our way, but all the way through—there’s no way we can make the right choice and persevere in it. Are there times, like there were with Moses, that we are ready to give up? I have to be honest and say I’ve had many such times. But praise

the Lord that He knows that too. When Moses was ready to die, God raised up seventy men from among the elders of Israel and put His Spirit upon them to become helpers for Moses. And to us today who are tempted to give up, Hebrews 12:3 says to us, “For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself [i.e. Jesus] lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”

When you are struggling, turn *to* Jesus, not *away* from Him. When you feel worthless, turn *to* Jesus, not *away* from Him. When you are lonely, turn *to* Jesus, not *away* from Him. When you look inside and see nothing but sin, turn *to* Jesus, not *away* from Him—for He can cleanse you again, and again, and again. And when you find you’re *not* ready to make the good choice; when you *don’t* see through the eyes of faith; when you *don’t* believe you have that new life from God; even *then*, turn *to* Jesus, not *away* from Him—for even the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and hearing, will live. There *is* a fountain open for sin and uncleanness, and also for all sinners.

Moses did endure. So did every one whose name is in Hebrews 11. How about you, young friend? Egypt or Christ? Pleasures of sin for a season—a very short season—or life eternal? Is your choice the world? I can still hear that minister thirty-six years ago, to such whose choice is the pleasures of sin, saying something like this: “Then just say it! Just say you want the pleasures of sin and not God! But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.” You know and I know and God knows that’s the wrong choice. Don’t do it. Don’t go down that dead-end road. There’s grace enough and to spare for someone like you and me. But there’s only one place to find it—at the foot of Jesus’ cross. Ask Him for it. Ask Him that you might receive sight. Ask Him to cleanse you from the leprosy of sin. Ask Him to open your ears to hear, to raise you up so you can walk in His ways. If need

be, ask Him to raise you from the dead—for only He can and will do it. And then *you* make the choice that Moses did and don't look back. There's nothing to see behind you. There's everything to see before you. Looking unto Jesus, you can—and you will—endure to the end. And then—the recompense of the reward of God's grace! Life, life, eternal life! *Amen.*

Holding Fast to Christ Who Holds Fast to You

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

Scripture: Hebrews 4:14–16

God's word is like a sharp sword that pierces our hearts, and an X-ray machine that scans our innermost thoughts. Before the searching eyes of the Lord, all things are exposed and laid bare (Heb. 4:12–13). The people chosen by the Father, purchased by the Son, and sealed with the Spirit, know this by experience. Like someone who pulls back a rug to reveal the dirt that has been swept under it, the Holy Spirit using God's Word, shows children how they have sinned against their parents, fathers and mothers how they have sinned against their children, and all persons how they have sinned against God. For a time, they may have tried to form their own religion and righteousness to deliver themselves from their guilt and grief, and for a while it seemed to go rather well. However, like Jonah's gourd, what once shielded them from the tepid heat of a guilty conscience withers under God's blast of light. Then they see that they cannot save themselves. The cry arises in their hearts, "Is there no way by which I may escape eternal punishment, and be again received into God's favor?" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 12).

The great wonder of God's grace is the truth that God has provided a way. From eternity the divine Trinity planned that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God,

should become that way. The Father sent His Son, and the Son came in the power of the Holy Spirit, to accomplish redemption for sinners. The Epistle to the Hebrews reveals God's Son as our Prophet to make known the way of salvation, and our King to make us bow to salvation, and especially our Priest to obtain this salvation by His precious blood. It is of this Savior and of His fullness as Prophet, King, and Priest that the Holy Spirit speaks in Hebrews 4:14–16.

Hebrews addresses people who already know that way to God and have professed their faith in Christ, but have become discouraged and are in danger of drifting away from their hope. It warns us against the terrible consequences of falling away from the living God and encourages believers to keep on believing and to stay faithful to the Lord. If today you are still in your sins and not saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, then it is my prayer that this message will be a tool in the hand of God to rescue you even now. However, this text of Scripture especially speaks to God's saved people, urging them to "hold fast" or cling firmly to Jesus Christ. In God's Son, their great High Priest, discouraged and doubting Christians can find all that they need to take heart, press on, and persevere in the pathway of obedience.

It may be that you have come to this service deeply discouraged. Your heart is crying out to God, "I believe; help thou mine unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). Maybe, if you were honest, you would have to admit that you are tempted to walk away from Christianity and give up on the faith. Sin seems so strong, you feel so weak, and there is something darkly appealing about sinful ways of life. Perhaps your case is not so dire, but you do feel tempted to give up on your calling to bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. You never thought that your children would resist instruction so fiercely; you never

thought that you would find it so hard to go on teaching them consistently and faithfully. Whatever your case may be, the Word of God is calling you to cling to Christ, and—if you are a Christian—to know that Christ is clinging to you. You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you, for he is a great Priest (Heb. 4:14), a compassionate Priest (v. 15), and a helpful Priest (v. 16).

Cling to the Great High Priest Who Clings to You

Hebrews 4:14 says, “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.” The author does not say, “seeing then that we have knowledge,” or “a spiritual experience,” or “good works,” but “that we have a great high priest.” He points us away from ourselves to find our hope in Christ alone.

Those engaged in rock climbing are always looking for something on which they can get a grip. That word “great” is like a projection of solid rock for the hand of your faith to grasp and hold tightly so that you don’t fall but keep moving upward on Hill Difficulty. There are many people in our world who claim to be priests, but here is the only Priest who has the greatness, in His achievements, past and present, His station, and His person, that we need. Verse 14 considers the greatness of His priestly sacrifice, heavenly intercession, and divine person.

The Greatness of His Priestly Sacrifice

As sinners, Jesus Christ is all that we need, for He has offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice to take away the guilt of all our sins and reconcile us to God. The apostle had already written of Christ as our “high priest” in Hebrews 2:17, “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a

merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.”

The word translated “make reconciliation” means to conciliate someone who is angry so that rather than punish the person who offended him, he forgives him.¹ This is the primary work of a priest, to turn away God’s anger against sinners and obtain forgiveness by offering a sacrifice for sins. Hebrews 5:1 says, “For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.”

In the first place, then, Jesus is great in His priestly work of sacrifice. All the Old Testament priests and sacrifices pointed to this great High Priest and found their fulfillment in Him and His sacrifice. He offered the only sacrifice that could satisfy the Father’s justice. The way of reconciliation can only go through the door of a perfect satisfaction to the justice of God and His wrath against sin. There is no other way. Modern man tries to make another way, but to do so he must invent a false god whose love is divorced from holiness and justice, thus cheapening grace. It is not the living God, who created the heaven and the earth, the righteous God who loves righteousness. He cannot deny Himself or compromise His justice.

Has that ever become real in your life? Have you ever longed to know that God’s anger against your sins is quenched and you have peace with God? Sadly, we can be so concerned about what other people think of us, and care little for what God thinks of us. Yet behind all our anxiety and stress lies the unacknowledged fear that God

1. See the use of this word (*hilaskomai*) and related forms in the Septuagint translation of Gen. 32:20; Ex. 32:14; 30:15–16; Lev. 1:4; Pss. 25:11; 78:38; Lam. 3:42–43. See Leon Morris, “Hebrews,” on Heb. 2:17, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 12:30.

is angry with us. Our conscience may speak with only a whisper, but it still speaks to us of the wrath of God against sinners. I work as an educator and greatly value education, but what good is education if we still lie under the wrath of God? Only by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ can we be set free to serve the Lord.

What did Christ sacrifice? What offering could possibly satisfy the holy justice of God against the infinite offense of our sins? Not the blood of bulls and goats! Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself. "He offered up himself" (Heb. 7:27). He was both Priest and Sacrifice. He laid down His life willingly (John 10:18). He gave Himself as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). By one offering, which never needs to be repeated, He has perfected forever them that are sanctified, and has delivered His people from eternal condemnation. He brought His people into God's favor. He purchased heaven for them. He hung on the cross in their place so that one day they could sit on the throne with Him in eternal glory.

O people of God, do you see the horribleness of sin in His sacrifice? Sin cost the very blood of Christ, and truly, if we can remain unaffected by the love of Jesus Christ in His death, then our hearts are harder than rocks. Oh, to think that He did not die for His friends, but for His enemies! He died for those who, by nature, hate Him and crucify Him. Truly, He is the great High Priest. His sacrifice is perfect, meritorious, beneficial, and comforting for all those who stand in need of His priestly office. He is great because He is able to save and to succor His people no matter how wicked a sinner they may be. His righteousness exceeds their sinfulness. His rights exceed their forfeits. There is a fullness in His death on Calvary which can never be emptied. He gave Himself—a gift of infinite value.

And He did still more. He did not remain in the grave. No, but it is the wonder and the victory of Christ over all

His enemies that He arose from the grave and ascended on high. There He continues to perform His priestly office, only now not in the way of sacrifice, but in the way of intercession.

The Greatness of His Heavenly Intercession

Hebrews 4:14 says that our “great high priest... is passed into the heavens.” Literally, the original Greek reads, “He has passed *through* the heavens.”² The author alludes to the Jewish high priest going through the veil once a year into the holy of holies (Lev. 16; Heb. 6:19–20) to present the blood of atonement. Thus, says our text, that Jesus Christ, the greater High Priest, has ascended into heaven on high, into the very presence of His Father. Hebrews 9:24 says, “Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”

It is as if the apostle is saying, “It is true, we Christians do not have a high priest on earth, but that is only because He has finished His work here. That only points to His greatness, to His superiority. And now, on the basis of that finished work He has passed through the heavens. He has passed through the starry skies. He has passed the seried ranks of angels. Yes, He, the greatest High Priest, has passed through the visible heavens into the heaven of heavens, not the symbolical holy of holies, but into the real Holy of holies, and there He sits enthroned on high.”

And now, exalted in heaven, the great High Priest does not forget any of His sheep. He knows them all by name. As Isaiah 49:16 says, “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” Therefore, He will never forget them. He will remember them forever. Not even the smallest in grace will be forgotten by this great High Priest even for one moment.

2. See the use of this verb (*dierchomai*) in 1 Cor. 10:1; 16:5.

What a great comfort this can be—in times of affliction, in times of spiritual barrenness, in times of backsliding, believers may confess: “I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me” (Ps. 40:17). People of God, no matter how afflicted, how harassed, how tempest-tossed you may be in this life at times, you shall never be forgotten. It is His own word: “Yet will I not forget thee” (Isa. 49:15). Upon His heavenly throne, your High Priest, who has passed through the heavens, sees you, knows you, cares for you, prays for you, pleads His own sacrifice for you, and will not permit you to be tempted above what you are able to bear.

But this great High Priest does more. By His bodily presence in heaven, He continually presents to His Father the sacrifice which He once offered, so that the guilt of His elect people will never appear before the judgment bar of God to condemn them. He presents the merit of His blood to the Father, and in virtue of that price which He has paid, He pleads for mercy. The atonement made on the cross for His people is continually kept on the foreground in heaven by Him who offered it up once and for all. That sacrifice is never forgotten for one moment in heaven, because the High Priest Himself is always there, continually presenting it on behalf of His people.

As an Advocate, Christ pleads the case of His people in the courts of heaven, and by His intercession He obtains both an acquittal from all their sins and a grant of eternal life. Speaking metaphorically, He opens the book of debts and over all the sins of His people He writes, “paid in full,” on the basis of His obedience and sufferings. Therefore, Paul says, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifies, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right-hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Rom. 8:33–34). And therefore, what an encouragement it can be for God’s people when the terrors

of the law, the power of sin, the accusations of Satan, or the pangs of their own conscience assail them, that they are entitled by grace to look up unto Him, and to leave it in His hands, who is always standing ready to answer all accusations brought in against them. In this sense He is called the Advocate of His people by the apostle John: “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

What a comfort this is to the believer! I hope that every person here takes your needs to brothers and sisters in Christ and experience that they pray for you. It is a great consolation in our trials to have a godly saint interceding for us. How much more, then, should it comfort us that Jesus Christ intercedes for us! It is all the sweeter when we consider who it is that is interceding.

The Greatness of His Divine Person

Hebrews 4:14 teaches us that our “great high priest” who has “passed into the heavens” is no one less than “the Son of God.” Jesus is God Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth (Heb. 1:10–12). He assumed humanity, but that did not in any way detract from His eternal deity. Jesus is very God of very God. Therefore, His priesthood is greater than all others, for it is divine as well as human. God’s people do not have a son of Aaron, but the Son of God as their High Priest.

The relationship of a son to his father in natural life is only a faint shadow of this relationship between God and Christ. Their relationship is so close that, although they are two persons, yet they are one in essence, as Christ Himself said, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30). And therefore, what amazing power the Son’s intercessions must have with His Father! His prayer is not the petition of the creature to His Creator, but the request of the Son to His Father. If the Father were to deny Him anything

He would also deny Himself, or else He would cease to be one with His Son, which is impossible.

Therefore, the intercessory prayer of Jesus, the Son of God, cannot fail. His prayer knows no limits with respect to might and power, and therefore, what a great comfort it can be for poor people who, being burdened with manifold sorrows, feel that they cannot pray any longer, but only sigh and cry unto Him. If their salvation depended upon their prayers, then they know for sure they would be lost forever. But now, they find themselves leaning more and more upon this great High Priest, so that they must confess, “Without Him I can do nothing. I cannot even pray or thank the Lord rightly. But I have a praying High Priest who is the Son of God, and His intercession is always effectual.”

Application: Cling to God’s Glorious Son

Hebrews 4:14 calls upon us to apply these great truths by a persevering faith: “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.” The word “profession” refers to our public confession that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in the gospel.³ When we speak of clinging to Christ, it begins in the heart, but what is real in the heart overflows in the words of your mouth and the actions of your hands and feet. Clinging to Christ changes how you conduct yourself in all areas of life.

Profession of faith is costly. It can alienate friends and relatives and provoke persecution. Children and young people, are you holding fast this true profession with your friends—not just those at church, but in the neighborhood

3. See the use of this term (*homologia*) in 2 Cor. 9:13; 1 Tim. 6:12–13; Heb. 3:1; 4:14; 10:23; and its verbal cognate in Matt. 10:32; Luke 12:9; John 9:22; Rom. 10:9.

where you live or on the job where you work? Or are you ashamed to confess Him before others? Are you afraid to pray in front of people to give thanks for your food? Parents, are you weary of speaking to your children about Christ and His Word? Have you grown doubtful that it does any good and started to mute your witness to the children God entrusted to you to raise for Him? Are we ashamed of Jesus Christ? Oh what fools we are! Shall Jesus Christ confess us before the holy Father and we deny Him before mere men?

There is a people, a blessed people, by grace, who desire to profess Him—not only to others, but also in private upon their knees, in their meditations, in their Bible-reading, in their church-going, yes, in everything that they do. They desire that their whole life may be nothing but a profession of their faith in His name, however much they must complain that they find so many weaknesses, so many imperfections and inconsistencies in themselves.

But now, poor, afflicted people of God, the great encouragement of this exhortation is the promise of that same great High Priest. In the midst of all difficulties, He will sustain you, He Himself will cling to you by His heavenly intercession. Therefore, there is always hope in the Lord. You shall not perish. His priesthood secures you from shipwreck. Left to yourselves, you would never reach your heavenly home. And therefore, all the glory is unto Him and to Him alone! He is at the right hand of His Father, Jesus, the Son of God. He will not fail you. He is a complete Savior. He gives you the strength to hold fast your profession in the midst of all trials, difficulties, and tribulations, and He shall one day give you a crown of eternal life. Then, sinful self, sorrow, sickness, death, and Satan will be done forever, and He will become your All-in-all forevermore.

Cling to this glorious Priest, O people of God, knowing that He clings to you. The hand of your faith may be weak, but the hand of His intercession will never let you go.

Cling to a Compassionate Priest Who Clings to You

The danger of looking only at Christ's greatness and glory is that we may doubt that such a high and holy Lord would care for the small and insignificant likes of us. What does the Lord of glory have to do with me, such a bundle of fear, sadness, burdens, disappointment, temptations, sorrows, and worst of all, sins that contradict and offend His holy nature? How can He ever look upon me?

The wonderful answer is that Christ is not only God, but man. He stooped very low to seek and find us where we are. Isaiah 53 tells us that He became "a man of sorrows"; he was "despised and rejected of men" (Isa. 53:3). He has "borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows" (v. 4). Therefore, there is hope, for this Priest is not only highly exalted, but also went so low that He is capable of being full of sympathy and tender compassion towards His people.

This is the message of the next part of our Scripture text. Hebrews 4:15 says, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." He is not so transcendent that you cannot reach Him, nor so distant that you cannot touch Him, for He has been touched by all the sorrows that touch you. Therefore, here we find another reason why you can cling to Jesus Christ, whose sympathy was learned in temptations, guarded by sinlessness, and is exercised toward weakness.

His Sympathy Learned in Temptations

This great High Priest is all that we need, not only because of His exaltation but also because of His humiliation while He was on earth. From His lowly birth in Bethlehem's

stable to His shameful death on Calvary's cross, He went through unspeakable temptations and trials for His people. Our text says that He "was in all points tempted like as we are."

As man, Jesus Christ was tempted beyond any other man tempted before or since. He was tempted "in all points." He was tempted during His whole life, though with greater intensity during His years of public ministry and especially during the last few days of His life on earth. Therefore, He said to His disciples, "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations" (Luke 22:28). Consider Christ's many temptations.

First, Christ was tried by Satan's enticements. The Lord Jesus stepped out of the water of baptism into the fire of temptation (Matt. 4:1–11). He was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness. Satan attacked Him fiercely, thoroughly, and exhaustively for forty days. Christ defeated every temptation with the word of God. Satan totally failed. Christ never wavered, and emerged from the fires of temptations as pure gold. However, Satan only departed for a season. The demon of hell sought to turn Christ away from going to the cross (Matt. 16:22–23). When that failed, the devil moved Judas to betray Christ and cast God's Son into the greatest test of his life in Gethsemane and Golgotha (Luke 22:3; John 13:27). Yet Christ persevered through it all, obeyed His Father to the end, and crushed the serpent under His holy feet.

Second, Christ was tried by man's provocations. His own brothers did not believe in Him, but sought to drag him into their worldliness (Ps. 69:8; John 7:3–7). Crowds impressed with His miracles wanted to make him an earthly king (John 6:15). The Pharisees bitterly opposed Him, and the Sadducees wanted to make a fool of Him (Matt. 22:15–40). False witnesses accused Him and soldiers struck Him unjustly. Worst of all, His apostles

abandoned Him, one of them betraying Him and another denying that he knew Him. Many people watched Him suffer and die, but mocked Him without pity. Christ was not stoic or unmoved by the insults of the wicked; the loneliness and disgrace heaped upon Him broke His heart (Ps. 69:19–20). Yet He quietly and meekly received their abuse like a lamb taken to the slaughter (Isa. 53:7).

Third, Christ was tried by God's testing. All of Christ's tests came about by the Father's eternal ordination and the Spirit's providential execution (Matt. 4:1). One of Christ's greatest tests was to bear the sins of His people. The heavenly Father set before Christ the accursed cup of death, from which Christ's human nature shrank in horror (Mark 14:34–36). Never was such a demand placed upon a man. To obey His Father, Christ must not only embrace the painful, shameful death of the cross (Phil. 2:8), but also submit to the curse of God's holy law against sinners (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:10, 13). He must experience the wrath of God and be forsaken for our sins; when darkness came upon the land, Christ fell into the spiritual darkness of hell—the hell of divine dereliction and abandonment (Matt. 27:45–46). Nothing held Christ on the cross except His submission to God's will, and the joy set before Him, on the other side of it.

We so quickly grumble about our trials. We resent things that inconvenience us, and resent those who mistreat us. What are our trials and temptations compared to Christ's? We should put our hands on our mouths in shame over our murmuring. It was our sins that did all that to Christ. He was tempted beyond what all men together could possibly bear, and if not sustained by His Godhead, He never could have endured. Therefore, we may cling to Christ with confidence that He has truly walked in our shoes, through the valley of the shadow of death, and indeed experienced more fully the power of

temptation than we ever shall—yet He overcame it, by faith in the Word of God, in the power of the Spirit of God.

His Sympathy Guarded by Sinlessness

Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus “was tempted in all points, like as we are, yet without sin.” Our Priest is pure of all wrong, as Hebrews 7:26 says, “Holy, harmless, undefiled.” If Christ had not been tempted, then we might question whether He was truly human. On the other hand, if Christ had yielded to temptation He could not have saved us from our sins, for He would need salvation for Himself. As it was, Christ could “offer himself without spot to God” (Heb. 9:14). He was a Lamb without blemish, a pleasing and acceptable sacrifice. Since He “knew no sin,” He could bear the guilt of our sins, “that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Christ was completely without sin. He was without original sin. Conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, God broke the deadly chain from Adam to his natural descendants so that the Child born of a virgin was “holy” from the beginning (Luke 1:35). Christ was without actual sin. He committed no sin in thought, word, or deed. He could say to His adversaries, “Which of you convinceth me of sin?” (John 8:46). Peter spent years in Christ’s company, yet said that Christ was “without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19).

Christ’s sinlessness guards His sympathy from all impurity. There is a wicked sympathy that sinners may have toward one another (Rom. 1:32). They wink at sin, pat the sinner on the back, and say, “It’s no big deal.” This is not a help to sinners, but greasing the skids to hell. Christ has sympathy for sinners, but never has sympathy for sin. His heart beats with compassion and love for us in our temptations, but also burns with holy zeal that we be delivered from sin. This is the sympathy that we need.

Christ is full of mercy to His people, but ruthless towards their sin, and thus absolutely committed to helping the saints to become holy.

Yes, He is fully qualified to help us to overcome temptation, for He faced it at every turn, but repelled all its advances. Since Christ has suffered under temptation, “he is able” to help those that are being tempted (Heb. 2:18).

His Sympathy Exercised toward Weakness

Christ’s suffering temptation and sinlessness under temptation makes Him the truly compassionate Priest. Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” Christ is “touched” with our weaknesses. The word translated “touched” means to have your heart moved with compassion for someone else’s hardships.⁴ It is more than just knowledge; it is feeling. It speaks of a unity of heart and spirit as one spiritual family bound together by love and tenderness.⁵ When something touches Christ’s people, Christ is touched.

Jesus is our brother in adversity, companion in sorrows, friend in affliction, and strength in weakness. Isaiah 63:11 says of the Lord, “In all their affliction he was afflicted.” To those who persecute His people, Christ says, “Why do you persecute me?” (cf. Acts 9:4). They are His body, and He is their head, and He is sensitive to all that affects His body (Eph. 5:28–30). The Lord said in Zechariah 2:8, “He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.”

Consider too that Christ not only is sympathetic to our sorrows, but, as the text says, to “our infirmities.”

4. The word (*sumpatheō*) appears here and in Heb. 10:34, of the saints’ compassion for other Christians in prison for their faith. It is used on parallel with being “companions” or “sharers” (*koinōnos*, v. 33).

5. Compare the use of the cognate noun (*sumpathēs*) in 1 Pet. 3:8.

The word infirmity means weakness or human frailty. The Lord Jesus is wonderfully patient with us in our weaknesses, be it disability in the body, ignorance in the mind, fear in the heart, spiritual immaturity, waywardness, or tendency to stray from the right path (Heb. 5:2). Isaiah 40:11 says, “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.” When Christ sees us stumbling along in the way of discipleship, He does not respond harshly. Rather, our poverty and neediness stirs greater tenderness in His heart. He accommodates Himself to the needs of His flock, and He will not lose the weakest little lamb—for this is His Father’s will (John 6:39; 10:27–29). He guides with His staff, and protects us with His rod.

Application: Cling to God’s Compassionate Son

The Lord knows your burdens. He knows your sorrows. He knows your weaknesses and your failures. Yet Christ does not turn away from you in impatience or disgust, child of God. His heart is full of tenderness to you. He understands how hard it is to live for God in this dark world.

If you feel frustrated over the difficulty of educating your children, consider how frustrated Jesus Christ felt about training the twelve disciples! Even Christ cried out, “How long?” (Mark 9:19). He too knew what it was like to say, “Do you still not understand?” Or worse yet, “Are your hearts still so hardened?” (cf. Mark 8:17). When Christ sees your frustration, He remembers His own, and His heart goes out to you in compassion and love.

And let us remember that the twelve disciples were not just students, they were also called to be the teachers of others—the apostles of Christ’s church. Christ has experience with the foolishness and sins of teachers too. Yet what do we read about Christ’s attitude toward His

disciples? “Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end” (John 13:1). If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, then He will never leave you or forsake you. The Lord Jesus loves you, forgives you of your sins, and will walk with you through all your trials. Always!

Christ is the Prophet of His people, and the supreme and sovereign Educator. Cling to Christ in His tender compassion, and know that He clings to you.

Cling to a Helpful Priest Who Clings to You

We have seen that our High Priest is a glorious Savior and a compassionate Friend. There is more. A person may have a high position and a tender heart, but lack the practical ability to help you in your specific needs. Not so with Christ. Hebrews 4:16 says, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” With Christ enthroned as our Priest, we have an open door to go to God and find the resources that we need.

Nothing is more valuable than access to the king. You know the story of Esther, a Jewish woman raised in exile by Mordecai, who was like a father to her. Esther was chosen to be queen to the pagan king over the Persian empire. Wicked Haman persuaded the king to authorize the slaughter of all Jews in the empire. Mordecai appealed to her to go to the king for help. Esther reminded Mordecai that the king had not called for her for a month, and if someone dared to approach the king’s throne without being called by him, that person would be killed—unless the king held out his golden scepter. This king not long before had had his first wife killed! However, Queen Esther risked her life by going to the king without an invitation. By God’s grace, the king held out the golden scepter. Esther was then able to speak with the king, and

obtained help in the time of desperate need. The Jewish people were saved by her boldness in going to the king.

Perhaps you feel like Esther sometimes. You know that you need help. You know that God is able to help you. However, you are afraid to go to the King in prayer and ask. Perhaps your mouth can say the words, but in your heart you have little faith that God will help you.

Hebrews 4:16 says that if you trust in Jesus Christ, then God's golden scepter is always held out for you. The door to His throne is always open. The help that you need is there for the asking. The emperor of Persia was a poor beggar compared to the living God. If Queen Esther could find favor with the king, how much more will the Bride of Christ find favor with God while God's Son sits at His right hand? To encourage you to cling to Christ, let us consider the throne of grace, the invitation of grace, and the benefits of grace.

The Throne of Grace

Boys and girls, our Scripture speaks of a "throne," a special chair where the king sits. A throne is a symbol of power, authority, greatness, wealth, dominion, dignity, and royalty. Seated upon his throne, a king made sovereign decisions and exercised just judgment. It lifted him up above other people to inspire awe and fear.

Thrones are magnificent. Solomon's throne was made of ivory and overlaid with gold. It had six steps and on both sides of the steps were six carved lions. There was nothing like it in any other kingdom on earth (1 King 10:18–20). Solomon's throne could not compare to God's throne, which John saw in the vision of Revelation, surrounded by a beautiful rainbow and like a storm-cloud from which came forth thunder and lightning (Rev. 4:3–5). The princes of heaven surround it with myriads of angels, all worshipping and adoring the Lord for His

holiness, power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing (Rev. 4–5).

The Bible tells us that God's throne is also a throne of holiness: "God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness" (Ps. 47:8). It is a throne of eternity: "Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting" (Ps. 93:2). It is a throne of righteousness: "Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne" (Ps. 97:2). And it is a throne of sovereignty: "The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all" (Ps. 103:19). Surely, it is a throne that inspires fear.

However, in Hebrews 4:16 God's throne is given a special name: "the throne of grace." The throne of glory is the seat of mercy. This is unfathomable and inexpressible. God's holy, righteous, sovereign throne is a throne of grace. Saving grace is God's purpose and power to rescue sinners from the hell that they deserve and to give them the heaven that they cannot merit or achieve. Grace chose sinners before time began, redeemed sinners by the blood of Christ, calls sinners powerfully by the Spirit so that they are justified by faith and sanctified, and carries sinners through all their trials to glory.

What this means for you and for me is that God's throne of sovereign power is now a fountain of mercy for sinners. John saw in Revelation that grace flows like a great river from the throne of God and the Lamb (Rev. 22:1–3). It is cleansing grace, to wash away our sins. It is life-giving grace, to make us fruitful for the Lord. It is healing grace, to relieve us of every pain and sorrow inflicted by God's curse against our sins. God's throne produces not just a trickle of grace, but a mighty flow of grace because of the love of God and the merit of Jesus Christ. All of our needs can be met and the deepest thirsts of our soul quenched and satisfied by streams of living

water that pour down on us from the fountain of life and the throne of grace.

The Invitation of Grace

Our text exhorts us, saying, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace.” The gospel offers Christ freely to sinners. Revelation 22:17 says, “Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” If you are lost and perishing in your sins, then I say to you, yes even now, come to Jesus Christ and find grace and salvation. However, the invitation here in Hebrews 4:16 is addressed not so much to the lost as to believers in Jesus Christ. Christians still need to come, again and again, day after day, to the throne of grace.

What does it mean to “come...unto the throne of grace”? It is not a motion of the body. There is no physical place that is sacred in the new covenant (John 4:21). The coming in view here is a motion of the heart, coming to God by the exercise of faith in Jesus Christ. Hebrews 10:22 says, “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.” Hebrew 11:6 says, “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” You come to the throne of grace by looking to Christ with trust and calling upon the name of the Lord for the help that you need.

Faith draws near to the throne of grace through humble prayer. Backsliding often begins with a neglect of private and public prayer. Prayer is the thermostat of the Christian life, for it both displays our current spiritual temperature and, if used well, engages God’s power to bring our temperature to where it should be. How is your prayer life? How often are you praising God? Confessing your sins and seeking forgiveness? Pouring out your fears

before the Lord? Petitioning God for what you need? Interceding for others? Thanking God for His mercies?

Are you praying with faith in Christ that God's throne is a throne of grace? Notice that our Scripture text says, "Let us therefore come boldly." Boldly means freely, pouring out your heart to the Lord. Boldly does not mean casually, presumptuously, or irreverently; we are going to the *throne* of God. We are not telling God what to do or treating God like a mere human being, a sort of bureaucrat on high. However, it does mean we go confidently and cheerfully based upon God's promises to us in Christ. We go with faith that God intends to answer our prayers and bless us with grace. We go believing that God is a loving Father who loves to give good gifts to His children. We go trusting that in Christ all our sins are forgiven. We go with consciences cleansed from dead works, entering the holy place without fear of rejection or dread of judgment. Is this how you pray? If not, get a grip on Christ's gospel, and start to pray boldly.

The Benefits of Grace

Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." There are tremendous benefits to praying by faith in our great High Priest. The life of praying is a life of receiving and finding. The words used here echo our Lord's promise, "For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth" (Matt. 7:8; Luke 11:10).⁶ This is not a blanket promise that every prayer will obtain what we ask, but it does indicate that God blesses the praying Christian. Effectual prayers are those that seek from God nothing but what He has promised to give us.

6. Matt. 7:8, Luke 11:10, and Heb. 4:16 use the same Greek verbs "obtain/receive" (*lambanō*) and "find" (*heuriskō*).

How God answers our prayers appears in the words used in our text. The first is “mercy.” Mercy answers to misery. God’s merciful heart is His compassion to relieve those in a miserable condition (Matt. 9:27; 15:22; Eph. 2:4). The second is “grace.” We also find “grace” when we come to God’s throne. Whereas mercy answers to misery, grace answers to guilt. God’s gracious heart is His goodness in giving blessings to those who deserve only curses. We have so many reasons to go to God’s throne of grace and receive more and more mercy and grace for the forgiveness of our sins (Eph. 1:7), continued protection from the dominion of sin (Rom. 6:14), the power to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this world (Titus 2:11–12), and the strength to stand firm in suffering (1 Peter 5:10). No matter how much grace you have received, you still need to “grow in grace” (2 Peter 3:18). Yet you never need to fear that God will run out of grace, for Jesus Christ is “full of grace” (John 1:14).

The last words of verse 16 are, “help in time of need.” Christ is able to help those in trials and temptations (Heb. 2:18). His heart is full of kindness and His hands are full of power. Furthermore, His mind is full of wisdom. Literally, we might translate the words, “well-timed help.” As we wait on the Lord for answers to prayer, let us remember that God’s timing is always perfect. We often feel that we must have an answer now, but God knows when to answer.

What a promise we have in this Scripture! Christian, you can go to the throne of grace and receive help from none other than the Lord of Hosts. Let us, therefore, stop wasting energy worrying and fretting, and instead devote ourselves to prayer and thanksgiving. Hebrews 13:6 says, “The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”

Conclusion

Dear non-Christian, not one of the precious promises I have opened up in this text belongs to you. Whether you are a young child or a gray-haired senior citizen, if you have not turned from your sins and trusted in Christ as Savior, the Lord is not your helper, and there is no throne of grace for you. On the contrary, God is your angry Judge, and His throne burns with wrath against your sins. If you continue in your present state, the Son of God will appear with glory to damn you forever to hell, and the very sight of Him will fill you with dread, horror, and grief.

However, every one of these promises can become yours, if Christ becomes yours. All of God's promises are "yea and Amen" in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). You cannot obtain them by religious rituals, good works, or good intentions. You must have Christ. Receive Christ Jesus now as your Lord and Savior by trusting in the gospel. Today could be your first day of enjoying a glorious, compassionate, and helpful High Priest.

Christian, do you see why you must cling to Christ? Who can compare to Jesus? He is the great High Priest and exalted Son of God. He alone has shed His blood for the atonement of sin. He alone is the heavenly Intercessor and Mediator of grace. Where will you find another who is so full of sympathy, compassion, and tender mercy? Christ is the only way to the throne of grace, where you meet with sovereign grace that is sufficient for all your needs.

Therefore, cling to Christ in your temptations for grace to flee from sin. Cling to Christ in times of prosperity, lest ease and success make you proud, cold to God, and harsh with men. Cling to Christ when suffering persecution, whether it is blatant persecution or more subtle slander and rejection, so that you may find grace to persevere. Cling to Christ under the clouds of adversity, so that you may not fall into doubt and discouragement.

Cling to Christ in your homeschooling. Don't give up when you face discouragement. Hold fast to the Lord, and press on. I was once asked at a conference what my greatest weakness was in parenting. After thinking for a while, I replied that I panicked when our children went through a season when they kept doing wrong and I could not get them to stop. When in early elementary school, one of our children got in a habit of exaggerating and lying so much that I began to fear I was raising a pathological liar. However, that child left that bad habit behind and became a truth-teller. When your child sins, stay calm, keep doing what is right, and wait on the Lord. "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days" (Eccl. 11:1). God's ordinary way is to use training from godly parents for the temporal and eternal well-being of the next generation. Cling to Christ, and entrust your children to Him.

Children, you too must cling to Christ. Cling to Christ through all the great changes of life such as growing up, graduation, getting married, having children of your own, watching them grow up, and then suffering the trials of old age. Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Cling to Christ with your last dying breath, for the sustaining of your hope and the glorification of His name. Cling to Christ, I say, every day of your life, for to live is Christ.

And as you cling to Christ, remember that your High Priest clings to you. He is praying for you, even when you are not praying. He is loving you, even when your love is weak. He is working in you by His Spirit so that your repentance and faith will not fail. He is walking with you, though perhaps you cannot sense His presence. Christ is able to save you to the uttermost, for He ever lives to make intercession for His own. *Amen.*

Empty Grave Clothes

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

Scripture: John 20:5–9

Have you ever been to the funeral of a family member? Can you remember all the emotions that you felt?

Imagine the emotions of Jesus' friends and followers as they saw their Savior and Lord taken captive. Imagine how John and Peter must have felt as they witnessed the interrogation of Jesus. Imagine what John experienced as he saw his beloved Master being nailed to the cross, dying a shameful, torturous death. There hung his best friend, his confidant, his Master.

Then it was all over. Jesus breathed His last. He was buried. What waves of sorrow and depression must have washed over these disciples! Their Master was dead. They had hoped He would usher in His new kingdom. They had thought that He would be the one who would redeem Israel. But now, everything was over—their hopes, their aspirations, their co-ministry with Him—all was history.

Now, try to imagine the disciples' emotions, as they became aware, on Easter morning, of Christ's resurrection. He is alive again! He is not dead! He is indeed the Messiah!

The reason the disciples were so depressed and fearful after Christ's death is that they did not understand the Scriptures, and they forgot Jesus' testimony that He

would rise again (John 2:22). Therefore, Christ lovingly provided wonderful evidence of His resurrection for them. The grave clothes that Jesus left behind were part of this evidence. Let's focus in this sermon on the instruction these empty linens provide for us in John 20:5–9. In examining the theme, "Empty Grave Clothes!," we will look at three thoughts: resurrection by fact, resurrection by faith, and resurrection by foreshadowing

Resurrection by Fact

It is early Sunday morning, the third day since Jesus had died so dreadfully on the cross. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Salome, Mary the mother of James, and other women approach the grave of Jesus. They love Him and want to add some spices to His body. Though it is dark, they notice that the stone has been rolled away from the entrance to the tomb. What has happened? Has someone pillaged the sepulcher? Did someone steal Jesus' body? What should they do?

Gathering courage, the women enter the tomb. In the dim light, they notice that Jesus' body is missing. Probably around this time Mary Magdalene rushes out to find the disciples. Soon she finds Peter and John. Panting for breath, she blurts out her interpretation of what she has seen: "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him."

Peter immediately decides to take a look, and John goes with him. They break out into a run. With such urgent matters to attend to, they cannot remain at a calm walk. There is only one thing on their minds. They must get to the tomb to see what has happened.

What must have gone through their minds as they ran? What had happened to Jesus' body? Could someone have stolen it? Certainly He could not be alive. They were

not gullible enough to get their hopes up. But, how could they be so sure?

John outruns Peter. Why does Peter run slower? Some have thought that Peter was simply older and slower. Others stress that his conscience still troubled him about his recent denial of Christ, and this may have slowed him. We don't know for sure, however, so it is best not to draw any speculative conclusions. Regardless, the fact that John outran Peter indicates John also desperately wanted to get to the grave as soon as possible. He did not want to take the time to wait for Peter.

Soon John, panting heavily, arrives at the sepulcher. It is true: the stone is rolled aside! Why? He stoops down to look in. He spots the linen grave clothes, still intact, lying there (v. 5). The Greek word here for seeing (*βλέπω*, *blepo*) merely indicates that John noticed the clothes. He does not inspect them, but just sees them lying there. Respectfully, he hesitates, no doubt instinctively remembering that those who come in contact with the dead are declared ceremonially unclean. So John does not enter the sepulcher.

John notices that Mary Magdalene's testimony had been wrong. He sees that the body of Jesus has not been taken, for then the linen wrappings would have been taken with the body. This would have made transportation of the body much easier.

But, you say, "The plunderer could have pulled off the grave clothes and taken the body." Surely you would agree that if this were the case, the linen clothes would have been torn and scattered about. In addition, the 100 pounds of spices, mentioned in chapter 19:39, would have been scattered about. But instead, John sees the linen clothes lying there, with no evidence of any disturbance (v. 5).

Moments later, Peter arrives. As usual, Peter does not hesitate. Brushing by John, he goes right on into the tomb. Perhaps he feels his uncleanness so strongly

combined with such a longing for Jesus that he does not hesitate to take the risk of becoming ceremonially unclean. As his eyes adjust to the darkness, he sees something quite astonishing. The Greek word here for seeing is *θεωρέω* (theoreo), from which we get the English word “theorize.” It implies that Peter scrutinized the grave clothes carefully. Literally, he *observed* them. He observed something unusual that caught his attention. The parallel passage in Luke 24:12 says that after Peter saw the linen clothes “laid by themselves,” he left the tomb “wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.”

What does Peter see? Our text says in verses 6-7 that he sees “the linen clothes lie, and the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.” He observes several things. He sees the linen clothes that had been around Jesus’ body; and he sees the napkin, or face cloth, wrapped together separate from the body clothes. No doubt he also sees the blood stains on the clothes.

You may be wondering: “Why does the text draw so much attention to the grave clothes and how they are arranged? Does this mean that Jesus, after He pulled off the grave clothes, put them in neat piles?”

If we study the text carefully, we don’t get the impression that that is what the text has in view. If the text were trying to show that Jesus neatly piled up His clothes after He rose from the dead, you would expect it to say something about neatness. But neither our text, nor the parallel passage in Luke 24:12, says anything about neatness of organization. What then is the text saying?

To fully understand the significance of the position of Jesus’ grave clothes, it helps to know something about Jewish burial practices. Every society has its own distinct mode of burial. Greeks and Romans often cremated the dead. Egyptians often embalmed the dead. Some cultures

buried tools, money, and food with the dead in a coffin. Jewish burial was different. How did they do it?

Look with me, first of all, at the previous chapter, in verses 39–40, where we are given a short description of how Jesus was buried: “And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. [Aloes was a powdered wood that had a nice fragrance. Myrrh was a fragrant gum that was mixed with the aloes.] Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.”

The Jews normally wrapped the dead person’s body in linen, while they mixed in dry spices. The body was wrapped in this way up to the shoulders, leaving the neck and head bare. Then they separately wrapped the head with a face cloth, sort of like a turban, but covering the entire head. This is why, when Lazarus was resurrected, John 11:44 says, “He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave clothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin.” Once the body was wrapped, the Jews put the dead body face up, without a coffin, in a tomb. The tomb was generally cut from rock in the Judean and Galilean hills. Then a large, flat, round rock was rolled in front of the entrance to seal it. It appears, then, that Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus did this with Jesus’ body, late Friday afternoon.

So what does Peter see in the grave clothes that causes him to gaze with amazing wonder? Peter recognizes that the body of Jesus is gone. Luke says he saw the “linen clothes laid by themselves.” The body is gone. How can that be! The clothes are here, but the body is absent! Peter also observes that the grave clothes are essentially undisturbed, that is, except for the head cloth. It seems that the head cloth was still wrapped up, as if it was

around a person's head (like an empty cocoon), but was separate from the linen clothes. This is strange! Peter leaves the tomb, marveling and wondering about what has happened.

Peter's mind is still in turmoil. Though he is a believer in Christ, light has not broken into his soul. He does not have clarity to see the wondrous truth of Christ's resurrection—at least not more than its fact. But we know that soon after Peter left the grave, Christ met privately with him in a personal restorative encounter that, reverently speaking, was too sacred for human words. Then Peter's darkness was dispelled. His burdened conscience was healed with the balm of Gilead.

We can experience something quite similar still today. Though we trust that Christ is the Messiah as a fact and believe in Him, our minds and hearts can be so clouded at times that we cannot embrace the full implications of that reality. The promises of the Word seem unreal and far from us. We remain like this until Christ again comes to us, shines with His glory into our souls through His Word and Spirit, and heals our broken hearts.

So we have here facts that testify of Jesus' resurrection. The grave clothes are still lying undisturbed in the tomb. The only unusual thing is that the body of Jesus is absent. It is as if the body of Jesus has disappeared. The linens that had wrapped the body are still lying there, and the head napkin has fallen apart from the body linens. Jesus is no longer in the grave. This could not have been staged. No one could have taken the body out.

Young people, just imagine for a moment that you were one of the disciples. Your whole world had just fallen apart when your Master died the shameful death of the cross. You are afraid that the authorities are going to round you up and finish you off next. Then you get the news that your Master's grave has been pillaged. You rush over, and

see the grave clothes lying, but the body is missing. What would you think?

We have seen the response of Peter. Luke says that he marveled. Now what about John? We see his response in our second point:

Resurrection by Faith

Before Peter leaves the tomb, John enters. He too sees what Peter saw. The Greek has a third word here for seeing (ὁράω; horao). This word means to perceive and take special notice. It has a focus on intellectual activity and concern. It indicates that he went beyond Peter in contemplating the implications of what he saw.

The text indicates a progression from John first noticing, then Peter observing, then John perceiving. There is an important distinction between these words. This perceiving of John fits perfectly with what accompanies his perceiving. Verse 8 says that when John went into the sepulcher, “he saw, and believed.” Spiritual light arises in his soul through the gentle, powerful work of the Holy Spirit. As a result he has spiritual sight to behold with the eye of faith.

What does John believe? He believes that Jesus has risen from the dead. He rightly concludes that Jesus’ body has not been stolen. Peter had probably also concluded this. But John perceives more. He believes that Jesus has arisen in a wonderful way. His body has somehow come right out of the grave clothes. It has been transformed in a mysterious way to a new form of existence. Jesus is alive and well. John does not know where Jesus is, but he believes that Jesus is alive and begins to grasp its saving ramifications.

That means that Jesus did not die like a martyr. He must have planned His own death. That’s right, Jesus had said that He was going to die and rise again. Why hadn’t

he remembered? But, why would Jesus have died and risen again? Ah, yes, hadn't Jesus said that "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life"? (John 3:14–15). John begins to perceive what has happened, and he embraces the truth wholeheartedly. He is awestruck as the light of the gospel begins to shine in his mind.

Something similar to this happens when the Spirit sheds light into the soul of a believer, after a time of darkness. The glorious light of the gospel grips our entire being, and thrills us as we perceive and believe it. It may be the truth of the atonement, God's providence, the resurrection, or Christ's intercession. Such light is thrown on gospel truth by the Spirit that we perceive the truth in a fresh, wonderful, new way. Perhaps it takes our breath away and makes us feel weak. We stand dumbfounded before the truth, basking in the glory of Christ. We perceive and believe the truth, and it makes us free, and bold, as it did with the disciples.

But why did John not believe earlier? Verse 9 tells us that: "as yet they knew not the Scripture that He must rise again from the dead." This means that they did not have a good, Spirit-applied, working knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures that predicted Christ's resurrection.

But where does the Old Testament teach that Christ will rise again? Let me mention just two places. For one, Isaiah 53:10–12 says: "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great.” This cannot make sense if the Messiah would remain dead. Then, too, Psalm 16:10 prophesied, “thou wilt not...suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.”

Moreover, many Old Testament stories and types predict or prefigure the resurrection of Christ, such as the bird in Leviticus 14 that was dipped in blood and freed, or two chapters later, the goat that was sent away, or the budding rod of Aaron in Numbers 17, or Jonah’s “resurrection” from the fish’s belly on the third day (Matt. 12:40).

In addition to the Old Testament Scriptures, Christ plainly told the disciples on several occasions that He would die, and then rise again the third day. In John 2 He declared that He would raise up the temple of His body in three days (vv. 19, 21), and in Matthew 16:21 He tells us that He would be killed and rise again on the third day (e.g. Luke 9:22; 18:33).

The disciples seemed to have had deaf ears regarding Christ’s teaching on His resurrection. But now John believes. He believes that Jesus is the real Messiah after all, the Lord of glory, the exalted Son of God, who has come to suffer and die, and to rise again, to save sinners.

Notice that John’s belief had its roots in Scripture. The implication of verse 9 is that if he had understood the Scripture about Jesus’ resurrection, he would have believed already. And this is ultimately where our faith must rest.

And yet we see from this narrative that the Lord is patient with our slowness to believe. What prompted John’s faith? Was it the Old Testament Scriptures? Was it the words of Jesus? No; it was the physical evidence of the empty grave clothes.

Isn’t it remarkable that none of the disciples believed until they had physical evidence of Jesus’ resurrection?

Jesus later said to Thomas: “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29). On the other hand, we see the condescension of God in providing abundant evidence for us of the resurrection of Christ. The angel did not have to roll the stone to let Jesus out, but he did so to let the disciples in, so they could see the evidence of His resurrection.

Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus? You say, “I wish we had some strong evidence like John had.” My response is: “We do.” We have the testimony of John and Peter to what they saw in the tomb. John says in verse 31 that everything in his gospel was written that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. We have the evidence of the Old Testament scriptures as well as the complete New Testament canon.

In addition to the straightforward record of the Scriptures (which is more than sufficient), there is abundant circumstantial evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Just as John was helped to believe by the grave clothes, we can be helped by circumstantial evidence, such as these thoughts:

1. If Jesus had not risen from the dead, then someone would certainly have produced the body, and Christianity would have died. Instead the angel beckons, “Come, see the place where the Lord lay” (Matt. 28:6). See the empty grave clothes where Jesus’ body had been laid.
2. Someone could not have stolen the body because the story that the Jewish leaders made up is not credible at all. It is a stretch to believe that the entire band of Roman guards was sleeping while the disciples stole the body. If somehow they were sleeping, they would have awoken at the sound of the removal of the gravestone. And if they had continued to sleep, their testimony means nothing, because they were not

witnesses. There is no way that Peter and John could have found the tomb with no guards and with the grave clothes essentially undisturbed, if the guards had not been supernaturally scared away.

3. How could the defeated and discouraged disciples, who did not even believe that Jesus would rise again, go about making up a story, and live joyfully to the end of their lives, dying martyred deaths, if Jesus did not really rise from the dead?

These kinds of considerations can sometimes be helpful for us to believe in Christ's resurrection. Of course it does not prove the resurrection, but it can help strengthen our faith.

The truth stands: Jesus arose from the dead. The resurrection is a foundational truth. It is the only hope for mankind. The story has been told of an atheist who called a prominent minister for a private talk. He asked the minister if he really believed in the resurrection. The minister said: "Absolutely, yes." The atheist replied: "Although I don't believe in it, the resurrection of Christ is the only hope for mankind."

If Christ did not rise, then He is a liar. If He is a liar, then the Scriptures are not true. If the Scriptures are not true, then there is no God of the Scriptures. Then there was no supernatural creation; then, we are just a cosmic accident. Life then has no meaning, no purpose, no fulfillment. But Christ did rise from the dead (cf. 1 Cor. 15:12–20). He is not a liar. His life and death were not for nothing. As He rose, leaving behind the empty grave clothes, all His work of humiliation was over.

Do you believe in Christ's resurrection? Do you believe John's testimony in our text that the grave clothes were empty and that Jesus rose bodily from the dead? Do you believe that Christ rose from the dead not just as a *fact*,

but do you put your faith in the risen Lord? Does the truth of Christ's resurrection impact your entire life?

You ask, "How does Christ's resurrection impact my life? How does the testimony of the empty grave clothes impact me?" We see that in our third point:

Resurrection by Foreshadowing

The empty grave clothes foreshadows several wonderful truths for God's people. If you're a believer these foreshadowed truths are significant for you in at least five ways:

1. Jesus' empty grave clothes assures us of His resurrection, which in turn foreshadows *our blessed resurrection*. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" (1 Thess. 4:14). The Spirit who raised up Jesus, will also quicken our mortal bodies (Rom. 8:11). Just as Jesus left behind His grave clothes, so we will too; Christ's resurrection is a sure pledge of ours (cf. Rom. 6:5; 2 Cor. 4:14; 1 Pet. 1:21).

Empty grave clothes show us Christ's victory over sin, for He came into the world in swaddling clothes, and now symbolically leaves behind the clothes of His humiliation, so that we who are believers might leave all our humiliating sin-clothes behind in the grave and be resurrected in the white-robed righteousness of everlasting glory in Christ Jesus. Being raised in the likeness of Christ, clothed in His white robe of righteousness, we may rejoice that, in the day of our resurrection, sin will be left behind forever.

2. Jesus' empty grave clothes foreshadow *our eternal justification*. Those empty clothes declare that divine justice demanded Christ's release, for He had made perfect satisfaction to His Father for all the sins of His people, had fulfilled all prophecies (Heb. 10), and was now raised again

“for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). Just as the Father confirmed with an oath, in Jesus’ resurrection that salvation is complete once and for all, so our resurrection will be the consummate declaration of our justification, for Christ’s sake, before our holy Judge.

3. Jesus’ empty grave clothes foreshadow *how* we will be raised from the dead. It will be *an instant and deliberate transformation of our bodies*. Our text implies that Christ did not get up slowly, unwrap all the linens, and walk out of the grave. He was instantly transformed into His glorious resurrected body. Just as He had been deliberate in all His sufferings and death, so He was deliberate in the instantaneousness of His resurrection, which occurred on the morning of the third day, even as He had said that it would. We too, even if we live until the Judgment Day, our bodies will be instantly changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, deliberately and precisely at the time appointed by God (1 Cor. 15:52).

What a comfort for us this is, dear believers! Just as our souls are instantly purified in the moment of our physical death, so our bodies will be instantly purified in the moment of our physical resurrection. The empty grave clothes signify that you, too, will live forever in as perfect a state as Jesus lives, glorifying Him with perfect souls and perfect bodies to all eternity—and that from the exact, deliberate moment appointed by God!

4. Jesus’ empty grave clothes foreshadow with *what type of body we will be raised*. Our resurrection will be similar to Jesus’. He is the firstfruits of the resurrection. Jesus came right out of the grave clothes, leaving them behind. His resurrection was different from that of Lazarus. Lazarus returned to the same life as before. He later died. Jesus, however, in His new glorious body, disappeared and

reappeared anywhere He wished. Similarly, our physical bodies will be transformed into new, glorious bodies governed by the Holy Spirit. Christ will “change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21).

What body will we be raised with? Paul anticipated this same question when writing to the Corinthians: “But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?” (1 Cor. 15:35). He answers with a comparison. When a farmer plants grain, he sows a bare seed. Over time, the seed is transformed into a wonderful plant. In the same way, though our natural body “is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body” (vv. 42–44).

Child of God, just think, the body that you now can touch and feel, though it will soon decay in the grave (if the Lord tarries), will be transformed like Christ’s was. There is no need to speculate on which atoms and molecules God will use to recreate your new body. It is enough to know that your body will be transformed, recreated, resurrected. It will exist in a whole new way—different than we experience now, and so it will not need the same materials. Not all the particles of the natural body are needed for the resurrection body. The farmer only plants the seed, but out comes the full plant. The plant takes particles from soil, water, and air. Yet the buried seed is the origin and foundation of the new plant. The identity of the seed passes into the plant. Out of its ugliness and decay springs forth the new plant. So our resurrection bodies will rise out of the seed of our decayed bodies. Even elect children, who die before birth, will rise with a glorious resurrection body.

But perhaps you have a question. Since Christ rose with what Paul calls a spiritual body, did He not then rise bodily? Yes, He did. His physical body did not remain in the grave clothes. It was transformed into a glorified, yet physical body. He ate food in this new body. The disciples could touch His body. Still today, Christ has a human body and soul in heaven, though he shines with glorious, divine light.

Similarly, our resurrection bodies are not only real material bodies, but also spiritual, or glorified. This new body will be grand, glorious, incorruptible, and will never become weary. Our bodies will be recreated to be able to enjoy the glories of being in God's presence. Our new bodies will know no pain, suffering, and illness. There will be unlimited opportunities for service to our King and Savior. This transformation will happen when Christ returns to earth bodily for the second and final time to judge all men.

There is also a dismal flip-side to this truth for the unbeliever. If you do not wholeheartedly believe in Christ's resurrection, you will still be raised from the dead. You too will be raised with a new body. But the purpose of this resurrection will not enable you to sustain and delight in the glory of God. You will be resurrected in a body that will be designed to survive the torments of hell; and that forever. It is said of criminals on the cross that increasingly they have only one desperate desire: to die. Usually they survived for a day or so on the cross, but eventually died. In hell, you too will desire annihilation but it will never come.

Hell is a real place. Jesus preached more about hell than about heaven. Hell is real because God takes sin seriously. Would He have sent His own Son to die the extremely painful and shameful death of the cross, and poured out His wrath upon His Son, if He did not take sin

seriously? Anytime you are tempted to doubt the existence of hell, take another look at the cross of Christ.

Have you ever been to the funeral of a family member or a friend? Did it make you think of your own death? Child of God, our text shows that we need not fear the grave. Are you nearing the end of your life? Do you have one foot in the grave already? Does the look of the cold coffin frighten you? Does the prospect of your body disintegrating in the earth make you tremble?

5. Jesus' empty grave clothes foreshadow the truth that *death and the grave have no more dominion over us*. Let us not forget on this resurrection day, that Christ, our Head, has already passed through the grave. He left His grave clothes behind! His body that was buried is no longer on this earth. He is now in heaven. If the head of the church, Christ, has risen, the body of Christ—the living church—is sure to follow. In principle, we are risen with Christ already now (Col. 3:1). If death no longer has dominion over Him, the head, we can be sure that it will not have dominion over us who form His body. We are raised up together with Him, sitting in heavenly places in Christ Jesus—here in principle already, and eventually forever in perfection (Eph. 2:6). Your physical grave is merely a temporary resting-place for your body because Jesus is risen and is alive as the empty grave clothes testify.

Let us then sing with the living church:

Christ the Lord is ris'n today, Alleluia!
 Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia!
 Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
 Sing, ye heav'ns, and earth, reply, Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
 Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!

Once He died our souls to save, Alleluia!
Where thy victory, O grave? Alleluia!

Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!
Death in vain forbids His rise, Alleluia!
Christ hath opened paradise, Alleluia!

Soar we now where Christ hath led, Alleluia!
Foll'wing our exalted Head, Alleluia!
Made like Him, like Him we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

Hail the Lord of earth and heaven, Alleluia!
Praise to Thee by both be given, Alleluia!
Thee we greet triumphant now, Alleluia!
Hail the Resurrection, thou, Alleluia!

King of glory, Soul of bliss, Alleluia!
Everlasting life is this, Alleluia!
Thee to know, Thy pow'r to prove, Alleluia!
Thus to sing, and thus to love, Alleluia!¹

1. Charles Wesley, *Christ the Lord is Risen Today*, 1739 (public domain).

