

Sermon 10 - Saving Faith (Hebrews)

TEXT: It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Heb. 10:31.

THE epistle of Paul to the Hebrews is addressed to those who are familiar with the types of the Jewish law. This book represents Christ and his work as no other of the epistles do. It is a commentary upon the typical system, designed to carry the Hebrew mind from the dead figures of the old covenant, up to the living facts of the new. The Jewish sacrifices in which blood was shed were a type of the sacrifice and precious blood of Christ. The Jewish sanctuary, with its two ministrations, was a type of the true tabernacle in Heaven where Christ ministers in both the holy and the most holy places. Such a commentary was peculiarly adapted to the time when the apostles had to meet the blindness of the Jews, who did not see that the types of their system pointed to, and were lost in, Jesus Christ and his work in the greater and more perfect tabernacle.

But this was not the only object of Paul's epistle to the Hebrews, to furnish Christ's first apostles with facts and arguments to meet their brethren according to the flesh. Another object was to shed light upon the ministry of Christ in the minds of those who are looking for his second coming, who live at the time when that ministration is closing. Hence the epistle to the Hebrews is really an epistle to the Adventists. We do not say that the book was designed only for those who are looking for the second advent of Christ. It was a powerful argument in the hands of the first apostles, and commentators and religious teachers generally have found much theoretical and practical instruction in it for the people of each successive generation since Christ ascended up on high. But the fact that the great sanctuary question has not been opened to the people by theological teachers until the close of the great prophetic periods, shows that its light was especially designed for our time.

Our text states that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. These words could not apply at any time since Christ undertook the great work of human redemption, and became man's mediator with God, not to any persons only those who had committed the unpardonable sin. There is a point to which man may go, beyond which there is no pardon. But this class is very much smaller than many suppose. But what is the sin for which there is no pardon? It is the same now that it was in the days of Christ. When Christ cast out demons, the Jews would not believe that it was done by the power of God. They blasphemed in saying, "He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils." Mark 3:22.

In reply to this blasphemy, Christ said, "Verily I say unto you, all sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme; but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never

forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation." Mark 3:28, 29. Blasphemy against the Father and the Son may be forgiven; but against the Holy Ghost, never.

In the first century, attributing the work of the Holy Ghost to the power of Satan, was blasphemy and the sin which hath no forgiveness. It is the same in the nineteenth. There are those in our day who are goaded on by Satan to attribute the work of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially the gift of prophecy, to the work of Satan.

These unfortunate persons commit the sin which hath no pardon. As further evidence of this fact, we here state that when these become alarmed and return with weeping they are not able to retain the position they retake. Like Esau, they have presumptuously sold their birthright; and although they seek to obtain it again with tears, they cannot. But let it be borne in mind that those persons who have grieved the Spirit of God away from them forever are left in a careless state of mind, generally supposing that they are in a fair way for Heaven, when they are really lost. The many who are suffering with fear that they have committed the unpardonable sin have done no such thing.

God by his prophet speaks to these trembling souls who are well nigh bereft of their reason, in the following words of comfort: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Isa.1:18. Shall we say that the crimson sin is the violation of the sixth commandment? And can the stain of this terrible crime be washed from the garments of the sinner by the blood of Christ? It is possible; but he who attributes the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan can find no pardon.

Once, sinless man could walk and talk with God and Christ and angels in Eden. He was then safe and happy in the hands of the living God. But when sin separated him from God he needed a mediator. Thank Heaven that the sinner is now in the hands of Christ. But when mercy's hour shall be past, and Christ shall no longer plead for him, then he will be in the hands of the living God to receive the righteous retribution of all his unpardoned sins; then, oh! then, it will be fearful to be in the hands of the living God.

The closing verses of the tenth chapter of Hebrews contain the clearest evidence that this epistle was given for the especial benefit of those who are waiting for the second advent of Christ.

Paul exhorts, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised; and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of

some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching." Heb.10:23-25.

This exhortation is addressed to those who see the day of the Lord approaching. They are exhorted to hold fast their faith, and by faithfulness in duty to provoke one another to love and good works.

Paul continues: "Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of affliction; partly, whilst ye were made a gazing-stock, both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in Heaven a better and an enduring substance." Verses 32-34.

In the great Second Advent movement of 1840-1844, a monument was raised up to which believers were to look back lest they forget that heavenly illumination, which prepared them to endure great afflictions. As were the Jews in their emancipation from the slavery of Egypt, they were to "remember all the way the Lord God had led them." That the Adventists did suffer reproaches, will not be denied. They were in many places afflicted for espousing the Second Advent cause. Some had their goods spoiled by mobs. And the most innocent were cruelly treated for maintaining companionship with believers. Some were publicly whipped, while others were placed under guardians who managed their property for them.

But it will be objected that these words of Paul apply to the Adventists on the ground that the apostle speaks as though he had part in these afflictions and bonds. We reply that the apostle speaks prophetically. He walks down with the church to the last generation, and speaks as though he was to be present to share with them their afflictions and joys. In like manner he speaks of being present at the coming of the Lord, and being changed to immortality.

He says: "For the Lord himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the arch-angel and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." 1 Thess.4:16, 17.

Here Paul speaks of being alive at the coming of the Lord. If he refers to himself, then the apostle is alive now. If so, he is eighteen hundred years old. He has entirely outstripped Methuselah. Again, he says: "Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep; but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." 1 Cor.15:51, 52.

Here the apostle says we shall not all sleep. Is it all a mistake that Paul was put to death at Rome? And when he wrote to Timothy that he was ready to be offered, and that the time of his departure was at hand, was he entirely mistaken? In fact, is he alive to-day? If so, where does he reside? But, seriously, dear reader, we all know that Paul is dead. And the only consistent view that can be taken of these texts is that the apostle, looking forward to the coming of the Lord, puts himself in with them. Therefore, when he says, "Ye had compassion of me in my bonds, " he is speaking of those who should suffer for embracing and adhering to the Advent faith.

Paul continues:–

"Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward; for ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." Heb.10:35, 36

Somebody has had great confidence in that which brings the reward to God's people. They are disappointed and brought into an exceedingly trying position, which demands patience. Patience was necessary in order to meet the ridicule poured upon Adventists before the time passed; but when the time did pass, the jaunting cheers, "You did not know as much as you thought you did, " "You have not gone up yet, " were exceedingly trying to those whose hearts were stricken with grief because their Lord did not come as they had hoped. But why apply these words of the apostle to the Second Advent movement?

To many this looks fanciful. We reply that the following verse compels us to thus apply the words of Paul. And if the reader will be candid and receive evidence, he will have no difficulty. Here is the golden text that settles the question: "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Verse 37.

The simple statement that Christ had tarried, shows a disappointment. We now enter upon fearful ground.

Paul continues:–

"Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." Verse 38. When Adventists were looking forward to a definite period for the consummation of their hope, the matter was one of mathematical calculation. They walked by sight. But when the time passed, and they were brought into the waiting, watching time, those who lived at all, lived by faith. They lived by faith in God, in his word, and the Advent experience which was wrought in them by the Spirit of God. While some held fast their Advent experience, many gave it up, and drew back to the world and Satan. Here are two classes. One holds fast, and pleases God; the other draws back, and suffers his displeasure. Here,

again, the apostle uses the word "we" in the next verse, by which he puts himself in with the Adventists in speaking prophetically. Ponder well his fearful words:– "But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." Verse 39. Here are two roads, leading in opposite directions; one to salvation, the other to perdition. To draw back is perdition; to believe is salvation. But the apostle is not speaking of faith in a general sense, but in regard to the subject under discussion, which is the coming of the Lord in a little while.

What, then, is saving faith for our time? In the days of Noah, saving faith was to believe that the waters of the flood were coming. In the days of Lot, saving faith was to believe that fire would be rained from heaven upon the ungodly. In the days of Christ, saving faith was to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the true Messiah. Saving faith now is to believe that the second coming of Christ will take place in a little while. This embraces faith in God and in his word, in all the way the Lord God has led us, and that the consummation of the blessed hope will come in a little while. Here is saving faith for the Christians of the last generation.

In the next chapter the apostle mentions the noted heroes of faith. "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." Chap.11:4.

Cain, in his unbelief as to a coming Redeemer, presented to the Lord the first-fruits of the ground. God did not respect his offering. But Abel, in faith of the Redeemer to come, brought a firstling of his flock. Through that lamb, Abel saw Christ. He as distinctly saw the atoning blood of Jesus through the blood of that firstling, as we see it through the fruit of the vine as we gather around the Lord's table at communion.

The apostle mentions the faith of Noah. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world." Verse 7.

This case has a special bearing upon our time. Christ describes the state of things at the coming of the Son of man as it was in the days of Noah. Then one family believed, and were saved; while all the world besides doubted, and were lost. But few will have saving faith, when Christ comes.

Noah made great sacrifices. He preached near a century and a quarter. He invested a fortune in the ark. And we venture the opinion that the old ark was not worth one per cent on the money invested as it rested on Ararat after the waters were dried up. It took strong faith to induce the patriarch to make so great sacrifices. The faith of the soon coming of the Son of man demands as great sacrifice as that made by Noah.