

Hebrews 6:4-12, The BETTER Things For Jesus Followers

2.24.19

Let me ask you a question. If I offered you a coupon to a steak restaurant for a free appetizer or a free meal, which would you take? The free meal? Me too! What about if I offered you an all-expense-paid 3-day weekend to Myrtle Beach versus a full week, all-expense paid trip to the Caribbean, which would you take? The full week in the Caribbean? Me too! We're not crazy, right! We'd choose the BETTER option, wouldn't we!

Today we're going to look at the "Better Things" found in following Jesus. For without question following Jesus is BETTER than anything a human being could possibly seek to find and know joy and contentment in this life. Why? Because He is the author of LIFE. He is the way, the truth and the LIFE!

Now, I'll tell you this passage we're getting ready to read is considered one of the most difficult and controversial passages in the New Testament (really the entire Bible). In fact, as I've studied...it's quite amazing...one commentator totally skipped this passage all-together. He didn't even touch it! So, I will tell you from the get-go...not everyone agrees on how to interpret this passage and I'll tell you...we could get lost in the minutia of all the various nuances of how to interpret this passage and we could get into the weeds in a hurry...but, that's not my goal today. My goal is to present to you the various options as succinctly as I can and then ask the Holy Spirit to speak to our spirits and take from this passage what He desires.

Truly, my ultimate goal is for us today is to continue to climb and experience the presence of Jesus in our lives by seeing...



"THE BETTER THINGS OF FOLLOWING JESUS!"

Hebrews 6:4-12

⁴For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. ⁷For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. ⁹Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. ¹⁰For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. ¹¹And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹²so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

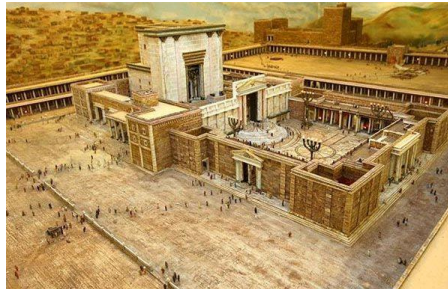
As I mentioned in the introduction, what we have here in verses 4-6 is a conundrum for many Bible Scholars. They asks, "Who is the writer talking about?" Again, I believe the writer is the Apostle

Paul...so, the question is, “Who is Paul talking about?” Is he talking about Christians, non-Christians, first-century Jews, or some hypothetical that we simply can’t understand?

Well, let me remind us that when we’re looking at Scripture, the proper way to study the passage and the proper Hermeneutic is to study it in context and allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. In other words, we shouldn’t isolate a text, but look at other passages of Scripture to help us determine what a particular passage is saying. And Church...I’ll tell you...for me...I really don’t struggle with this passage. I really believe it’s straightforward and direct in how we may understand it.

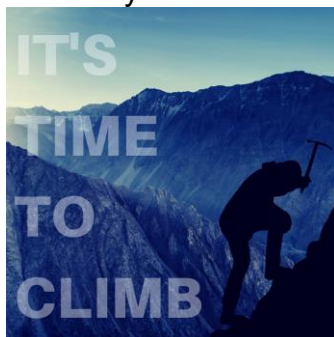
I want to draw your attention to the word **“those”** in verse 4 and the words, **“yet in your case beloved”** found in verse 9. I believe these words are key in helping us understand the audiences who are being addressed in this passage. Now, let’s see if we can understand the context of this passage. And so let’s ask: What have we been talking about leading up to this passage?

Remember, these Hebrews, these first-century Jews, have given their lives to Christ—they are now followers of Christ, and they have left a system of religion they’ve known all of their lives. They have left what they’ve known since childhood. What is that? This...going back and forth to this place.



That’s the Temple. They’ve been accustomed to the trappings of Judaism from the time they were children, but now...they’re no longer a part of this system. They have given their lives to Jesus and they’ve left all of this behind. Or had they? That’s the question. It seems there were those who were really struggling to leave Judaism and we saw this last week.

Remember how Paul was trying to describe why Jesus was the Great High Priest and how He had replaced the Aaronic priesthood of the Old Testament...but, many of these people couldn’t seem to grasp this and he said, “you have become dull of hearing,” and acting like infants who need milk and not meat. Remember how he implored them to leave the “elementary teachings” and move on to maturity. And in our example...we would say...



“IT’s Time to Climb!”

Remember, at the time of the writing of this book it’s been approximately 30 years since Jesus had

been on the earth...it's around 65 AD ...and incidentally...that's literally within about five years of the Jewish Temple being destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. Therefore, from 70 AD until today, the Jewish system of animal sacrifice has not happened...it came to an abrupt end in 70 AD, but up to this point...the Jews were still going to the Temple every day to offer sacrifices. So, for those who have come to Christ, you can see how it would be difficult to move away from everything you've ever known. But, isn't this what it means to come to Christ, EVEN TODAY? Isn't this what we're told in...

2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

And that's the question...were the people being described in Hebrews 6, verses 4-6, "new creations," "born-again believers" in Christ...or were they something else? Who are the "THOSE" in verse 4? Let's look at these three verses again and let's notice how they're described...

Hebrews 6:4-6

⁴For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

Who are these people who have once been "enlightened," "tasted," and "shared" in the things of God...but, now have "fallen away?" Well, the Greek word for "fallen away" is: **"parapipto,"** and it means to: "step aside from the path, to turn away." So, these are people who have been walking in one direction...but, they step aside and then turn around and walk away. So, were they Christians?

Well, let me first offer this. Some scholars say this is not a question for our day. They say the situation being described could only have happened to those first century Jews and this Scripture is not to apply to us today. Yet, to be faithful to the Scripture before us...there is simply no indication in the text that we should apply this kind of understanding to the text. To do so...to say this text was only for the first century Jews would be a TOTAL hypothetical guess. And I don't believe we have to take this passage as a "guess."

But, here comes the rub. What are we to do with those words: "enlightened, tasted, shared?" For you see, it's those words that are going to be critical in helping us to understand who we're talking about here. I want to show you a picture that I believe helps to explain what we see here.



Can you tell what's going on here? That's a lady at Sam's Club offering you a piece of Asiago Cheese on a toothpick. The cheese is \$4.87/lb. You are going to "taste it...share in it...be enlightened to this type of cheese," but the question remains...will you actually buy it. Do you see?

I believe the “THOSE” being described in verse 4 or Jews who have been coming to the house meetings of these new Christians...they had seen what the Lord had done in the lives of these believers and yet...it appears they have yet to “buy into” following Jesus. In other words, I do NOT believe these people were ever born again. I don’t see conversion here...I just see tasting here.

The great Bible commentator Matthew Henry summarizes by saying this:

“They may be *enlightened* to the knowledge of ideas and common illumination, which people may have a great deal of, and yet fall short of heaven. They may also *taste of the heavenly gift*, like people at a market who taste what they will not buy. They may be *partakers of the Holy Spirit* and see and observe extraordinary and miraculous works and may taste the goodness of the word, but never have it dwell richly in them. ...The writer describes the fearful situation of those who fall away after having gone so far in the profession of religion.” Matthew Henry, Bible Commentator

Profession. Can a person “profess” Jesus and not “POSSESS” Him? It reminds me of Hebrews 3 and 4 where Paul had been teaching them about the children of Israel who rebelled in the wilderness wandering and never entered the Promised Land. So, church family, to use our analogy...this is base camp at Everest.



it’s like people who come in and out of base camp, but never pitch a tent. They come and go and they come and go, but they never pitch a tent...therefore...they give no credibility to the fact that they’re actually serious about climbing the mountain (following Jesus). In fact, eventually (over time), you look around and you realize this person is gone. You don’t see them anymore. This is what the Apostle John describes in 1 John 2:19.

1 John 2:19

¹⁹They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

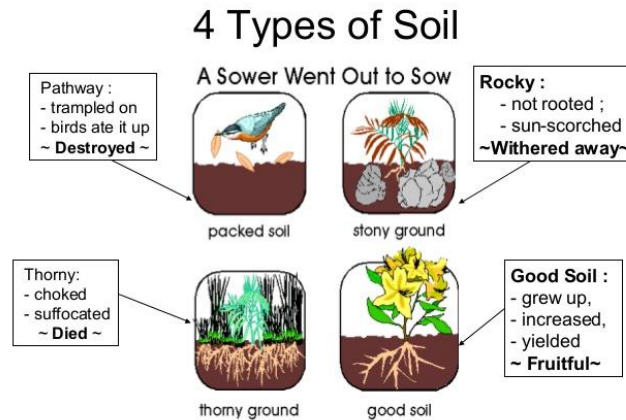
You see, I’m convinced these people had “tasted,” but were unwilling to pay the price! What was the price? Potentially losing a lot! Ostracized. You see, when they followed Christ, they walked away from everything they had ever known. You see, many were “unsynagogued,” or excommunicated. They could be kicked out of their family...they could lose business...the cost was very heavy and the pressure was intense. Much like it is today. It’s getting harder and harder to live for Jesus because His commands are not popular and they aren’t easy to follow in our “everything goes culture.” But Jesus said, “If you love me you will keep my commandments,” in other words, you’ll do what I say.

Now watch how the Holy Spirit, (through Paul), describes how you can tell if a person is genuine, versus those who have walked away...how you can tell what their lives look like.

Hebrews 6:7-8

⁷ For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

Church, what did Jesus say? “You will know them by the WHAT?” The fruit they bear. You see, throughout Scripture, “Christian fruit” is always the indication of regeneration...that salvation has taken place. I believe that’s what Jesus taught in His parable of Matthew 13. The Parable of the Sower...Remember this...



Only the Good Soil produced fruit. The other plants in the Rocky and Thorny soil sprang up (looked like they were the real deal), but never produced fruit, indicating, I BELIEVE that there was a profession of faith, but no true possession of Christ. You and I are to be looking for FRUIT and expecting fruit.

Jesus said, “You will know them by the fruit they bear.” Jesus said:

Matthew 5:14-16

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Listen, our works don’t save us...they’re like filthy rags in that respect...but our works give evidence that we are saved and it’s our works that show the unsaved world what God is doing in our lives...the works are a magnet to draw the lost. It’s these works that the Lord has purposed for us to walk in...live and do while we’re here...

Ephesians 2:10

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

And you see church family, it’s this conversation about the SAVED person, those walking in these “good works” that Paul switches to in verse 9. Notice again, the word: **BELoved**.

Hebrews 6:9

⁹ Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that

belong to salvation.

Listen, the “beloved” in Scripture in the NT are always those who are “believers.” You see these or those THE BELOVED who have a tent at Base Camp...these are the Israelites who went into the Promised Land. These are the saved who BELONG TO SALVATION and partake in the BETTER THINGS! What better things? Watch...

Hebrews 6:10-11

¹⁰ For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. ¹¹ And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end,

You see, I'm convinced this passage is not a discussion about Christians who lose their salvation...that's impossible. No! The BETTER THINGS of our salvation is that we have (vs 11) “FULL ASSURANCE OF HOPE UNTIL THE END.” Full assurance folks! How long? Until the end...until we cross the finish line. That's what Paul did, right? He would FINISH THE RACE and KEEP the Faith to the end...and this thought embodies the doctrines of Eternal Security and of the Perseverance of the Saints! Jesus said:

John 10:27-28

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Ephesians 1:13-14

¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

These are better things Church family! Jesus sees us all the way to the end...

Philippians 1:6

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

So, how are we to live? Not like this... It's not no-thros.



Remember him from last week, that's lazy, sluggish, no nothing, no tent at base camp, the one who will never climb. No, verse 12 tells us how we're to live, the climbers.

Hebrews 6:12

¹² so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

And that's the point in the passage, the inherited promises are the BETTER THINGS!



What are some of those “better things” on this climb of the Christian life?

Well...I'm not talking about if you want a coupon to a steak restaurant or an all-expense paid trip to the Caribbean. NO! We're talking about being delivered from Hell! We're talking about having the faith and patience to get through hard times...the storms of life. We're talking about peace and comfort and joy while living in a tough world...

We're talking about the BETTER THINGS of having Jesus help us make good decisions and guide us to a better life as we climb the mountain He has set before. It's the better things that lead us away from a sluggish life at base camp. ...and it's these better things that lead us to the mountain...that lead us...LISTEN...to making good decisions that keep us from bad consequences...some of you are living with bad consequences because you aren't saved...and that bad consequence for you is Hell...because that was the warning of Hebrews, chapter 2...

³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

You can't...you won't escape...you will be thorns and thistles thrown into the fire.

But, what about the Christians. Christian, are you making bad decisions, are you living with the consequences of being stuck at base camp making bad decisions, relationally, financially, emotionally, whatever. Wouldn't you like to climb? Wouldn't you like to experience the BETTER THINGS:



Oh, it's not easy to leave base camp, but, oh is it worth it, because when you finally get out of base camp, when you finally start climbing with Jesus that climb becomes sweet because you are in communion with Jesus Christ who is THE LIFE and you begin to experience His presence, His power and His purpose for the Better Things He has planned for you! No, I'm not talking about steaks or vacations. I'm talking about experiencing Jesus Christ and His better things for you!

Stand with me and you come if you need to pray if you need Jesus, we're here for you!