

Something Better

“You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.”

This is how the author of Hebrews ends Chapter 10. He then illustrates in Chapter 11 how many of the Old Testament figures persevered, how they expressed faith in the context of hardship, persecution, and death. You’re undoubtedly familiar with Hebrews 11, the “faith” chapter. But notice how the author ends Chapter 11 (verses 39,40):

“These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”

Faith is being certain that God’s verbal promises are true and will be fulfilled. Faith looks back at creation and understands that as God has said that He spoke everything into existence, that’s how it happened. Faith also always looks forward, anticipating that what God has said will happen in the future, will happen. Thus, all those Old Testament figures in Chapter 11 anticipated Christ. They are types of Christ’s perfect faith and perseverance in the context of persecution and death.

So the author says that God had “something better” in mind, both for us and for them, to make all of us “perfect.” What’s the “something better”? Chapter 12 partly answers that, it’s Christ Jesus. We are the beneficiaries of the greatest gift that God has for His beloved creatures, which is being *in Christ*. It’s He who perfects us. It’s Jesus who did everything necessary so that we can be safely in God’s presence. It’s Jesus who enables us to live a life that pleases God, and at the end of life to be transported to be physically with Jesus where He is.

Christ Jesus is the greatest reality that there is. We don’t need to have our own personal Damascus Road experience to know that. We know it through the testimony of Scripture. Christ Jesus is the most important Person in our lives. This is why Paul wrote the letters to the believers in the church at Corinth. Christ Jesus was the most important Person in Paul’s life and he knew that it had to be the same for those Christians at Corinth.

Those believers at Corinth were terribly distracted by all kinds of things, things cultural, things disruptive, things ungodly. Paul’s letter was to get them past those distractions so that Christ would reign supreme in their lives, in the Person of the Spirit. Or, to put it another way, Paul wanted those believers, *and us his modern readers*, to experience and to live out, now, the “something better.” Our union with Christ is not just a theological doctrine. Union with Christ is our life! (“For me to live is Christ” and “I no longer live, but Christ liveth in me,” wrote Paul.) Union with Christ is our hope. It’s our future. It’s our salvation. It’s our *everything*. We don’t merely imitate Jesus [although that’s biblical, it places Christ external to us, when in fact He dwells within us], we allow Jesus thru the Spirit to live His life *in us*. It’s Christ who transforms us, if we want to be transformed.

Union with Christ is corollary to the unity of the Persons of the Godhead. God identifies Himself as “I am,” not as “we are.” God is one. And the loving fellowship of the Persons of the one God is reflected in our union with Christ. Thus, as sons we cry out, “*Abba, Father*” by the indwelling Spirit of Christ who calls out, “*Abba, Father*” (Galatians 4:6). We’re that intimately identified with, or united to, the living Christ. And so we abandon sin, not because of any commandment in Scripture (although such commandments abound), but because sins are totally contrary to the indwelling Christ. (Note that we’re responsible for making the effort to deal with sin; we’re not inert bystanders.)

Union with Christ means when we die, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit we’ll be glorified, that is, delivered from our inherent sin nature and fit to be in heaven. We will see the exalted Christ in all His transcendent glory. We’ll be there in heaven, not as John was in the Book of Revelation, observing things, but in some other manner, cryptically revealed by Peter as “partakers of the divine nature.” In some [in this era, unexplainable] way, we’ll be incorporated into the fellowship of the Godhead. It means also that when He returns to earth, we’ll be with Him. We’ll rejoice as we see Him physically defeat Satan and have him thrown into a great pit. We’ll see His righteousness spread across the earth. We’ll see Him restore all earth to how it was at creation, before sin and its attendant curse entered. And it means we’ll have the privilege to serve the Christ-King in some capacity in His Kingdom. We’ll experience the “new heavens and new earth,” the “new Jerusalem,” the wonders of a new creation coming from the infinitely creative mind of God. Union with Christ also means that we have a unique and special relationship to the Father, and we’ll actually experience the transcendent blessings of such sonship. And it will endure for an eternity.

The author of Hebrews, you'll notice in the verse quoted earlier, is vague about what the "something better" is, for a good reason. There's more, *much* more, to what God intends to give us in the future:

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered in the mind of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9)

Paul here is paraphrasing a verse from near the end of the Book of Isaiah. He similarly understands that, although a lot of what God has for us in the future has been revealed, there's vastly more waiting in God's rich storehouse of blessing. Exactly what the creation blessing is, for example, is nowhere in the Bible stated. By pulling verses here and there together we can surmise what it is. [That's another Sunday School lesson.] But the promised creation blessing will actually be (on the basis of this verse) far greater than what we suppose.

Consider this: Abraham trusted God's words as truthful: "Through you all the people on earth will be blessed." But he didn't know how the promise would be fulfilled and never in his lifetime saw that tremendous thing that God had promised. It was a future reality that, in Abraham's mind, was certainly going to happen, so he acted on the promise. (James, in Chapter 2, explains that that's the kind of faith that saves.) Consider also this: Exactly what the "rewards" are for faithful obedience is nowhere stated in the New Testament— nor are the consequences to a believer of disobedience. God has deliberately withheld that from us to motivate us to be faithful and not to disobey. It's as if, by the phrase "something better," God is saying, "I intend to bless you in an exceedingly great way. Never mind how. Just trust Me."

So "something better" means that the best is yet to come. This life is but a brief probative period, a time for anticipating and living in light of what we know to be future realities. We therefore set aside — no, we eschew, we despise — all that tries to distract us from the promise of what's to come. And we persevere in spite of what life throws at us. "Persevere" means continuing to trust and obey God's Word, and continuing to serve God faithfully according to His will. And therefore we look forward to dying, so that we can experience the "something better." (Or, we look forward to being "snatched up," if the Rapture is for us, because it probably is imminent.)

The "something better" isn't a hope that may or may not materialize. No, it's the greatest and truest of all future realities. But we have this huge problem in our nation: In the same way that we're passive consumers of news and opinions (from the various newsmedia), we are passive consumers of Christian truth. We sit and listen to a sermon in the same more or less disinterested way as we sit and listen to a TV newscast or to some pundit bloviating on the latest news item. And we walk away unchanged, no response needed or expected. Hey...If we understand that with the advent of Christ Jesus "something better" is on offer, and if we have some idea of all that that "something better" is, our lives simply cannot be the same.

The initial readers of Hebrews were Jews in Judea who believed that Jesus was their promised Messiah but, faced with intense persecution because of their belief, intended to revert to their old ways, which they knew well and which were, they thought, safer. "Don't trust in a fantasy!" is what the author of Hebrews essentially warned them. Fantasies are deceitfully alluring. We have Christians today who live the fantasy that the tradition of church attendance is sufficient for God's blessing. "No," says the author of Hebrews, and Paul, and the Spirit of God, "you need to be joined by faith to the Person Christ Jesus, trusting in His work on the cross, to experience God's blessing. And then you need to know His will for you *and do it.*" For those whose Christianity consists of church attendance, God has "something better."

"Something better" is a great way to understand God's gifts. Whatever we have here on earth, whether it's peace, comfort, prosperity, freedom, health, whatever it may be, is not and cannot even come close to God's "something better." That's because God is an infinite Being, a good Person, and a perfect Person, and His gifts are from His hand; they are infinitely precious and are offered to us in transcendent love.

In many regions of the world today, Christians are suffering horribly for their faith. God may not require us to suffer torture or to be killed, but He does command us to be faithful in prayer, in servanthood, in obedience, and in pursuing godliness. Persecuted believers serve God as best they can with their necessarily limited opportunities. With the wealth and freedoms we have in America, we should all be bearing fruit and sharing with others the blessings of salvation to the maximum. Whether we suffer because of our identity as Christians, or whether we expend ourselves doing Christ's will, it's with future realities in full view before us.

Those initial readers of Hebrews, history suggests, were persuaded by the author's appeal. As those initial readers of Hebrews did, may we too press on into an ever closer, more intimate walk with the living Christ.