

Exhorting the family of God

Moses was a very special man. Although raised as royalty (Exodus 2), He learned humility through forty years of tending sheep (Exodus 3). Called to confront an unjust ruler (Exodus 5), He led a nation out of slavery (Exodus 12). Called to witness the majesty and power of the Almighty GOD, He heard God's thundering voice sounding forth from Sinai (Exodus 20). Called to receive the covenant (Exodus 20–24), then God's precepts, decrees, judgments and commands, God knew Moses face to face (Deuteronomy 34:10). Moses faithfully served as God's prophet, leader and judge over the house of Israel.

God had called Israel for a special purpose (Exodus 19:5, 6; 29:46). He had liberated them all, bringing them out of a state of slavery, and sought to bring them to a place where He could give them rest (Numbers 13). But the people of Israel grumbled, rejecting God's authority (Numbers 14). They attempted to stone Moses, Joshua and Caleb, and would have done so had not God's glorious power shone forth to protect these men (Numbers 14:10). The people tried to appoint a leader to lead them back to Egypt (Numbers 14:4).

These actions represented a total rejection of God. They came from a deep-seated mistrust of God's purposes, His lovingkindness and His power. These actions were a blatant, faithless rebellion against Heaven (Numbers 14; Psalm 95).

Moses, the servant appointed by God, was faithful in all God's house (Hebrews 3:2). Yet the very people who were called to be members of that house were faithless, rejecting God's leadership, rejecting God's lovingkindness, rejecting God's promises, rejecting God's rule (Hebrews 3:16–4:2).

What is rebellion?

I want to be clear about what the Bible means by rebellion.

You can't confuse this rebellion with personal mistakes. You can't confuse this rebellion with giving in to temptation. You can't confuse this rebellion with personal sins that God is in the process of convicting you about. You can't confuse Israel's experience with the struggle to submit all of our lives to the control of God's Spirit.

You might join with the Apostle Paul in saying,

“For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out” (Romans 7:15–18).

But God says,

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

And,

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

God has provided a way that your mistakes, your failings, your sin, your transgression is wiped clean from your slate. God has provided for your cleansing. He removes your scarlet, and makes you as white as snow.

And God had provided the means by which Israel could have their mistakes, their failings, their sin and their transgression wiped clean, cleansed and purified too. That's what the temple sacrificial system was all about.

But this rebellion was of an altogether different character. This rebellion was not just a mistake, a failing, a sin or a transgression. It was the complete and utter rejection of God's rule. It was a complete and utter lack of faith in the goodness, lovingkindness, mercy, grace, justice and power of the Almighty God who had brought them out of Egypt.

This rebellion is equivalent to the “unpardonable sin” (Mark 3:30). This is the case where the person has so closed themselves down to God's calling, God's pleading, God's correction, God's discipline that their eyes and ears are closed, and their spirit is dead to the LORD.

So God's judgment wasn't a punishment or a retribution. It was the demonstration of the consequence of Israel's faithlessness. It was the demonstration of the consequence of mounting a spiritual rebellion against the LORD. The people did not want to follow God, the giver of life, and they reaped the consequence of separation from the love of God, namely, death.

So when we are considering this passage, we need to be careful to apply its lesson to our lives correctly. This judgment from God was not a judgment on mistakes; it was a judgment on committed rebellion against His rule.

The faithful One

While Moses was a faithful servant in God's house, Jesus is the heir of His house. While God knew Moses face to face, Jesus had laid aside the Father's glory, and would return to it (John 17:5). While Moses temporarily shone with the after-effects of God's glory (2 Corinthians 3:12–13); Jesus permanently shines with it (Revelation 1:16). While Moses audibly heard the voice of God describe His covenant words, His precepts, decrees, judgments and commands (Exodus 21:22ff); Jesus spoke as One who had authority (Matthew 7:29). While Moses functioned as prophet, leader and judge, the Lord Jesus revealed Himself as apostle, prophet, messiah, priest and king.

Jesus is faithful in God's house.

“We are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope” (Hebrews 3:6).

God's house means His household—those who are part of His family. And you are part of His family if indeed you receive the faithfulness of God within your heart. And if you receive the faithfulness of God within your heart, if you are united by faith with those who hear God's voice, then you will believe and obey our Lord Jesus Christ.

So what did our faithful Lord command us?

These are the characteristics that Jesus taught us.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3).

God blesses those who are humble. God blesses those who are totally dependent Him for their righteousness.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).

God blesses those who mourn for the sin and the evil that they themselves have contributed to the world. God blesses those who mourn that God's will is being resisted. God blesses those who mourn for the rebellion they see in this society.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5).

God blesses those who are gentle, humble and submitted to God. God blesses those who allow the Spirit of God to put to death the deeds of the flesh. God blesses those who allow themselves to be vessels of His will, “to will and to work for God's good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matthew 5:6).

God blesses those whose every desire is to seek after His righteousness (Matthew 6:13). Not to try to establish a righteousness of their own, but to seek for and submit to the righteousness that belongs to God (Romans 10:3).

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (Matthew 5:7).

God blesses those who love mercy, who long to forgive wrong, who do not demand their rights, but cede their rights to others. When we have the right to enforce our rights, but give up that right, and do it willingly, then we understand the mercy that God has granted us, and the ministry of mercy that He wishes us to share with each other, and with the world.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).

God blesses those whose heart is cleansed by the washing of God's Word (John 15:3), and whose heart is strengthened in faith by the presence of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:16).

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9).

God blesses those who long for the ministry of reconciliation—reconciling man to God. He blesses those who want to mend fences, who want to place coals on the heads of the enemy, who want to go the extra mile, who willingly turn the other cheek, who use non-violent means that seeks to uplift friends, neighbours and enemies alike.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:10–12).

God blesses those who are willing to undergo persecution for the sake of the LORD, for the sake of righteousness, for the sake of advancing His kingdom. For those who fear Him who gives and takes life do not fear for what happens to their body (Matthew 10:28). It is the inner man to whom God has given life (Ephesians 3:16, KJV); and the man who is spiritually alive is willing to allow the flesh to suffer for the sake of God (Colossians 1:24; 1 Peter 4:1).

Will we respond?

I'd like you to ask yourself how you responded to the Lord's instructions?

Did your heart leap with joy? Did you long and pine for that which you feel you do not have? Does it sound at all attractive? Would you like those nearest to you to exhibit these qualities? Are you prepared to lay down your life to gift these qualities to those around you?

Because if your spirit whispered, “Yes, Jesus, I want to follow you. Yes, I want you to take hold of me that I may become like you,” then you are responding in faith.

And if you are responding in faith, then Jesus holds out His promise of entering His rest to you.

God's rest

God held out the promise of Israel entering God's rest in the “land flowing with milk and honey,” but Israel did not enter in. Later, even when Israel had settled in the land, King David realised that the promise of rest in the land was still a future promise (Psalm 95). For Abraham looked forward, not to a land in the middle east, but “to a city that has foundations, and whose designer and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10).

God's rest will be fully realised when the New Jerusalem enters the “new heavens and new earth” (Revelation 21:1–2). God's rest will be fully realised when the dwelling place of God is with man (Revelation 21:3). God's rest will be fully realised when He “wipes away every tear from your eyes, and death is no more, neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

To those who conquer, this will be their heritage, and God will be their god, and they will be His son and His daughter (Revelation 21:7).

And yet, even today, we can experience this rest. We “who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come” (Hebrews 6:4–5), experience the foretaste of God’s rest now.

And our spirit rejoices with God’s Spirit. And we have love, peace, joy, patience, gentleness, goodness and self-control overflowing our soul. For this is the presence of God. This is God’s rest.

How will we respond?

How does this sound to you? Does it sound good? Do you long for this in your life?

Because if you do, then you are responding in faith to God’s Word. If you do, you can be sure that you are alive in God. And if you’re alive, then you need to hang on to this hope, the hope of glory, which is Christ in you (Colossians 1:27).

Exhort one another

If you are humble, if you mourn, if you are meek, if you hunger and thirst for righteousness, if you love mercy, and are pure in heart, and are willing to suffer persecution for the LORD, then the most loving thing you can do is to exhort your fellow believer.

The most loving thing you can do is to exhort your brother and sister in Christ to stay alive, to stay fruitful, to stay productive. The most loving thing you can do is to exhort your brother and sister in Christ to resist sin’s deceitfulness.

For those who are alive in Christ have received a heart transplant, but sin callouses the arteries and threatens to remove our spiritual sensitivity. Sin can choke the life of Christ that is in us.

I know of a church that turned a blind eye to wilful sin. A man separated from his wife, and within two weeks was sitting with another woman in church. And no one said a word. A church that does that is not fulfilling this command to exhort one another to faithfulness. That’s not a church I want to belong to. That’s a church dead to the Spirit of God.

The most loving thing is for someone who recognises a flaw in me, in my life, in my conduct, to have the courage to exhort me to more fully live the principles of God’s will.

We can’t be strangers here and fulfil this scriptural command. We need to love one another, to sacrifice for one another, to encourage one another, to exhort one another, to correct one another.

We can’t do this in a small way, picking petty things that offend our flesh. But we need to do this in a large way, where we’re willing to sacrifice ourselves, our pride, our time for one another, that we can point each other to the large principles of the Spirit. That we can exhort each other to avoid sin’s deceitfulness. That we can encourage each other to lay our lives down for those closest to us, and for those who are our enemies.

For the gospel has come to us as it came to Israel, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. But I pray that a better story will be told of you. For the message you hear will benefit you eternally, provided you are united by faith with those who listen. May you respond in faith to Him Who is faithful, listening to His call, obeying His commands, and entering His rest.

References

This message is based on Hebrews 3:1–4:2