

How to Be a Difference Maker

14 Keys

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Introduction

Many religious people in the first century after Jesus' birth, both Jews and Gentiles had questions about the religion of the early Christians. They were looking for evidence that this new faith was genuine. Jews had the miracle of crossing the Red Sea and the agreement made with God at Mount Sinai to support their faith. But what miracles did Christians have? Jews had beautiful worship ceremonies and a high priest who offered sacrifices in the temple so that the people would be forgiven. But what did Christians have? How could this new Christian faith, centered in Jesus, offer forgiveness of sins and friendship with God?

The letter to the Hebrews was written to answer exactly these kinds of questions. In it the author tells the readers how important Jesus really is. He is greater than any of God's angels (1.5-14), greater than any prophet, and greater even than Moses and Joshua (2.1-4.14). Jesus is the perfect high priest because He never sinned, and by offering His own life He has made the perfect sacrifice for sin once for all time (9.23-10.18). By His death and return from death, He has opened the way for all people to come to God (4.14-5.10; 7.1-8.13).

This letter has much to say about the importance of faith. The writer points out that what Jesus offers comes only by faith. And this faith makes His followers sure of what they hope for and gives them proof of things that cannot be seen. The writer praises God's faithful people of the past (11.1-40) and encourages those who follow Jesus now to keep their eyes on Him as they run the race (12.1-3).

What does it mean to have a high priest like Jesus?

Jesus understands every weakness of ours, because he was tempted in every way that we are. But he did not sin! So whenever we are in need, we should come bravely before the throne of our merciful God. There we will be treated with undeserved kindness, and we will find help. (4.15,16)

A Quick Look at this Letter

- The Greatness of God's Son (1.1-4)
- Jesus is Greater than Angels (1.5-2.18)
- Jesus is Greater than Moses and Joshua (3.1-4.13)
- Jesus is the Great High Priest (4.14-7.28)
- Jesus Brings a Better Agreement (8.1-9.22)
- Jesus' Sacrifice is Once and for All (9.23-10.31)
- Some of God's People Who Had Great Faith (11.1-40)
- Follow the Example of Jesus (12.1-13.19)
- Final Prayers and Greetings (13.20-25)

Summary of the First Chapters

In the epistle to the Hebrews, which some claim to have been written by St. Paul, we have some of the finest theology of the New Testament. The author of Hebrews goes to great efforts to explain the Christian's fulfillment of both the covenant and the tabernacle of the Old Testament. Here, more than any place else, we see Jesus Christ exalted as the great high priest. Superior to the angels, greater than Moses, here the Lord Jesus is calling us to hear His voice and not harden our hearts during this time of testing so that He can bring us into a special rest in His own heart. Both the encouragements and the warnings are strong. Jesus says, if the Father does not discipline you and chasten you, you are not His sons and daughters but illegitimate offspring.

This new priesthood that Jesus comes to bring is not a continuation of the Levitical priesthood, but a throwback to the priesthood of the patriarchs and their elder sons. It is a priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek, who is the first-born son of Noah and the only righteous first-born son of any of the patriarchs. Although Melchizedek was born ten generations before Abraham, in actual span of life he outlived Abraham. Only he had the power to bless Abraham because he was the last to receive the blessing from his father, Noah. That is why, when Abraham defeated the five kings who had defeated the four kings, he humbled himself before Melchizedek and paid tithes to him so that he could receive the priestly blessing.

In Hebrews 7:16-22, it states, "What we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest not on the basis of a revelation as to his ancestry (such as the Levites), but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life (based upon righteousness). For it is declared, you are priest forever in the Order of Melchizedek ... Others became priests without any oath (which is the basis of any covenant). But he became a priest with an oath when God said to him, the Lord has sworn and He will not change His mind. You are priest forever. Because of this oath, Jesus had become the guarantee of a better covenant."

So Jesus becomes the high priest of a new covenant, the one promised by Jeremiah: "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, when I turned away from them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will make of the house of Israel, after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or man his brother, saying, 'know the Lord', because they will all know me, from the least to the greatest for I will forgive their wickedness and forgive their sins no more" (Jer 31-34). By calling this covenant new, he has made the first one obsolete (Heb 8-13).

Wership in the Tabernacle

Here the author of Hebrews shows how the tabernacle that Moses built in the desert, which became the pattern for the temple, now becomes the pattern of the new sacramental system. In Chapter 9, the author refers back to that first tabernacle there in the desert. The author refers to the holy place, when he says, "In its first room where the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the holy place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the most holy place (holy of holies), which had the golden altar of incense and the gold covered ark of the covenant, this ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's rod that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the ark were the cherubim of the glory overshadowing the place of atonement.

Then the author goes on to say, the Holy Spirit was showing that the way into the most holy place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshipper. They were only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings -- "External regulations applying until the time of the new order" (cf Heb 9:2-10).

The Blood of Christ

When Christ came as the high priest of the good order, He went through a greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not manmade; that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and cows; but He entered the holy of holies once for all by His own blood, having attained eternal redemption. If the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of the heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean, sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean, how much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit, offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God.

Christ's Sacrifice Once for All Continued Daily Through the Mass

In Chapter 10, the author tells us that this Jewish law was only a shadow or type of the good things, "the realities themselves" that Christ brought by being the new Passover lamb who would lead us into the very manifest presence of God, the real holy of holies through His blood. He quotes from Psalm 40, "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'here I am -- it is written about me in the scroll -- I come to do your will'" (Ps 40:6-8).

A Call to Persevere, the Explanation of the New Veil, the Crucified Body of Christ

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another -- and all the more as you see the day approaching" (Heb 10:19-25).

Scripture's Hall of Fame for Those Who Live By Faith (Heb. 11)

In Hebrews 11, Paul says, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. By faith, Abel offered to God a sacrifice better than Cain. By faith, Enoch was taken from this life so that he did not experience death. By faith, Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear, built an ark to save his family. By faith, Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith, Abraham, even though he was past age -- and Sarah herself was barren -- was able to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob. By faith, Jacob blessed each of Joseph's sons. By faith, Joseph spoke of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. By faith, Moses' parents hid him for three months. By faith, Moses refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a long time. By faith, he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood so that the destroyer of the first-born would not touch the firstborn of Israel. By faith, the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land. By faith, the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days.

"And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated -- the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. 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" (Heb 11:32-40).

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Heb 12:1-4).

So faith is deeper than things, deeper than words, deeper than creedal assertions. Faith is a confident assurance in the person, the power, the presence of Jesus at work in our hearts. By faith, we too can make the extraordinary ordinary and the supernatural natural. All things are possible to those who live by faith.

God's Discipline

In Hebrews 12, Paul also tells us, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punished everyone he accepts as a son" (Prov 3:11-12). Endure hardships, he continues; God is treating you as sons. But what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. "May level paths for your feet" (Prov 4:26) so that the lame may not be disabled but rather healed.

14 Keys to Becoming a Difference Maker

1. Get and keep the right mindset (Hebrews 11-13)

Turn off the bad news, (let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles) and turn on the good news. Let us keep our eyes fixed upon Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Put on the mind of Christ, as Paul tells us in 1 Cor:1, not the mind of Adam. Meditate upon those things that are holy, Christlike, pure, sensitive, and life-giving. Meditate upon the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7. Purposely think that you will be happy when you are poor in spirit, humble of heart, pure of mind, a peacemaker, and a pursuer of holiness.

2. Keep working to clear out the sin in your life (Hebrews 12:1)

Go to confession frequently. This is a great sacrament. Everytime we go to confession, three great miracles take place. First, every bit of sin and guilt is cleansed by the saving blood of Jesus administered from His mercy seat through the raised hand of the priest. Second, all bitterness, hatred and unforgiveness is let go of. Third, we are given the awesome power to forgive ourselves and get on with our lives. Fight the battle of our thought life. The mind is the battlefield. When your thoughts are under attack from the world, the flesh or the devil, turn gently to Jesus.

3. Set some goals and stick with them (Hebrews 12:1)

Prayerfully set goals and stick with them. God has an ongoing plan for our lives that He reveals step-by-step and moment-by-moment to incorporate us into the mystical body of Jesus. God speaks to us all the time -- through the covenant, the Bible, our pope, our bishops and priests, each other, through the circumstances and lived experiences of our lives, as well as interiorly through our thoughts, dreams and intuitions. We have to take time to listen to and discern His voice. Be

encouraged to keep a spiritual journal, writing down the thoughts that the Spirit inspires you to think. Try to, from time to time, write a schedule of your week, setting prime time for Jesus, for your spouse, for each child, and for the people closest to you. Many people use the breviary as a vehicle to sanctify the various times of the day. Try to get away to make a retreat from time to time. Then follow the plans and the goals that God sets for your life.

4. Fix your eyes on Jesus (Hebrews 12:2)

Stay focused on Jesus. Focus is important in sports and work and in life. A non-focused person is all over the place. Stay focused on Christ, on His gospel and upon His plan. It is good to make an examen of conscience each evening to see where you've lost focus.

5. Expect resistance (Hebrews 12:3,7,12)

A boat in motion has resistance. Likewise, a Christian swims upstream against the downward pull of the world, the flesh and the devil. The author of Hebrews says, consider Him, that is Jesus, who endured such opposition from sinful men so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (v.3). Endure hardship as discipline: God is treating you as sons, for what son is not disciplined by his father (v. 7). Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees (v.12).

6. Build relationships (Hebrews 12:14)

Christianity is a religion of covenanted relationships of family bonds. God is a family. So are we. We belong to each other. We need one another, we love one another, we forgive one another. We work together, we pray together, we laugh together, we play together. We worship together. We are to love one another, accept one another, encourage one another, forgive one another, honor one another, instruct one another, serve one another and submit to one another. We are in this world together, and we will not get out of it alone. What we do influences those around us for better or for worse, eternally.

7. Keep a long range perspective (Hebrews 12:16, 17)

Each one of us is a dream walking. We are meant to grow up into Christ, to be like Him in every area of our life. Therefore, we should pray that He constantly changes us to be our best self and the total fulfillment of the dream that He has for us. A Christian never retires. A Christian can never look forward to a plateau where he will no longer be striving nor working toward perfection. As the song says, "To dream impossible dreams, to fight unbeatable foes, to bear with unbearable sorrow, to run where the brave dare not go, to right the unrightable wrong, to love pure and chaste from afar, to strive while your arms are too weary, to reach the unreachable stars."

8. Be a people helper (Hebrews 13:1,3)

The author of Hebrews tells us to keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to entertain strangers for by doing so, some people have entertained angels. Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you, yourself, were suffering. We are the hands, the eyes, the feet, and the body of Christ. Christ is aiding and saving a broken world through us. *As the Father has sent me, Jesus says, so I send you.* Be a people person. Be a people helper.

9. Show hospitality (Hebrews 13:2)

Hospitality is an important virtue. As the Spanish say, "Mi casa, tu casa" (My house is your house). Since Jesus is Lord of all, whatever talents and possessions we have are meant to be shared with our brothers and sisters. St. Paul tells us, "Keep your lives free from the love of money" (v. 5). And be like Jesus, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever (v.8).

10. Be a marriage builder (Hebrews 13:4)

Marriage should be honored by all and the marriage bed be kept pure (v.4). To think that God would allow, *nee* rather create it so, that a husband and wife in loving each other with a love so intense and

holy, that they could beget children is the nearest human representation of the Father loving the Son with a love so intense and personal that it spirates the Holy Spirit. How holy is the sacrament of marriage as God intends it to be. I've written an article on *Superabundant Family Love*. There, I list ten ideals of a father, ten ideals of a mother, and ten ideals of children. Marriage was created by God; and to make us sexual beings, this is divine plan.

11. Be content with what you have (Hebrews 13:5)

Jealousy and envy have no place in the heart of a Christian who loves everyone as his brother or sister. If a brother gets ahead, you get ahead. If a brother falls behind, you fall behind. We are linked together. No man is an island, no man stands alone. Each man's joy brings joy to me, each man's peace is my own. Be grateful and thankful for the many blessings and talents and graces that God has given to you. Realize that He has made you the best you that there is, a unique, incomparable, masterpiece of grace. Be content with who you are and what you have.

12. Learn from those who are leaders (Hebrews 13:1, 17)

God has established three structures to oversee His people: the Church, the family and the state. Those who have a leadership authority in each of these much serve the needs of all. They must not rule over them but humbly serve them. All Christian leadership and headship is servant leadership. St. Paul tells us, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you" (v.17). Pray for those who are in leadership. Pray for the pope, the bishop, the pastor, the governor, the president, the policeman, your parents and godparents. God has placed them over you. Pray that they will be humble servant leaders.

13. Select your teachers carefully (Hebrews 13:9)

Not every leader teaches the truth in all its fullness. That's why we should be thankful for the Magisterium of the Church that faithfully transmit the gospel of Jesus to us. Let the new Catechism teach you. Let the Bible teach you. Let those priests who are faithful to the Magisterium teach you. Paul cautions us, "Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings" (v. 9). There is so much out there that is materialist, hedonistic, individualistic, and downright pagan. False teachers abound. Good teachers are few. Select your teachers carefully.

14. Commit to Prayer (Hebrews 13:18, 19)

Mother Teresa says, "It is not possible to engage in the direct apostolate without becoming a soul of prayer. We must be aware of oneness with Christ as He was aware of oneness with His Father. Our activity is truly Christian insofar as we permit Jesus to work in us and through us with His wisdom, His love, and His power. Therefore, love to pray. Feel often during the day the need for prayer. For prayer enlarges the heart until it is capable of containing God's gift of Himself. Once you have learned to seek God and His will, your contacts with others, especially the poor, will become means of great sanctity to yourself and to them."

Listen, discern and obey. This is such a simple yet powerful rule of life. God will guide you each step of the way if you are faithful to listening, discerning and obeying. So pray always. Ask God everything, take nothing for granted. God wants to be Lord of all. ASK stands for Ask, Seek and Knock. So Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and God will open the doors.

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