

It's a sair fecht

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 July 2005

Preacher: Sinclair Ferguson

[0 : 00] Well, as we turn to the second chapter of Hebrews, let me just take a moment, lest I rub it on at great length, to tell you how marvelous it is to be here again and to say to you how much you continue to mean to us.

They say that distance lends enchantment to the view, and I'm sure that's true, but absence certainly makes the heart grow fonder, and we have often at this time in the morning when we've wakened up at five o'clock in the morning, I've seen St. George's Tran come down around me, and often in church, for some strange reason, many of you seem to materialize around me as I'm worshipping with Americans who speak a very strange language.

So thank you for your ongoing love for Dorothy and for me and for your prayers. You know I very much hope how mutual that is, and I would have been happier to have sat in the pew, but not for this one thing, that this is the only place in the church from which you can see everybody's face, and I'm tempted just to stand here and look at you, and I think there might be a sermon, a wordless sermon in that.

But if this sermon were to have a title, I think it would be, It's a Seer Fecht, which those of you who are not either native Scots or adopted Scots need to know means it's a sore fight, it's a struggle. And we often say that about life when it gets difficult for us, and it's certainly true also of the Christian life. I've just come from the Keswick Convention, as you know, marvelous to see so many St. George's Tran people there. But coming home, I was reminded of a story that's in the biography of the great Alexander White, minister of Free St. George's Church in Edinburgh many years ago, that just on yesterday, the anniversary yesterday, a younger man in his congregation came hot foot from Keswick, having experienced the blessing in large measure. And he went immediately to see Dr. White as soon as he got home, and poor

Alexander White was in the middle of his sermon preparation, but graciously invited the young man in. And the young man told him how his life had been radically transformed, how great the worship had been, how marvelous and clear the preaching had been. And Alexander White is sinking underneath his desk, thinking about tomorrow, and learning that Keswick was so much better than Free St. George's, and said absolutely nothing. And then when the young man had finished telling him what a tremendous Christian he had just become in the previous week, Alexander White showed him to the door, and as he shook his hand, he said, aye, aye, he said, it's a sehr fecht. It's a sehr fecht. And the words are particularly appropriate, I've no doubt, for some of us Christians. Some of us perhaps know that Christian living is always a fight, it's a battle.

[3 : 34] Some of us don't always admit that. We know it's true, but we put up the shutters to one another. But the letter to the Hebrews is written to those who know, some whom admit and some don't, that the Christian life sometimes is a tremendous struggle. They had left much behind. They had left behind the old rituals of the ancient church. They had left behind their families, many of them.

They suffered deprivation, some of them persecution, some of them had even been in prison. They suffered social ostracization. And life as a Christian was, as so many people, I think more recently and more than ever have said to me, they found the Christian life so different from what they expected.

Indeed, life had become more full of challenges now that they had become Christians than it ever seemed to be beforehand. And so these Christians were tempted to draw back, to drift away, and to go back to the old days and the old times. In fact, they lived something like this. One day they wished that the old days would come back when life was easier, and other days they wished that the future was now when life would be better. Either back when being a Christian was easier, or forwards, when all the difficulties would be taken out of the way. And one of the things that the author of the Hebrews is emphasizing to them is that in either hankering back to the past, or wishing that the future would come more quickly than God intends, they've lost sight of what will transform their lives in the present.

Namely, what is already theirs. Or more accurately, who is already theirs. And that's why this letter to the Hebrews that I suppose some of us find at times a little difficult to follow through what it says about the Old Testament. But at the end of the day, it's really one marvelous multicolored picture book about the Lord Jesus Christ, and all that he is to us, and all that he wants to do for us.

We already have Christ, he says. So let's not diminish ourselves by going back to angels. Let's not diminish ourselves by wishing that we were living in some other place or some other age. We have the great Savior, and we have him now. And yes, of course it's true. And this is why he quotes from the 8th Psalm in Hebrews chapter 2. Of course it's true that we don't yet see everything under his feet.

[6 : 52] And that's why he comes in chapter 3 verse 1 to say to us, So fix your eyes on Jesus. Fix your gaze on Jesus. Consider Jesus, as he says at the beginning of chapter 12, in the midst of all the struggles, fix your eyes on Jesus. And don't be diverted to anything else. And see everything else in the light of what is already yours. Because Jesus is already yours. And I want you to know that as he works through this, he wants to say to us at least four wonderful things about the Lord Jesus.

Jesus. The first is this, and you see it in verse 9. It is that Jesus is our King, and he has conquered for us.

Jesus is our King, and he has conquered for us. We see Jesus, who himself was made a little lower than the angels, but now he is crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God, he might taste death for everyone. And he works very slowly through this idea that Jesus has conquered Jesus is King. Right through to verses 14 and 15, when he says that by his death, middle of verse 14, Jesus destroyed or rendered powerless, in our case, him who holds the power of death, and freed those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. Jesus has conquered conquered. He has conquered death by drawing the sting out of it. But he has not only conquered death by drawing the sting out of it. He has rendered powerless to keep us in bondage. The devil, he says, the one who holds the power of death and keeps us in lifelong fear. What does he mean? He means that the devil uses the threat of death to keep us in bondage to a multitude of lesser fears. And that's such a truth, isn't it?

We have so many fears. Some of us are just a bundle of fears. We fear for our health. We fear for our family. We fear about our spiritual condition. We are fearful about our health. We are fearful about our finances. We are fearful about our occupation. And we are a bag of fears.

And the author has seen a great fear that lies behind all of these other fears. He says, at the end of the day, all of those other fears are really just miniature fears. They are small warts, as it were. But there is a mother wart that has given birth to all of these fears. And it is the ultimate fear of death, which we try not to think about, which we suppress to the back of our minds. And he says, don't you see that because Jesus has died for our sins, and therefore taken away the guilt, and therefore the dread that brings the awful fear of death, he has by doing that set us free from the grip that Satan has upon us to produce in us all manner of lesser fears. And he says, if we will only see how Jesus has conquered, how he's borne the guilt of our sin in his death, and broken the power of death in his resurrection.

[11 : 27] And as we see all these other things that make us fearful, and I'm sure they were fearful. They had lost so much, and some of them were losing more. Oh, he says, don't fix your gaze on the things that you're losing that might make you fearful, but fix your gaze upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you will discover, trusting in him, that deliverance from the great mother of all fears will deliver you from all that mother's children.

I will never forget some of you, perhaps a good number of you, were there at the funeral years ago now of Professor Patrick Smith's daughter. I will never in all my life forget Patrick saying to me as we shook hands, and his whole being seemed to be surrounded with a heavenly dignity that was awesome to see. And I remember the smile of grace that was on his face as he shook my hand and said to me, we know now that there is nothing left to fear. Because Jesus is King, and Jesus has conquered.

But then you notice, the author says, our Jesus is not just a King of sheer power. Verses 10 and 11.

The King who conquers for us is also the brother who cares for us. The reason he died, he says, is in order to bring, verse 10, to bring many sons to glory. And so because he was going to bring many sons to glory, he says it was fitting that if Jesus was going to bring many sons, that's us, sons and daughters of God, if he's going to bring us to glory, then it's fitting that he himself should become our brother should become one with us. That's what he means by these words here. When he says that it was important that Jesus should be of the same flesh and blood of all those he was going to make holy. Now, in Hebrews, that just means really bring into the presence of God.

[14 : 11] So in order to bring us into the presence of God, as the children of God, which we aren't by nature, the Son of God took our flesh and he became our brother to take our hand and to bring us into the presence of the presence of God. He is the Son of glory and he came and became the Son in flesh in order to make us children who would see and share in the glory and be brought, as he says in verse 10, to glory.

And I think that's why he uses the very striking word here in verse 10, Jesus was the author of their salvation. It means he was the starter. He was the first one. And that's a very interesting way of putting it when he's speaking about Jesus becoming our brother, our elder brother. Those of you of families of a number of children probably experienced what we experienced as the younger children came along. Whatever was happening, they kept looking at the oldest boy out of the corner of their eye to see what the score was, to see how you did it, to see what the, you know, the line was that you should never walk past. And he's saying that's how it is in Jesus. Jesus has become our elder brother and he's gone through death and he's gone through death and he's now in the glory, but he's still marvelously our brother. And so he uses family language. We are sons, verse 10. We are brothers, verse 11. And again in verse 17, we are his brothers and he's our brother. Now why is this so important? Why is it so important that Jesus our King should be Jesus our brother?

brother. Because the author wants to emphasize that he's not a savior at a distance, but he's one who has come near. He's one who understands. He's one who cares about us. He's a brother who has suffered and he knows what it's like. And so he says, do you notice at the end of verse 11, these amazing words, so Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. Isn't that marvelous? I mean, it's marvelous that you are not ashamed to call him savior, but that he should not be ashamed to call you brother, sister. Sometimes, sadly, we are ashamed of one another. And we distance ourselves from one another, even fellow believer from fellow believer. I think I'll regret to my dying day something that happened when I was, I suppose I was nine years old and I was playing football later than I should have been playing. And my older brother was sent to fetch me. And all my pals kind of sided against my older brother and urged me to stay and play with them. And I'm ashamed to say I stayed. And I watched my own brother turn around and go home, tell my parents, I won't tell you the rest of the story, tell my parents.

Sinclair won't come home. My dear friend, it does not matter who you are as a Christian believer, how low you have sunk, how lonely you feel. Jesus will never do that. He will never ever side with others against you. He will never think of it. You've sunk low. You don't feel you're very much. You're lonely and you're afraid.

And you know you've failed as a Christian believer. And perhaps you even feel that your fellow Christians would be ashamed of you if they knew the truth about you. My dear friend, if you really belong to Jesus Christ, he will never ever, ever be ashamed of you.

[18 : 56] And so our Lord Jesus is the king who conquers for us and he's the brother who cares about us. But he's not only that. There's a third thing here in verses 12 and 13.

And this is so interesting, although at first sight it seems a little strange. He says, verse 11, Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. And then he quotes from the 22nd Psalm, which of course is the Psalm that begins, my God, why have you forsaken me?

But while it begins with those famous words that we associate with the humiliation of Christ, it goes on to speak about the triumph and the resurrection of Christ. And it's from that part of the Psalm that these words come. He says, I will declare your name to my brothers in the presence of the congregation. I will sing your praises. Now here is the third thing. And it's a little surprising.

Jesus who is the king who has conquered for us and the brother who cares about us. Let me put it this way. He is the minister who leads us. Now you wouldn't misunderstand me as to say that I don't believe in ministers.

But you see what he's saying? He is saying that those who are bishops, which every Presbyterian minister is supposed to be in every Presbyterian elder, a bishop, we are just under bishops. He is the archbishop, the great bishop. We are under shepherds. He is the great shepherd of the sheep.

[20 : 45] And so he's saying to these Christians, he's saying, whatever you get through your ministers, look to the great minister, the chief minister. How do I say that actually? In Hebrews chapter 8, verse 2, Jesus is actually called the minister. And he's the one who leads the people of God in their worship and teaches the people of God from God's word. And isn't it interesting? That's exactly the point that's made in this quotation. Let's take the second half of it. First of all, in the presence of the congregation, I will sing your praises. What's the picture? It's the picture, notice verse 13, of the Lord Jesus coming and taking us by the hand, bringing us into the presence of God and saying, here am I, Father, and the children you have given me, and we are here to sing your praises.

I will sing your praises in the midst of the congregation. And so we're not looking only to those who assist us in music or those who write the words of the songs that we sing, but as we worship together, the Lord Jesus is here and he's leading us in praise. I mentioned this at a conference a couple of years ago in the United States where there happened to be a man singing during this conference who had won several Emmy awards. And he was a man with the chest of four barrels and a voice of amazing proportions. You know what he did the next time we were singing in the congregation? He sidled up behind me with his hymn book and then came and he and I sang together.

It was a fantastic duet, I can tell you. Because his voice carried mine. Now that's what it means to praise him. He is our worship leader. And do you know, can I say to those of you who are older and who treasured your resources so that you can be here on a Sunday morning and it's just about all you can do?

Isn't this glorious to think that you're coming with the Lord Jesus to praise and worship him? And he's leading you and he's encouraging you and he's saying to you, come on, sing with me the praises of your God and Father. And yes, as Hebrews quoting Psalm 22, Jesus is also in the final analysis, the preacher of the word. I will declare your name to my brothers in the presence of the congregation.

I will sing your praises. You know, to me, that is one of the, that's one of the great things about listening to the exposition of the word, reading the scriptures, meditating on the scriptures, to hear the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ who knows his sheep by name.

[24 : 19] And there are times when we think nobody knows, nobody understands. People do show me care and love, but nobody really understands. And then as the word is ministered, it seems to find a way deep down into the deep recesses of your life. And you hear the voice of the shepherd and you recognize his voice and human voices seem to drift into the background and he's speaking to you. And you say, Lord, you do understand. You do know me. You do care for me. And you do lead me in worship. You are my shepherd and you know your sheep. And you're a man in Unst when we were there who was the most silent man I have ever met in my life. Probably the most silent speaking man in the entire universe.

And he was a shepherd. Sometimes when I was driving to see him, he lived halfway up a hill. I would see him out with the sheep and he was in his element there and I would see him working the sheep. And I, I knew that although he was a totally silent man to me, that he was able to communicate to his sheep in just an absolutely amazing way. Sometimes Jesus, the shepherd, can seem very silent.

But he knows his sheep. And he will speak. So Jesus, he says, is our king who has conquered for us.

Jesus is our brother who cares for us. Jesus is our minister who leads us into the very presence of God. And there's the great breakthrough.

And then in verses 17 to 20, finally, Jesus is the high priest. And actually what he's focusing attention on here leads me to say, Jesus is the tempted one who is able to help us when we are tempted.

[26 : 32] Verse 17, he helps us in our guilt because he has died on the cross for our sins. But more than that, says the author in verse 18, he is able to help those who are being tempted because he himself suffered when he was tempted. Now I know some of you like me have puzzled over this perhaps all your Christian life.

But how can Jesus, who was sinless, ever have been really tempted so that he can really help me, really understand me when I am tempted? You know, I think ultimately the answer to that question is something like this. That what his heavenly father was asking Jesus to do all his life long, all his life long was a preparation for that moment when on the cross he would experience God forsakenness.

And there was nothing in Jesus' holy heart that could ever, ever, ever want that. Nothing.

He could never want that. It was against every holy instinct in his being ever to want to be separated from the presence of God.

And that's why the insistent whisper throughout the whole of Jesus' ministry is, find some other way. Find some way that actually fits in with your own holy will, never to want to be in a moment sensing you're forsaken by God.

[28 : 23] And in the garden of Eden, overwhelmed by that temptation. And in those last hours, he says, Father, is there no other way than if there is no other way, although I shrink at the thought of being forsaken by your beautiful, lovely, encouraging, glorious presence, Father, not my will.

But your will be done. Now, every time you and I are tempted, we are tempted to do something part of it actually wants to do.

But you see, he is tempted to do something that he does not ever rightly want to do, and yet has been called to do.

Beloved ones, he has gone down so deeply into the sheer overwhelming pressure of temptation, that wherever you go down into temptation, he has always gone down deeper.

And that's why he's able to get underneath you and to help you when you are tempted. So that when you are at breaking point with temptation, you know he has gone down further into darker and harsher points where one might break.

[29 : 55] And he's able to help you. You know, in many ways, I sometimes think the whole of the Christian life boils down to this one thing. What do I really think Jesus is like?

Who is he to me? Yes, at times, and for you perhaps, in a special way, it's a sehr fest.

But where are you looking? Do you know who Jesus is? The king who conquered for us? The brother who cares for us? The minister who shepherds us and speaks to us?

The tempted one who helps us? Then he says, come on now, brothers and sisters. Fix your gaze upon him.

See who you already have. And live in his light and power.

[31 : 06] May he help us to do that. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word and for your grace and for your presence and for our marvelous Lord Jesus Christ and for whatever he has preached into our hearts this morning.

And so, as we sing your praises, we come with him who leads us and we triumph in his grace and praise you for his glorious presence.

We ask for your blessing. In Jesus' name. Amen.