

HERE AND NOW, THERE AND THEN
HEBREWS 12



T. M. Moore

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Here and Now, There and Then Hebrews 12
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Hebrews 12: Introduction

We must not let affliction sidetrack or derail us. We have a race to run, and those who have faith like the saints of old will endure and persevere in faith, fixing their eyes on Jesus and living their here and now struggles in the there and then of the City to Come.

The writer of Hebrews wants his readers to remember what they have inherited and where they have come. Grace is available for the asking to enable them to stay the course, and if they desire the City to Come like the saints of Hebrews 11, they will press on through every trial, drawing on the grace of God for every next step.

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1 Look Up, Press On!

Introduction

The writer brings his letter of exhortation toward its conclusion. He urges his readers, in the light of all he has presented for their consideration, to focus on Jesus, the Lord's true rest, and to follow His example in pressing on in "the race that is set before us." By looking to Jesus, we can find strength to stay the course, like our faithful forebears, until we all come to the promised Kingdom and City.

Read Psalm 47.

Read Hebrews 12.1, 2.

Think it through.

1. In what sense are we "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses"? Where is heaven? What are the saints in heaven doing there (cf. Rev. 5.8-14)? Remembering their presence all around us should encourage and help us in our walk with and work for the Lord. In what ways? How is sin a "weight" and a "snare" in our journey toward the City to Come? What's involved in running "with endurance the race that is set before us?" What does this require of us day by day?

2. We can gain strength to persevere by "looking unto Jesus" as we run our race. Why should we do this? How? How should Christians help one another in this? What made Jesus able to bear up under His suffering? How did God reward His endurance? We should expect suffering to be involved in following Jesus. How does Jesus' example teach us to "run with endurance" when trials or troubles beset us?

Meditate.

"The models of godliness are set before us on all sides, he is saying, in such vast numbers as to resemble a cloud in density and testify to the power of faith. Accordingly, let us keep our eyes on them, be light on our feet and rid ourselves of the burden of unnecessary worries, in this way being able also to avoid sin that is easy to contract. Before everything else we need perseverance to succeed in the course ahead of us." *Theodoret of Cyr (393-466 AD)*

Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1.8, 9

Strengthen in me assurance of faith, O Lord, that I may live boldly for...

Pray Psalm 47.

This psalm celebrates the exaltation of Christ and what it means for the world. Ask God to bring the reign of King Jesus more fully to expression in your life today.

Psalm 47.1-9 (*Truro: Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*)

O clap your hands, you peoples all,
With joy to God your songs intone!
Shout out to Him, and on Him call,
He is the mighty, sovereign One!

High is the Lord, O, fear His Name!
He rules, a King o'er all the earth.
Nations and peoples He has tamed,

The heritage of His holy worth.

God has ascended with a shout,
The Lord with sound of trumpet bold!
Sing praise to Him, let praise ring out!
Let praise through all the world be told!

God is the King of all the earth,
Sing praise to Him with glorious psalms!
He rules the nations by His worth,
And on His throne receives their alms.

Princes of peoples gather all
To Abraham and to our God.
Exalt the Lord, and on Him call –
The earth is His, so praise our God!

2 Striving against Sin

Introduction

The Christian life is a struggle against sin – the sin in the world, that seeks to distract, disturb, and disquiet us, and the sin in our own souls, the leads us to draw back and drift from the Lord. We must look to Jesus and the saints who have gone before, if we are to find that strength to endure, resist, and strive against sin, as the Lord exhorts us in His Word.

Read Proverbs 3.1-12.

Read Hebrews 12.3-6.

Think it through.

1. Jesus' example of bearing up under suffering must encourage us as much as our vision of Him exalted in glory (v. 1). Meditate on Psalm 88 and Psalm 22.1-21. How would you explain the suffering of Christ? Of what did that suffering consist? How can it help us to "consider Him" in this way?

2. How can you know when you're beginning to "become weary and discouraged" in your soul? What should you do then? Define each of the following verbs:

- endure:

- resist:

- strive against sin:

Using these verbs, complete this sentence, "God uses chastening of various kinds to keep us on the path of obedience, so for my part I..."

Meditate.

"Let us look not toward human beings for the perfection of our faith. In fact, among them one is good for something, but the other is not. Rather let us look into 'Jesus Christ, the pioneer of faith,' who was made our leader and 'the perfecter' of our faith, because he began from the Jordan the fight against the enemy, then continued it in the desert, and finished it in Jerusalem through the cross, which was erected by the persecutors on Golgotha." *Ephrem the Syrian (306-373 AD)*

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. James 4.7, 8

Give me strength for this day, Lord that I might endure hardships, resist the devil, and strive against sin, and in all things...

Pray Psalm 47.

Pay special attention to verses 1-4 as you pray this psalm. What obstacles, challenges, enemies, or trials do you expect to encounter today? Name them before the Lord, and call on Him to give you strength to endure through them all.

Psalm 47.1-9 (*Truro: Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*)

O clap your hands, you peoples all,
With joy to God your songs intone!
Shout out to Him, and on Him call,

He is the mighty, sovereign One!

High is the Lord, O, fear His Name!
He rules, a King o'er all the earth.
Nations and peoples He has tamed,
The heritage of His holy worth.

God has ascended with a shout,
The Lord with sound of trumpet bold!
Sing praise to Him, let praise ring out!
Let praise through all the world be told!

God is the King of all the earth,
Sing praise to Him with glorious psalms!
He rules the nations by His worth,
And on His throne receives their alms.

Princes of peoples gather all
To Abraham and to our God.
Exalt the Lord, and on Him call –
The earth is His, so praise our God!

3 The Chastening of the Lord

Introduction

In the Christian life, we distinguish between *active* disciplines and *passive* disciplines. *Active* disciplines are those exercises, practices, and routines we take up and which fill the time of our lives to prepare and ready us for Kingdom living. *Passive* disciplines are those God brings to bear against us as our loving Father, because we in some way have drifted from His path and need some “encouragement” to return.

Read Psalm 94.12-15.

Read Hebrews 12.6-11.

Think it through.

1. Why should our loving heavenly Father ever need to *chasten* us? How can we know when we have come under the chastening of the Lord? Was the writer of Hebrews being used of God to chasten his first readers? Explain. How does chastening make us feel? What is the goal of chastening (v. 9)? How should true believers respond to the Lord’s chastening (v. 7)?

2. God’s intention in chastening us is not so much to *punish* as to *transform*. God wants us to “be partakers” (Greek: μεταλαβεῖν, “have a share in”) His holiness. What does this suggest about holiness as a priority for Christian life (cf. 2 Cor. 7.1)? What is holiness (Rom. 7.12)? Growing in holiness doesn’t come easy, and when God intervenes – because we are drifting – chastening can be downright unpleasant (v. 11). What does it take to *endure* (v. 7) chastening and thus to *respect* (v. 9) God and His will? If you are able to endure, what should you expect as the outcome (v. 11)? How does chastening – and how do *all* disciplines – *train* (Greek: γυμνασμένοις, “strengthen by exercise”) us (v. 11)?

Meditate.

“For this is genuine love, and love in reality, when we are beloved though we be of no use to the one who loves us—not so that one may receive but so that one may impart. God chastens, God does everything, God uses all diligence, that we may become capable of receiving God’s benefits.” *John Chrysostom (344-407 AD)*

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. 2 Corinthians 7.1

Let me not despise discipline, Father; but when it comes, when my drifting brings Your loving correction, help me to...

Pray Psalm 47.8, 9.

As you pray, pause to meditate on all the ways God rules your life. Consider His blessings, His counsel and guidance, and His chastening, and give Him thanks and praise.

Psalm 47.7-9 (*Truro: Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*)

God is the King of all the earth,
Sing praise to Him with glorious psalms!
He rules the nations by His worth,
And on His throne receives their alms.

Princes of peoples gather all
To Abraham and to our God.

Exalt the Lord, and on Him call –
The earth is His, so praise our God!

4 Repent Now

Introduction

God gives us abundant opportunities to repent of our sins and resume our journey to the City to Come on the true path of righteousness. We must repent of our sins as often as we become aware of them. Put another way, where repentance is concerned, there's no time like the present. And if the present opportunity for repentance is not seized, we must be careful, lest it slip away.

Read and meditate on Psalms 139.23,24; 43.1-7; 119.59, 60.

Read Hebrews 12.12-17.

Think it through.

1. Repentance is a coin with two sides. The one side (vv. 12, 13) is the side of *turning away* from the sin that weighs us down, causes us to stumble in our path, and renders our souls and bodies "dislocated" from the Lord and His purposes. This aspect of repentance begins with confession, agreeing with God that we have drifted and drawn back from Him. What was the writer of Hebrews trying to get these first readers to confess? In verses 12 and 13, which verbs describe the work of repentance? How should you apply these verbs in your own work of repentance from sin? Hand, knees, paths: The writer uses these to outline the walk of faith. Explain. How does sin affect these? Repentance brings a form of healing to our walk of faith (v. 13). In what ways?

2. The second side of the coin of repentance involves *turning back* to the Lord and His ways. Which verbs in verses 14 and 15 indicate this aspect of repentance? What does this entail? Staying on the Lord's path to the City to Come requires constant vigilance against any inroads of sin or any tendency to drift. How does the writer express this in verses 15 and 16? Finally, verses 16 and 17 seem to suggest that we are our brothers' keeper, and that we need to be ready to teach, correct, and admonish one another as needed. How can you see this? What will this require of you? What warning does the writer insinuate at the end of verse 17? Should we take this seriously? Explain.

Meditate.

“‘Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees,’ that is, ‘make straight paths for your feet’ throughout the afflictions caused by your persecutors, so that they may not slip. [Do this] ‘so that what is lame,’ that is, those who transgressed through the denial of faith, ‘may not be put out of joint’ and increase the power of sin ‘but rather be healed,’ so that, through his healing, sin may be affected by sickness.” *Ephrem the Syrian (306-373AD)*

But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.
Ephesians 4.20-24

Help me to practice repentance every day, O Lord, because every day I...

Pray Psalm 47.1-7.

Let your mind, guided and guarded by the Spirit, allow you to envision God in His exalted greatness, majesty, and glory. As you gaze at Him, let the Spirit bring to light any sins you need to confess. Confess them readily, repent, and work at turning away from them throughout the day.

Psalm 47.1-6 (*Truro: Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*)

O clap your hands, you peoples all,
With joy to God your songs intone!
Shout out to Him, and on Him call,
He is the mighty, sovereign One!

High is the Lord, O, fear His Name!
He rules, a King o'er all the earth.
Nations and peoples He has tamed,
The heritage of His holy worth.

God has ascended with a shout,
The Lord with sound of trumpet bold!
Sing praise to Him, let praise ring out!
Let praise through all the world be told!

5 Remember Where You've Come

Introduction

The first readers of the book of Hebrews were, under the pressure of persecution, drifting back to Mt. Sinai and a Law that could not save. But if they were truly saved, this is not where the Lord had brought them. They needed to get the eyes of their understanding rightly focused if they were going to run their race with endurance.

Read Psalm 48.

Read Hebrews 12.18-24.

Think it through.

1. The underlying affection arising from verses 18-21 is that of fear. How can you see that? What were those Israelites afraid of, and why? Fear was causing the first readers of the book of Hebrews to draw back from Jesus and drift from their great salvation. Why did the writer remind them of Israel's experience at Mt. Sinai? Is it ever helpful to our walk with the Lord to look back to our life as it was before we came to know Him? Can it also be unhealthy to do so? Explain.

2. Those first readers had not come to a place of fear and drawing back. They had arrived at some place altogether glorious, awesome, unshakable, safe, strong, and holy. So have we. What is that place, and how much does it encompass? How does the psalmist describe the Church ("Mt. Zion") in Psalm 48? This is where we have come, says the writer (v. 23). But coming to the Church is not an end in itself; it is – or should be – the means for coming increasingly to God Himself and to Jesus "the Mediator of the new covenant." How should a church do that? The end of verse 24 creates an *inclusio* with Hebrews 11.4. That is, these two verses are "bookends" for everything in between, tying this entire section of Hebrews into a single message. How would you summarize that message? How should Christians use this message to encourage one another?

Meditate.

"There you find dread, he is saying, here on the contrary festival and assembly. The former happens on earth, the latter in heaven; there thousands of people, here tens of thousands of angels. There unbelievers and lawbreakers, here church of the firstborn enrolled in heaven and spirits of the just who have been made perfect; there an old covenant, here a new one; there a slave as mediator, here a Son; there blood of brute beasts, here blood of a rational lamb. The phrase 'speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel' means communicating through deeds and betraying its own activity: while the blood of Abel is celebrated, this blood is responsible for the salvation of human beings." *Theodoreet of Cyr (393-466 AD)*

Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. Ephesians 1.15-21

Lord, open the eyes of my understanding to see the greatness of Jesus and the salvation He has secured for me, and I will...

Pray Psalm 47.

Tell back to the Lord the things you see as you meditate on Him there, exalted in His holy throne room,

gathering His people to Himself, and subduing all the nations. Praise and thank Him accordingly.

Psalm 47.1-9 (*Truro: Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*)

O clap your hands, you peoples all,
With joy to God your songs intone!
Shout out to Him, and on Him call,
He is the mighty, sovereign One!

High is the Lord, O, fear His Name!
He rules, a King o'er all the earth.
Nations and peoples He has tamed,
The heritage of His holy worth.

God has ascended with a shout,
The Lord with sound of trumpet bold!
Sing praise to Him, let praise ring out!
Let praise through all the world be told!

God is the King of all the earth,
Sing praise to Him with glorious psalms!
He rules the nations by His worth,
And on His throne receives their alms.

Princes of peoples gather all
To Abraham and to our God.
Exalt the Lord, and on Him call –
The earth is His, so praise our God!

6 Unshakeable

Introduction

This section begins with the sternest warning in the entire book and ends with sweet exhortation and encouragement – albeit with a note of fear. It takes such counsel to communicate the importance of bearing up under our trials, keeping focused on Jesus, and pressing on in our heavenly calling (Heb. 3.1). God has called us to an unshakeable Kingdom for unfading glory (1 Thess. 2.12). We need to make sure we have a firm grasp of these.

Meditate on Haggai 2.1-9.

Read Hebrews 12.25-29.

Think it through.

1. To draw back from Jesus in an effort to minimize persecution is to “refuse Him who speaks.” Jesus speaks to us words of salvation, hope, faith, and rest. If we cave in and clam up when others speak taunting or threatening words, we are choosing to be ruled by their words rather than by the promises of Jesus. Is this a serious matter? Explain. How does the writer use the word *escape* in verse 25? Escape what? Would it be better to endure the persecution of people than the chastening of the Lord? Explain.

2. The writer cites Haggai 2.1-9, which was given to encourage the people of Israel at a time of great discouragement. What Haggai promised (Heb. 12.26), we are now *receiving* (v. 28). The writer avoids the verb *have received* and chooses the participle *are receiving* (παρολαμβάνοντες) to describe our relationship to the Kingdom. What’s the difference? Can the Kingdom of God be shaken by the taunts, threats, or attacks of men? Why not? The writer urges his readers on to serve God “with reverence and godly fear.” Why do we need *grace* for this? What is grace, and how does it operate to give us endurance? How can we secure such grace (Heb. 4.16)? Why is it always a good idea to remember that “our God *is* a consuming fire”?

Meditate.

“‘The one who warned them on earth’ can be understood to mean the one promising them earthly things that will pass away: the land flowing with milk and honey, the conquest of enemies, goodly offspring and long life. But from heaven speaks the one who promises heaven itself as an inheritance, who graciously bestows the enjoyment of that unspeakable and eternal glory.” *Photius (820-891 AD)*

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. 1 Corinthians 9.24, 25

Let Your Spirit and Word be a firm foundation for my life, O Lord, that I may seek and advance Your unshakeable Kingdom in...

Pray Psalm 47.

God is the King of all the earth. How should that sovereign and glorious rule be expressed in your life today? Meditate as you pray, and make whatever specific commitments the Spirit suggests.

Psalm 47.1-9 (*Truro: Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*)

O clap your hands, you peoples all,
With joy to God your songs intone!
Shout out to Him, and on Him call,

He is the mighty, sovereign One!

High is the Lord, O, fear His Name!
He rules, a King o'er all the earth.
Nations and peoples He has tamed,
The heritage of His holy worth.

God has ascended with a shout,
The Lord with sound of trumpet bold!
Sing praise to Him, let praise ring out!
Let praise through all the world be told!

God is the King of all the earth,
Sing praise to Him with glorious psalms!
He rules the nations by His worth,
And on His throne receives their alms.

Princes of peoples gather all
To Abraham and to our God.
Exalt the Lord, and on Him call –
The earth is His, so praise our God!

7 The Race before Us

Introduction

The Christian life is an adventure of living here and now in the there and then of the City to Come. Jesus is already there, ruling at the Father's right hand and preparing a place for us. He is surrounded by saints and angels who bear witness to and support us as we run our race with endurance. In a very real sense, we have already come to this New City, of which we are full-blown citizens and ambassadors. The joy and power available to us from this heavenly calling can help and sustain us in the hard places and tight squeezes of here and now. So let us have grace – all the grace we need for every day of our race – and let us serve God “with reverence and godly fear.”

Read and meditate on Psalm 47.

Read Hebrews 12.

Think it through.

1. What do we mean by saying that the Christian life is both “here and now” and “there and then”? How do you experience this? Hebrews 12 begins and ends with a vision of our “heavenly calling” (Heb. 3.1): Jesus exalted at the beginning, the unshakeable Kingdom and Church of heaven at the end. How can keeping this vision before us help us to endure the trials of our here-and-now existence? How can Christians help one another in keeping this vision before us?
2. What would the writer of Hebrews say are the keys to enduring through trials? What should we keep in mind? What should we do? How should we respond when difficulties or obstacles appear in our path? What is our responsibility to one another in the Body of Christ? How will we be able to know when we are coming under the chastening of our heavenly Father? What should we do then? How would you explain the lesson of Hebrews 12 to someone who has just become a Christian?

Meditate.

“As God, then, is a ‘fire’ and the angels are ‘flames of fire’ and all the saints are ‘fervent in spirit,’ so, on the contrary, those who have fallen away from the love of God are undoubtedly said to have cooled in their affection for God and to have become cold.” *Origen of Alexandria (185-254 AD)*

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Romans 12.1, 2

Lord, consume my life like a living sacrifice, and let the fire of Your grace and truth...

Pray Psalm 47.

Commit yourself afresh to the Kingship of Jesus over every area of your life, and dedicate the day ahead to seeking and advancing His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Psalm 47.1-9 (*Truro: Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*)

O clap your hands, you peoples all,
With joy to God your songs intone!
Shout out to Him, and on Him call,
He is the mighty, sovereign One!

High is the Lord, O, fear His Name!

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Why does God sometimes chasten His children? What forms can that chastening take?
2. What do we mean by saying that the Christian life involves living our here and now in the there and then? How does that work in your life?
3. How full and clear is your vision of Jesus exalted in glory in the heavenly Jerusalem and City to Come? What role does that vision play in your walk with and work for the Lord?
4. How is God “a consuming fire”? Why is it important to keep this in mind?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.