

JESUS, OUR FAITHFUL APOSTLE AND HIGH PRIEST

Hebrews 3:1 - 4:16 (3:1)

"Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest."

Dear heavenly father. Thank you for today's lecture and for showing us who you are. You are our true apostle and high priest. You obeyed the father to the point of death to save us from our sins. We want to humble ourselves before you and make every effort to find true rest in you. Thank for your for the Next Generation and their pure love for you. May they receive one word of God. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

In the first lecture by M. Joseph Lee we have learned that Jesus is the complete and final word, who is superior to the angels. Thank and praise Jesus, through whom we may inherit salvation by obeying his word. Let us pay most careful attention to the word of the Lord and take hold of this great salvation through writing deep, personal and repentant testimonies.

In today's message, the author warns us not to be betrayed by the deceitfulness of sin but to enter true rest by fixing our thoughts on Jesus alone. Many of the Jewish Christians let themselves be betrayed by sin's deceitfulness and became restless and insecure about their future. Thus, they fell back to their old lives and habits. Even in our times, young people are seduced by teachings of humanism or liberal theology, to find rest not by following Jesus but through material wealth and the illusion of freedom and autonomy. However, under no circumstances will they find true rest going after these things. On the contrary, throughout history we see, that those who fixed their thoughts on Jesus by faith received true rest in Him. Not only did they receive true rest, God used them as history makers. God may help us today, to fix our thoughts and our hearts on Jesus alone, who is the true Apostle and High Priest, and to serve His salvation work faithfully, so that we also may be used as history makers!

I. Fix your thoughts on Jesus, our apostle and high priest (Chapter 3:1-19)

When we look at the context, as we have already heard, the book of Hebrews was written especially for the Jewish Christians who wanted to return to their old lives, doubting whether Jesus was really the Son of God. Thus, the author begins this passage by establishing Jesus as the apostle and high priest, who is superior not only to the angels but also to Moses. Let's read verse 1, the key verse, together: "Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest." The author addresses his readers as the "holy brothers and sisters" who share "in the heavenly calling." The holy brothers and sisters, were the Jewish Christians, who became Christians by repenting and believing in the gospel of Jesus. They were holy, not by blood, i.e. because they were born as Israelites, but because God had called them as a "kingdom of priests" and "a holy nation" (Ex 19:5-6). **We** are also "holy brothers and sisters", for God has called us as his "chosen people", "a royal priesthood" and "a holy a nation" (1 Peter 2:9). It is the privilege of his calling that makes us holy, not anything else. The author encouraged the "holy brothers and sisters" who willingly lived according to His heavenly calling, to

fix their thoughts on Jesus. In the German bible it says fix your eyes on Jesus (like in chapter 12:2). What does it mean to fix your thoughts on Jesus?

To fix our thoughts on Jesus here means, to acknowledge Jesus as our apostle and high priest. Many Jewish Christians did not have clear insight about who Jesus really was. They either saw Jesus as a prophet or some kind of political rebel. As a consequence, they did not know how they could live as newborn christians, especially in times of difficulties and persecution through the world and even their own families. Likewise, nowadays, many young christians in the age group of our Next Generation see Jesus as a teacher with profound teachings, a revolutionary or even a miracle worker. But they don't know, how to overcome lustfulness and the influence of humanism or live according to God's heavenly calling.

Verse 1 clearly states, who Jesus is. He is our apostle and high priest. The word "apostle" is derived from the Greek word "apostolos" that means "the one who is sent off." Jesus himself was sent off by God to this world to be among us and to fulfill his will of salvation for the world. In order to do that, he gave up his heavenly glory as God and became a human being through perfect obedience to his father.

The word "high priest" is an important concept, especially from the Old Testament. The high priest was the mediator between God and the people of Israel, interceding for forgiveness of all sins of the people of Israel in the Holy of Holies. Likewise, Jesus came to the throne of God to bear all our sins as a living sacrifice. We are all hopeless sinners that deserve eternal condemnation. But because of his sacrifice, we can come to God wherever and whenever and receive forgiveness of sins, true comfort and rest. Praise and thanks be to Jesus, our apostle and high priest, who humbled himself and became the perfect sacrifice for our salvation.

That Jesus is our apostle and high priest means that he is the Son of God. He is the Almighty Creator God. He is the Messiah. Through accepting him and his word in our hearts we can find our heavenly calling and true meaning in our lives. We can put our trust in him and live under this sovereign reign. Let us fix our thoughts on Jesus as our apostle and high priest, so that we may experience God's salvation grace daily and live as apostles and shepherds for others, as John 3:16 says: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

"To fix" includes a) a direction b) a clear point of focus. In this context "to fix" means to hold on to and follow. In our times it is of immense importance what or who we fix our thoughts upon. Do we fix our thoughts on human idols or people, that hurt or even persecute us? Social media? Our lustfulness or false teachings? The bible says that those who follow sin will perish. Let us fix our thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest and his word and follow him alone.

The Jews were very fixated on Moses, who was representing their traditions and laws. In verses 2-6 the author examines the relationship between Jesus and Moses. It is noteworthy, what they had in common. Jesus and Moses, both, were faithful to God's house. Moses was faithful in all God's house (5), which means over God's people, the house of Israel. In contrast, God's people, the Israelites, were very unfaithful, so that God had to punish and destroy the people of Israel several times. But

because of Moses' faithfulness God allowed the 2nd generation of the people of Israel to come to the promised land after 40 years of training in the desert.

Let's have a look at verse 6: "But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory." Christ was faithful as the Son of God over God's house. What does this mean? The people were unfaithful by rejecting Jesus as the Son of God. They sentenced him to death by crying out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" They also tempted him to abandon the work of God, "Come down from the cross!" But Jesus resisted the temptation to come down from the cross. He was faithful towards the will of His Father, even to the point of death on the cross. He firmly held on to the confidence and hope of God. Through this faithfulness, he accomplished the work of redemption for us, the house of God, and gained eternal victory. This is why Jesus was found worthy of greater honor than Moses. Thus, while honoring Moses' heritage, the author urged the Jewish Christians not to fall back into their old habits of Judaism, but to be faithful over God's house.

God continues His work of salvation even today, through servants of God who are faithful over God's house. In spite of their age, M. Peter and M. Sarah Chang are faithful over God's house. Instead of retiring or giving up God's mission because of persecution or disappointment, they faithfully take spiritual care of coworkers. They especially serve the Next Generation not to be weekly churchgoers but with the vision to be global spiritual leaders. M. Peter Kim from New Jersey has been serving God's ministry and GLEF for the past 5 years faithfully, praying and planting the vision of God into the hearts of the Next Generation. The late M. Paul Chung paved the way for the mighty work of God in the hearts of Next Generation that we see today by being faithful to the spiritual heritage of UBF. In this time of the COVID-19 pandemic and increasing digitalization, many have minimized their contacts, living selfishly. But we may remain faithful to God's house by raising 10,000 one-to-one Bible study teams, and continue to do common life and early morning prayer and give our lives to discipleship ministry and world mission. This way, according to Ez 37:10, dry bones of young people will be brought back to life, stand up on their feet and will be raised as a vast army of God.

Let us look at verses 7-19. These verses are a harsh warning to the Jewish Christians and ultimately us not to harden our hearts and as a consequence never enter the rest of God. Let's read verses 7 and 8: "So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness." The author reminds the Jewish Christians of the people of Israel, who for 40 years had repeatedly seen the wonderful works of God and experienced the grace of God (he even seems to include them). But still they had hardened their hearts toward the word of God. As a result of their rebellion, the Israelites could never enter God's rest (11). They had to wander in the desert for forty years until their bodies perished in the wilderness.

The example of the Israelites is also a serious warning to us. Verse 13 says: "But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." The one thing hindering us most to humble ourselves before Jesus is the deceitfulness of sin. Sin is the love of evil, unbelief and disobedience to God. Its consequence is eternal condemnation. Verses 16-19 clearly show that the people that perished in the desert were the same people that had seen God's Almighty power leading them out of Egypt. Just because we are Christians, we are not immune to sin or protected from eternal condemnation. Only through

daily spiritual repentance according to one word of God, we can we can overcome the deceitfulness of sin and be saved. It is important to listen to and practically obey the word of Jesus, not tomorrow, not the day after tomorrow, but “today”!

A young woman planned to leave God’s house and enjoy the world as soon as she would become independent from her parents care. But during her baptism she was struck by God’s love and rebuke through one word of God, 1. Peter 4:13: "But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed." She made a decision of faith “today” to stay in God’s house and to be faithful to God’s house. After making this decision she was filled with joy and now she fixes her thoughts on Jesus, her apostle and high priest. She now serves God with her many talent and lives with the identity of a mother of faith of the Next Generation.

II. Christ, the Rest of God (Chapter 4:1-16)

In chapter 4:1-11, the author talks about the promise of the rest of God. These verses are almost written philosophically and in typical “Paul-style”, who the authorship of the Book of Hebrews is attributed to. Let's look at verse 1: "Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it." We have already heard about the rest of God in the previous chapter. But what is the rest of God? The rest of God is a spiritual state. When God created the heavens and the earth in six days, he worked very diligently. But on the seventh day, called the Sabbath, he took time to rest (4). According to verse 3b, this state of rest would continue to this day. But because men sinned against God, they lost the paradise and with it the state of true rest. And because of the consequences of sin, men cannot enter the rest of God using their own strength or efforts (2b). But instead of coming to God, they rather harden their hearts and stay in their sin through disobedience and unbelief (6). As a matter of fact, the story of the people of Israel represents the stubbornness and hardened hearts of men throughout history until today. But God did not give up on them. He prepared a new, definitive and living way to the true rest of God through Jesus Christ. Let's read verse 7: "God again set a certain day, calling it “Today”. This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” The author assigns great significance to the word “Today” in Hebrews 3 and 4. Do you know how often the author uses the word “Today”? 5 times! Jesus is the new "today." Let’s not miss this new "today" through a hardened heart (7) but come to him with repentance and humility.

Let's read verses 8 to 10: "For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his." The Israelites thought that they had gained rest through Joshua, by conquering the Promised Land. But that was not the case, because even in the Promised Land the fighting did not stop but went on and on. The reign under the great King David was seen as the most peaceful and prosperous times in the history of Israel. But even that time was filled with battles and wars. Nowadays, people look for true rest e.g. in stability or tangible material prosperity. They try to force rest through vacation, Netflix binging, computer games, romance novels and even alcohol. But they will never find true rest doing these things. The only true rest is the Sabbath-rest which is the rest of God. The rest of God is unshakable, like the powerful undercurrent of the ocean. This true rest of God has nothing to do with human achievements and

cannot be gained through material security or worldly pleasure but only through a vital relationship with him.

Let's read verse 11: "Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience." This verse shows us that entering the rest of God is an act of obedience of faith and effort. What does it practically mean to "make every effort"? Let's read verses 12 and 13: "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." Here we learn that "make an effort" means to devote oneself to the word of God, meaning studying it, living by it and obeying it. The purpose of bible study is not to enjoy moments of emotion. According to verse 13, we study the bible, so that the deceitfulness of sin is exposed and laid bare before the eyes of God (13), so that we can come to the High Priest Jesus with our sins and repent. The word of God can scan through our bodies, minds and souls, more accurately than the most modern CT or MRI scans. When we study it continuously, it will give us spiritual discernment for sin and humanistic and relativistic way of thinking. How blessed are the Next Generation, that we are able to study word of God and listen to it on a daily basis with a repentant heart? Liberal Christian theology teaches us that we can enter God's rest without repentance and taking an effort. However, these teachings are incongruent with the teachings of the Bible and tempt us to resist God's word and even to take advantage of it.

Since we are studying church history in Bonn during this GLEF, I want to talk about a dangerous example of the influence of liberal Christian theology in church history. Under Emperor Constantine the Great, Christianity began to transition to state religion of the Roman Empire. Christianity was now socially approved and accepted. Christians finally seemed to have entered true rest, because they were not persecuted anymore. They went from being martyrs to being people with a career. But as a result, Christianity became superficial and open for false teachings.

However, among them, there were a few people of God who did not let themselves be influenced by this superficial Christianity. They sold everything they had, went into the desert, and sought after God's rest through Bible study in seclusion, asceticism and prayer. They were called the desert monks. Many outstanding young men came to them, who had been educated in the best schools of their time in Alexandria, Constantinople and Athens, e.g. Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, John of Constantinople, Jerome and Augustine of Hippo. They all came to the desert and learned from the desert monks how to make every effort to enter the true rest of God. They became the Church Fathers of the 3rd and 4th centuries who defeated false doctrines and were the spiritual leaders of their time.

Is this outdated? No? Thanks be to God for the Next Generation coworkers who in a time of liberal theology, humanism and gender ideology also make every effort to enter the true rest of God through deeply meditating on the word of God. They are in the best years of their lives. But during the last years they have devoted most of their time to early morning prayer, inductive bible study, International Bible Seminar, Master courses, Presentation about spiritual books, church history and so on. They have become spiritual leaders and professional self-motivated executive bible teachers. They are history makers like our church fathers. God may continuously use our 1:1 bible study,

common life and disciple making ministry, so that young people on our campuses in these modern times of liberal Christianity may enter true rest in God and may be raised as global spiritual leaders.

It is my personal thanksgiving topic that my parents taught me to make every effort to enter true rest in Jesus through continuous bible study from an early age on to this day. But in the last years my definition of true rest shifted more and more to what I defined as rest from a human standpoint, e.g. the feeling to be free of work deadlines and stress or even a feeling of accomplishment. But these things made me think only about myself and never gave me rest. Today I learn that true rest lies in the rest of the Sabbath, that means to be faithful to God's promises first and to devote my life for his mission. The key verse of my house church is Mt 6:33 "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well". I want to enter God's rest by being faithful to him first, to his word, to daily bread, testimony writing, prayer and the fellowship with God's servants and our Next Generation. I pray not to be a man with a career but a bible teacher and global leader for the mobilization of the Medical School Campus and the Next Generation.

Let conclude by reading verses 14 - 16: "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." After the harsh warnings, in the conclusion of this chapter the author sums up who Jesus is in the Book of Hebrews, our high priest and son of God. He also reminds us of God's grace and encourages us that it is not too late to come him now. When we start to "take every effort" to enter his rest we will realize, that we are not alone, but that Jesus will walk with us. Jesus, the Son of God has already walked the way of faithfulness and sacrifice. He has given us the example of faith to obey God to the point of death (Hebr 5:8.9). He has been tempted in every way, just as we are. He knows our weaknesses and has experienced all the pain in his own body, overcame them and "has ascended into heaven". We can come to him in our weakness and sins through repentance, approach the throne of grace with confidence of salvation and receive His mercy and grace.

Today we have learned to fix our thoughts on Jesus. Fixing our thoughts on Jesus means to accept Jesus as our Apostle and High Priest, who is the Son of God, and to follow Him no matter the cost. What is true rest? True rest does not come from material security or worldly pleasure but from Jesus alone. And we should make every effort to enter that true rest, today, with a vision to be used as history markers and spiritual leaders for our generation. Let us hear the authors' spiritual rebuke very personally, come to throne of grace with absolut trust in him, and live with God's heavenly calling today.

Dear heavenly father. Thank you for GLEF 2022. Thank you for your wonderful work in our Next Generation throughout the world, especially NJ, Moscow, Istanbul and Bonn. Thank you for their eager desire to serve you and to find true rest in you alone. May you bless them to meet Jesus, our apostle and high priest through GLEF 2022 very personally. I thank you and in the name of Jesus I pray, Amen.