

Message Fourteen: The Fourth Warning

Hebrews 10:1-39 — Understanding Hebrews Series, Part 14

By Escape the Mustard Tree

Introduction

Chapter ten opens with one final comparison — the sacrifices themselves — and then turns into the most sobering warning this letter contains. It can feel unsettling to read closely. But stay with it to the end, because the same chapter that issues this warning closes with some of the letter's warmest encouragement. The two halves belong together, and neither one is meant to be heard without the other.

I. A Shadow, Not the Substance

"For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Hebrews 10:1-4).

The old sacrifices were never designed to finish the job. Notice the giveaway in verse two: if they had actually cleared the conscience once for all, the worshipers would have stopped bringing them. Instead, the very fact that the sacrifices continued, year after year without end, proves they were only ever a shadow — a reminder of sin repeated, not a removal of sin accomplished.

II. A Body Prepared

Into that endless repetition, the author places words from Psalm 40, spoken as though from the mouth of Christ Himself: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God'" (Hebrews 10:5-7). The author then draws out the conclusion: "He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:9-10). What the old system could only picture, one obedient life and one offered body actually accomplished.

III. Standing Versus Seated, One Final Time

"And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:11-14).

This is the same contrast this series has now traced from three separate angles: an earthly priesthood that never sat down because its work was never done, and a High Priest who sat down because His was. And notice where His present posture points — He is waiting, seated, until His enemies become His footstool. Everything about His current position is forward-looking, resting entirely on a work already finished.

IV. Therefore, Let Us

Because that offering is complete, the author draws a string of direct exhortations: "Having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith... let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering... and let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another" (Hebrews 10:19-25).

Three exhortations, each resting on the same foundation: draw near, hold fast, stir one another up. None of them are offered as a way to earn what Christ already accomplished. They are the natural response of people who already have full, confident access because of what He finished.

V. If We Go On Sinning Willfully

Then comes the warning itself. "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment... Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?" (Hebrews 10:26-29).

This is not describing an isolated stumble into sin — every believer does that, and Christ's present priestly ministry exists precisely to cleanse those failures when confessed. This is describing something else: a believer who has been brought to full maturity, has understood exactly what is being offered in the coming age, and then deliberately, willfully turns away from that knowledge altogether. Read this warning immediately after the third warning in chapter six, without the three chapters of priestly explanation in between, and the connection is unmistakable: enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, then fallen away — enlightened, received the knowledge of the truth, then sinning willfully against it. Both warnings describe the same person, viewed from two angles, and

both describe the same consequence: not a loss of salvation already secured, but a forfeited inheritance in the age to come, met instead with severe discipline.

"For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:30-31). Notice the quotation: "the Lord will judge His people" — not the world, not the unbelieving, but His own. This is discipline administered by a Father to His own children, not condemnation handed to strangers.

VI. Remember the Former Days

The tone then shifts completely. "But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings... For you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven" (Hebrews 10:32, 34). These readers had already proven, through real suffering and real sacrifice, that they understood exactly what was worth holding onto. The warning was never written to people the author doubted. It was written to people he was confident would heed it.

"Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward; for you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise" (Hebrews 10:35-36). And then the closing word, quoting the prophet Habakkuk: "Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul" (Hebrews 10:38-39).

VII. Applying the Fourth Warning

Every one of this letter's five warnings has now traced the same single danger from a different angle: not the loss of a salvation already secured the moment you believed, but the real possibility of forfeiting an inheritance still ahead — a share in the coming age that is entered by faithful endurance, not merely by having believed in the past.

So take this warning with the full weight it was written to carry, and take the closing encouragement with equal weight. You are not the kind of person this warning describes if you are still pressing forward — still drawing near, still holding fast, still stirring up love and good works in others. The author's confidence in his readers was grounded in exactly that kind of visible, ongoing faithfulness. Let the same be true of you.

Looking Ahead

Next, we move into Hebrews chapter eleven, where the author turns from warning to witness — a long procession of men and women who lived by exactly the kind of faith this chapter has just called us to.