

“The Power of an Indestructible Life” (Heb. 7:16)

Sermon for 24 March 2019

Texts: Genesis 5:18-32 (esp. vv. 21-24); Isaiah 58:6-14& Heb. 11:5-6

**v.5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. v.6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards them that seek him.**

This passage states upfront, the reward of Enoch’s faith: **that he should not see death**. Now that’s quite remarkable. Then we read that he was **commended as having pleased God** prior to his translation. That’s quite remarkable, too. Paul writes next, **without faith it is impossible to please him**. So we conclude that Enoch had faith, that this faith was pleasing to God (a commendation while Enoch yet lived) and, as a reward for faithfulness, Enoch received a pass. Yes, he was allowed to skip death, his reward, and go to be with God straightway. Those who **draw near** to God in this life, God draws near in the next life.

**Draw near** to God. Sounds like a splendid aspiration. Do you not agree? Does everyone get to **draw near**? Is it a come-as-you-are party? Is this “privilege” restricted in some way? It appears that it is. We know that because Paul is actually citing a “Hebraism” in his using the phrase **draw near**. A Hebraism is a figure of speech—the use of which signifies something understood *beyond the actual words*. And here is what **draw near** meant: *only those who have had their sins atoned for by a high priest are permitted to draw near*. Say, after the offering of a sin offering, or on the Day of Atonement—then one, an observant, faithful Jew(!), might draw near. Oh, dear. Where do I find a high priest to atone for my sins today? Is this only for Jews? And how does Enoch, seventh from Adam, qualify as a Jew when Judaism had not even been revealed to the world as yet?! Where, now that the temple sacrifices have ceased, does anyone find a high priest? Is it necessary to have one?

Yes, it is and, yes, we do. Jesus is our great high priest. And he has atoned for our sins. And forgiveness for our sins comes through believing on him, trusting in who he is and embracing what he has done for those who believe.

I want to show and Easter slide at this point in the sermon. A slide of Jesus Christ, under arrest in the courtyard of the acting high priest Caiaphas—with his father-in-law Ananias in attendance. The true high priest under trial, accused by two hirelings, two bought and paid for Jewish clerics. Perhaps the highest point of irony in salvation history! The irony does not cease with the high priesthood; it also includes kingship and the prophetic office. Jesus as the King of kings and Lord of lords is arraigned before Herod Antipas, the tetrarch overseeing Galilee—who *happens to be in Jerusalem at that moment!* The Herodian dynasty is very close to its end so, in actuality the throne of David is at that time divided into four parts and each part is ruled over by an Idumean tetrarch. An Idumean is someone descended from Esau, and an Edomite by definition the sworn ancestral enemy of the Jews! Both foreign kings and fractured monarchy, yet these imposters, political appointees, sit in judgment over the true King of the Jews who is in truth the only true King of all. And, as for the prophetic office, Caiaphas operates in that sphere when he, unwittingly declares (John 10:49-51:

**But one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all! 50You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.” 51 Caiaphas did not say this on his own. Instead, as high priest that year, he was prophesying that Jesus would die for the nation,**

Be this as it may, we need to bear down on “the office of high priest” because only those who have had their sins atoned for by a high priest are permitted to draw near. A high priest after the order of Melchizedek (see 7:15) refers to Jesus who **arose in his likeness** of Melchizedek and not on the basis of ancestry, **a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life**. (v.16) That **indestructible life** is Christ’s sinless existence. Frankly, I had never considered the power of Christ’s life in itself—as in apart from his sacrifice!—but Christ’s whole life was a divine force enacting atonement for our sins. **It is witnessed of him, “You are a priest after the order of Melchizedek.”** Further, Christ was made this better high priest by the oath of God: **The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest forever.”** (Psalm 110:4) **This makes Jesus the guarantor of a (our) better covenant.** Yes, indeed!

Then, almost as an augmentation of this truth just revealed about Jesus, our great high priest, Paul writes, **The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.** (vv. 23-25) A high priest remains necessary, but, praise God, we have just such a one.

Now, because we are in the Easter season, I must draw your attention to this: when the former high priest, Ananias and his protege, the acting high priest Caiaphas, confront Jesus in the high priest’s courtyard—they, hirelings, are coming against the one, true high priest. This is enormous effrontery and irony! And what do they do? They, violating the law with every stroke, have him stricken many times. That is lawlessness in spades—not good at all. **Exactly the kind of behavior that Enoch prophesied against in Jude 14-16:**

**14 It was also about these men (unholy men, false teachers and apostates) that (A<sup>1</sup>) Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, “(B) Behold, the Lord came with [His holy ten thousands] many thousands of His holy ones, 15 (C) to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which (D) ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.” 16 These are (E) grumblers, finding fault, (F) following after their own lusts; [their mouths speak] they speak (G) arrogantly, flattering people (H) for the sake of gaining an advantage.**

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

So, not only did Enoch please God by faith, not only was he bold to draw near to God (his sin having been atoned for!), he also prophesied about the Lord’s coming vindication from the deeds and unkind aspersions against our holy and righteous God in the age of the church which we describe as the early church. He condemns those who sow moral and doctrinal confusion *in the early church and, livingly, even our own day* and encourages the true church that God takes

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<sup>1</sup>Cross references for confirmation and further study:

Jude 1:14 : Gen 5:18, 21ff

Jude 1:14 : Deut 33:2; Dan 7:10; Matt 16:27; Heb 12:22

Jude 1:15 : 2 Pet 2:6ff

Jude 1:15 : 1 Tim 1:9

Jude 1:16 : Num 16:11, 41; 1 Cor 10:10

Jude 1:16 : 2 Pet 2:10; Jude 18

Jude 1:16 : 2 Pet 2:18

Jude 1:16 : 2 Pet 2:3

note of the worldly and deal with those who are **devoid of the Spirit**, v.19 (i.e. unbelievers). Enoch was a prophet indeed.

So, with regard to Enoch we have three things: a. and epitaph: **he walked with God**; b. a character reference: **he was commended as having pleased God**; c. a message: as just cited in which Enoch indicts sinners for their faultfinding, their lustful behavior, pride and flattery. A short list compared to others we have for the worldly and carnal.

I want to close with sharing a slice of my life as a graduate student at Oxford. I was cycling home from “Oxford Samaritans” —a twenty-four hour suicide prevention ministry located in Broad Street—and as I headed up St. Giles towards Banbury Road and Summertown, it was approaching the noon meal time. I looked ahead, and to my horror, I saw black suited cleric kicking a homeless man to the curb. Apparently the man had broken into the religious house, invaded the dining room and stolen a loaf of bread. An indignant priest, cursing and kicking the man had accosted the beggar. I dropped my bicycle and intervened, “Stop, stop. What are you doing?!” I separated the priest and the poor fellow. “What are you thinking? Should a vicar of Christ be beating the poor in the streets? Let him have the bread.” The priest glared at me, blushed crimson and, as a small crowd had gathered, stormed off back into the house. I asked the poor man if he was okay. He was barely coherent, obviously intoxicated, but he pulled himself together and mumbled something. “It is better to ask for food, sir, than to steal it; but as you have it, go in peace. Be wiser.” He stumbled off. After explaining what had happened to some bystanders, I retrieved my bike and resumed my journey home. I overtook the beggar as he turned into the University Parks, “Have a blest day!” I shouted and waved.

As I reflected on Isaiah 58:6-14, this incident recalled itself to me.

**Isaiah 58:6 “Is this not the fast which I choose,  
To loosen the bonds of wickedness,  
To undo the bands of the yoke,  
And to let the oppressed go free  
And break every yoke?”**

Loosening someone’s **bondage to wickedness**, and lightning the **yoke of sin’s oppression** are the terms of the fast that God requires us to keep. **Let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke.** Let us be very discerning here. Sin’s captivity is the work of the Devil and like Jesus, we are to labor to destroy his works, joining our wills to his will!

This implies compassion coupled with a steadfast refusal to be welcoming and affirming of sin, wickedness and /or oppression of every stripe. Cries of “God made me this way!” Or the insidious logic that takes “God don’t make no junk” and turns it into a justification of one’s unrepentant rebellion and defiance. Until we see our slavery to sin as unwonted bondage and oppression, we are not likely to cooperate with the Savior sent to rescue us from both or either. Our lust for approval is such that we will opt for a bum deal (such as continuance in sin, or addiction) to soul liberty and freedom. Approval makes sin indelible, or at least freedom inhibiting.

**7 “Is it not to divide your bread [for] with the hungry  
And bring the homeless poor into the house;  
When you see the naked, to cover him;  
And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?”**

**Share your bread with the hungry** may not be the same as “Start a food ministry” and **bring the homeless poor into your house** may hardly be the same as: fund low income housing unit, or institute public welfare. What makes us squirm is the discomforting, relational piece to these social directives! It’s my bread shared, it’s my house into which the poor are to be

brought. We would prefer to keep the hungry at arm's length—verse 10 says, **furnish yourself to give to the hungry**. Give myself? Furnish myself to give to the hungry? Can **DO NOT HIDE YOURSELF FROM YOUR OWN FLESH** (v.7) mean anything less?

**Covering the naked**, again, is not merely a charge to establish a clothing ministry. It might be as simple as this: “Go to your closet and take, out of your clothing, something for the naked to wear.” Dress them in your own clothes and then it will be easier to see them as a part of yourself—not a customer, or consumer, a third party. Their identity will be an extension of your own identity/self—an act of adoption in word and deed— and your love will make you both one in Christ. Don't complicate this very basic, very simple matter. Don't insulate yourself from the neediness of your neighbor, rather admit that you are needy, too. If he offers you a hat for a jacket, receive it with thanksgiving. Avoid any equivalency, and comparison because it's the love, the friendship, the relationship that matters. *Be neighborly*.

**8 “Then your light will break out like the dawn,  
And your recovery will speedily spring forth;  
And your righteousness will go before you;  
The glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.**

We know that the cause of poverty is not lack of money—we know that it is a lack of friends. It is a lack of social connectivity. It is not having anyone to provide anything for, or to. It is being shut out of the love marketplace. Making stuff to sell is creating the opportunity to interact; it speaks of mutual usefulness. In an economic frame, that means sellers need buyers and vice versa—the great evil of socialism is that it interferes with this great need for transaction, creating dependency on the government instead of on our neighbors. Welfare destroys families, oppresses community, restricts freedom and imprisons people to the system. Emergency relief becomes a way to live parasitically, a life style of low aspirations and dependency. Welfare degenerates into a drug of choice and many are those addicted to it.

**Love one another** never loses its convicting edge. **Walking with God** strikes me as very much connected. What do you think? Later revelation, from Micah 6:8, summarize Isaiah 58 quite succinctly: **Love mercy, do justice and walk humbly before your God**. That is the walk, backed by the power of Christ's indestructible life, that pleases God.

**Amen.**