

LET'S MOVE ON UP (Hebrews 5:11-6:3)

When I was growing up, Saturday night was the night to watch TV, and my family did so from 7:00 until 10:00. Amazingly, all of the shows were on CBS. At 7:00 we watched *All in the Family*. That was followed by *M*A*S*H*. Next, at 8:00 it was *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. Then came *The Bob Newhart Show*. Finally, from 9:00 to 10:00 it was *The Carol Burnett Show*. Then, it was time to go to bed because we had Sunday School the next morning.

The show that got it all started at 7:00 was the ground-breaking situation comedy *All in the Family*. We laughed at Archie Bunker, his wife Edith, their daughter Gloria, and son-in-law Mike, better known as meat-head.

All in the Family spawned several spinoffs during its 9 seasons on the air. Its most successful spinoff ran for 11 seasons. Archie Bunker and his family lived in a working-class neighborhood of the Queens in NYC. He had a neighbor named George. George came into a sizeable settlement after being hit from behind by a bus. With that money he was able to buy several dry cleaners around NYC. He used his new-found wealth to move his family from the Queens to a luxurious high rise in Manhattan. George's last name was Jefferson, and the show about this African-American family was *The Jefferson's*.

I still remember some of the lyrics of the theme song:

Well, we're movin' on up,
To the east side.
To a deluxe apartment in the sky.
Movin' on up
To the east side.
We finally got a piece of the pie.

That phrase "movin' on up" aptly captures the message of the text we are going to look at today. Turn to Hebrews 5:11-6:3. In this passage, the author encourages his readers and audience, including you and me, to move on up spiritually. We are going to focus on two things: what we are to move up from and what we are to move up to.

Look at 5:11. The verse begins with the words "About this." To understand what *this* refers to, we have to go back to v. 10. The author has been dealing with the idea that Jesus is our High Priest, but he wants to show that Jesus is not a priest after the order of Aaron or the Levites. He invokes a name mentioned but not elaborated upon in the OT. It is the name Melchizedek. We looked briefly at that name last week. The author of this letter says that Jesus was a priest, not like Aaron was, but like Melchizedek. He will build on that theme later on in Hebrews, specifically in chapter 7.

He says, basically, in v. 11 that he wants to talk about this truth in depth, but he is unable to do so because his readers aren't capable of taking it in and understanding it. He says they are "dull of hearing." What does that mean?

You know what is to have to listen do a dull speaker. Maybe he talks in a monotone like this. Maybe he reads his notes and never makes eye-contact. Maybe his subject matter is dull. It has nothing to do with your life.

There is a difference between a dull speaker and a dull hearer. Do you remember being in school and what it was like when you got to the last period of the day? You have been in school all day long. By this time, you are spent. If you are a teacher, you know that blank stare that tells you that your students are done. They are not sharp hearers, hanging on every word, asking good questions. At this point, they are dull hearers, not taking in what you are saying. They are doing good just to stay awake.

To be clear, if we are not where we need to be in our spiritual growth, it is not because the content is dull. Now, I may not be the most spell-binding preacher, but in the end, I am not supposed to be your chief teacher. The Holy Spirit is your real Teacher, and there is nothing dull about Him. If you are not where you are supposed to be in your spiritual growth, in all likelihood, you are a dull hearer. You are not paying attention.

In His 7 messages to the 7 churches of Revelation, 7 times Jesus says, "He who has an ear to hear, let him hear." Growth is dependent on hearing and actively listening for the voice of our Lord. Are you listening?

Based on our text, I challenge you to do two things.

Let's Move on Up from Spiritual Immaturity

The spiritually immature are dull hearers. They are not able to take in deep truth and understand it. The author makes the case that his readers are suffering from arrested development. They have not become what they should be. Look at v. 12.

A very important truth can be drawn from this verse: **Spiritual growth is not a function of time alone.** Sufficient time had elapsed such that the author expected his audience would have grown to the point that they were themselves teachers of others, but such was not the case. In fact, it was just the opposite. Instead of them teaching others, they were the ones who needed to be taught. They still needed the basics. My version uses the word *oracles*. Another word would be the *sayings*. The NIV uses *the word*. I think what He has in mind is Scripture. By now they should have been teaching Scripture, but instead they were in need of being taught the very basic, elementary truths of Scripture.

Because you have been a Christian a long time does not mean you have grown as one. Growth requires more than just time. We must use that time profitably.

Look at the last part of v. 12 and v. 13.

When I lived in Stillwater, one day I discovered a business called *Smoothie King*. They made wonderful smoothies. They were especially wonderful on hot, summer days. I quickly grew to love Smoothie King. I enjoyed the Acai Adventure or the Caribbean Way smoothie and several others. It was a sad day for me when Smoothie King went out of business in Stillwater. Of course, it was a sadder day when the building they were in became the headquarters for the Payne County Democratic Party. That just added insult to injury. One thing I remember about the smoothies is that they would come in a cup that said in large letters, "Chewing is over-rated."

That could be the motto of immature Christians. They don't want to chew on Scripture. They don't want to work at it. They want someone else to blend together a nice sweet-tasting, pick-me-up to get them through the week. They much prefer putting a spiritual lollipop in their mouth. For them, studying the Bible, researching a word or

subjecting, tracing how it is used in Scripture, meditating on God's word, that is just out of the question. Doing such things are just too hard. Too much chewing is involved.

In his commentary on Hebrews, Warren Wiersbe wrote:

I once heard a preacher say, "Most Christians are 'betweeners.'"

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

"They are between Egypt and Canaan—out of the place of danger, but not yet into the place of rest and rich inheritance," he replied. "They are between Good Friday and Easter Sunday—saved by the blood but not yet enjoying newness of resurrection life."

Wiersbe, then asked his reader, "Are *you* a 'betweenner'?"

This brings us to the second point. We are to move on up from spiritual immaturity, and finally . . .

We Are to Move on Up to Spiritual Maturity

Look at v. 14. I came across a sermon by John Piper on this passage. Listen to what he says about v. 14:

Now this is amazing. Don't miss it. It could save you years of wasted living. What verse 14 is saying is that if you want to become mature and understand the more solid teachings of the Word, then the rich, nutritional, precious milk of God's gospel promises must transform your moral senses—your spiritual mind—so that you can discern between good and evil. Or let me put it another way. Getting ready to feast on all God's Word is not first an intellectual challenge; it is first a moral challenge. If you want to eat the solid food of the Word, you must exercise your spiritual senses so as to develop a mind that discerns between good and evil.

The startling truth is that, if you stumble over Melchizedek, it may be because you watch questionable TV programs. If you stumble over the doctrine of election, it may be because you still use some shady business practices. If you stumble over the God-centered work of Christ in the cross, it may be because you love money and spend too much and give too little. The pathway to maturity and to solid biblical food is not first becoming an intelligent person, but becoming an obedient person. What you do with alcohol and sex and money and leisure and food and computer have more to do with your capacity for solid food than where you go to school or what books you read.

In this passage, the author of Hebrews is blowing away some of our myths. The first myth we saw was that growth is just a matter of time. We saw that growth is not a function of time alone. We have to put forth some effort in order to grow. Here we see the falsity of a second myth: Understanding is a matter of intelligence. No, instead we see that understanding is not a function of intelligence alone. There is a strong moral component to gaining a working understanding of God's truth.

Read the wisdom literature of the OT: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Those books unanimously teach that you cannot be a wise person without being a moral person. There is a moral quality to true wisdom.

If you want to go from milk only to feasting on the meat of God's word, you have to live an obedient life, a life that is in line with what God's word teaches.

Let's go on to 6:1. The writer of Hebrews says that we are to leave the elementary doctrine of Christ, and then he goes on to name several of those. In other words, he is saying these are the ABC's of the Christian faith.

Think about it this way. It is the first day of college. You go to your very first college class. It is English Composition I. You are met at the door by your professor. She introduces herself and asks you what your name is. Then she hands you a nametag and asks you to put it on. She lets you know there is a cubby on the wall with your name on it and that you can put your backpack in it. Underneath is a peg for you to hang up your jacket.

You walk in the classroom. Everything is in primary colors. Around one wall is an alphabet chart. On a focal wall is a large calendar. Underneath is a rug. In another part of the room is a reading table. On another wall are the class rules.

When the class gets started your professor doesn't hand out a syllabus. Instead, she goes over the class rules. Then she announces, "Today, we are going to practice the alphabet. There are 26 letters in our alphabet." She draws your attention to the alphabet chart on the wall, and she leads the class in reciting each of the letters.

One of the rules is that if you have a question you are supposed to raise your hand and wait to be called on, so you raise your hand, and when she calls on you, you say, "You have not yet given us a syllabus. What books are we to read this semester? Are we going to be writing any papers?"

She answers, "Oh, no. We won't be doing any of that. The last professor did that, and I just decided that was way too much work. We are going to focus this semester on the alphabet, which is the basis for everything in English. I want you to know what each letter is, and the sound each letter makes, and how can put those together to make words."

Many people get a spiritual equivalent to that every week when they go to church. They get a steady diet of: God loves you. The Bible is God's word; you should read it. Prayer is how we talk to God, and we should do that, too. Be sure to be nice and obey God.

Look, however, at what the writer of Hebrews says the ABC's of the Christian faith are: (6:1-2).

Listen to what N.T. Wright said about that:

At this point, once more, many modern Christian will rub their eyes in surprise. These are the . . . basics? The original early Christian ABC's? Most of our congregations don't know much about them! Many in our churches today couldn't tell you why we baptize people, what precisely the resurrection is and why they should believe in it, let alone what 'dead works' are and why you should repent of them. If this is the alphabet of Christian education, I fear there are many churches, as well as individual Christians, that need to go back to

primary school. It's not, I think, that they've learned the alphabet long ago and forgotten it. No: they haven't ever learned it in the first place. They are getting by on the spiritual equivalent of grunts and hand signals.

Finally, look at 6:3, "And this we will do if God permits." This verse reminds us that our progress in the Christian faith, our movement from immaturity to spiritual maturity is not a matter of our effort alone. We can keep ourselves from growing by our lack of effort, but we cannot make ourselves grow by our own self-effort. God's grace is still needed.

I close with two verses from Colossians and one story. Look at Colossians 2:6-7. Paul let the believers in Colossae know that he was praying for them and even suffering on their behalf. Then he wrote: "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."

Receiving Jesus is not the end. It is the beginning, the beginning of a process and a pilgrimage. We are to be rooted and built up, and it is not something we do entirely on our own. We need one another, and we need God's grace at work in our lives because ultimately, he is the gardener and builder.

Twenty-five years ago, a Quaker pastor by the name of Philip Gulley wrote a little book entitled *Front Porch Tales*. The first chapter of his book was called "Growing Roots." Listen to what he wrote . . . (pp.17-19).

Had an old neighbor when I was growing up named Doctor Gibbs. He didn't look like any doctor I'd ever known. Every time I saw him, he was wearing denim overalls and a straw hat, the front brim of which was green sunglass plastic. He smiled a lot, a smile that matched his hat—old and crinkly and well-worn. He never yelled at us for playing in his yard. I remember him as someone who was lot nicer than circumstances warranted.

When Doctor Gibbs wasn't saving lives, he was planting trees. His house sat on ten acres, and his life-goal was to make it a forest. The good doctor had some interesting theories concerning plant husbandry. He came from the "No pain, no gain" school of horticulture. He never watered his trees, which flew in the face of conventional wisdom. Once I asked why. He said that watering plants spoiled them, and that if you water them, each successive tree generation will grow weaker and weaker. So, you have to make things rough for them and weed out the weenie trees early on.

He talked about how watering trees made for shallow roots, and how trees that weren't watered had to grow deep roots in search of moisture. I took him to mean that deep roots were to be treasured.

So, he never watered his trees. He'd plant an oak and, instead of watering it every morning, he'd beat it with a rolled-up newspaper. Smack! Slap! Pow! I asked him why did that, and he said it was to get the tree's attention.

Doctor Gibbs went to glory a couple of years after I left home. Every now and again, I walk by his house and look at the trees that I'd watched him plant some twenty-five years ago. They're granite strong now. Big and robust. Those trees

wake up in the morning and beat their chests and drink their coffee black.

I planted a couple of trees a few years back. Carried water to them for a solid summer. Sprayed them. Prayed over them. The whole nine yards. Two years of coddling has resulted in trees that expect to be waited on hand and foot. Whenever a cold wind blows in, they tremble and chatter their branches. Sissy trees.

Funny thing about those trees of Doctor Gibbs. Adversity and deprivation seemed to benefit them in ways comfort and ease never could.

Every night before I go to bed, I go check on my two sons. I stand over them and watch their little bodies, the rising and falling of life within. I often pray for them. Mostly I pray that their lives will be easy. "Lord, spare them from hardship." But lately I've been thinking that it's time to change my prayer.

Has to do with the inevitability of cold winds that hit us at the core. I know my children are going to encounter hardship, and my praying they won't is naïve. There's always a cold wind blowing somewhere.

So, I'm changing my eventide prayer. Because life is tough, whether we want it to be or not. Instead, I'm going to pray that my sons' roots grow deep, so they can draw strength from the hidden sources of the eternal God.

Too many times we pray for ease, but that's a prayer seldom met. What we need to do is pray for roots that reach deep into the Eternal, so when the rains fall and the winds blow, we won't be swept asunder.

Hear again the word of God: "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."

Move on up from immaturity. Move on up to maturity. To do that, we must be rooted in Jesus and His word.