

JESUS - Your High-Priest Advocate for the Tough Stuff
One with mercy and grace - Hebrews 4:11-16

In her wildest imagination, she could have never dreamed she'd be standing here. Waiting. Waiting to face, painfully, a man she had selfishly attempted to seduce, and then destroy.

As the wait lengthened, her mind raced back to when she had first seen him. Her husband, Potiphar (captain of the Pharaoh's guard), had paid a significant pricetag for him and a few other slaves--young men successfully eclipsed from family bonds, void of any hope of retrieval.

By the Ishmaelite slave traders, quite savvy about rejection. They knew how their own great-grandmother (Hagar) and Ishmael (their grandfather, but then just a boy) were driven helplessly into the barren wilderness by a gutless Abraham bending to the spiteful demanding of Sara his wife. "Get rid of her, and her son!" Sara barked.

These Ishmaelites knew rejection, and made an industry of it, along their wide wanderings snatching up those cast off, and selling them for profit in distant markets. These Ishmaelites had scarce sympathy, now, for such a helpless grandson of Abraham, pulled out of waterless pit only to be sold off by his own.

Yes (she remembered), Joseph came into her majestic home a slave, filthy, hair matted, and scared. And yet, underneath the grime was a brilliant and capable--and incredibly handsome--young man with a strangely effective leadership propensity. Potiphar had a knack for discerning what a man was capable of, and within a few short weeks, this trustworthy and principled young Hebrew, rose to the top. Potiphar began to trust him with *everything*.

Potiphar...he was often absent, safeguarding the Pharaoh, training additional sentinels to protect and provide in a responsibility that permitted no mistakes. And, when Pharaoh traveled about his vast empire, Potiphar traveled, oft-times for weeks on end. Joseph managed everything, and she had everything she wanted...except him.

"Why not?" she reasoned. She was subtle at first, but it didn't seem to register. So she called

him one afternoon to her chamber. "Lie with me," she insisted. To her surprise, Joseph had already thought this through, as if he knew the offer were coming. "I will not." He spoke with conviction. "My master trusts me completely, and he told me that you are his wife. I cannot do this great wickedness, and I will not sin against God."

He left. It made him all the more attractive to her. Relentlessly, day after day after day, she made every effort she could think of, every appeal she could dream up, every enticement, every guarantee that no one would know...and every day, with every temptation. Joseph refused even to be with her for any longer than the moment she began to approach.

On that fateful and final day, having stalk his work routine, she caught him alone, attempting to rip off his clothing. Her fingers dug in; she would not this time be denied. So suddenly, she was clutching only cloth as he spun out of her grasp and ran bare-chested from the house. Angrily, she called other servants, wildly accusing "the Hebrew slave" of sexual assault. Potiphar was summoned. The accusation stuck. The Hebrew slave would be beaten and locked down with those who had deeply wronged the King.

These memories evaporated as Joseph abruptly stepped into the room with his guards. Now, second only to Pharaoh. Her head hung, her eyes down. "Please," she pled, "I beg you...*please* forgive me. I was so wrong." She couldn't think of anything else to utter, or ask.

Joseph did not step closer, but his reply was stunning. "You meant it for evil," Joseph said, with the same tone of conviction that countered her previous temptations, "but God meant it for good.ⁱ Speak no more of this. Go home...and give greetings to my master, Potiphar."

Perhaps as you listen to that story, drawn from possible circumstances in Genesis 37-50, you wonder if that actually happened. Did Potiphar's wife ever stand before an exalted Joseph and beg for forgiveness for tempting him with sin, falsely charging him with assault, which led to him spending years in prison?

We don't know if she was ever held accountable, but what we do know is this. Joseph

suffered under the onslaught of temptations. There is

- Nothing easy about fending off the sinful, pleasurable offers of an immoral woman or an immoral man, especially when our entertainment industry is so relentlessly driven to glamorize such offers
- Nothing easy about battling sinful opportunities which seem to offer an easy pathway to success or financial gain or physical pleasure.
- Nothing easy about battling sinful addictions which feel good in the moment while thoroughly destroying what is good in the very same moment
- Nothing easy about checking up and crucifying personal pride
- Nothing easy about putting to death the deeds of the flesh
- Nothing easy about refusing to love the world and the things in the world...when everyone (!) around you is doing it

There is nothing easy about temptation. It takes spiritual guts and conviction, spiritual staying power and preparation.

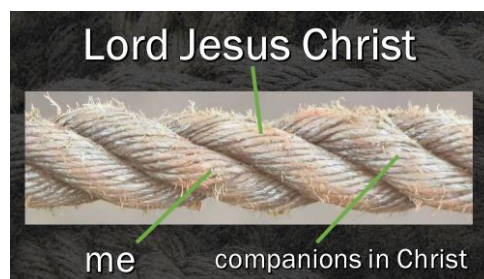
In the past 3 weeks, we've been learning from young Hebrew Christians who lived in tough stuff in the first century. How tough was their stuff? Here's a description from their letter:

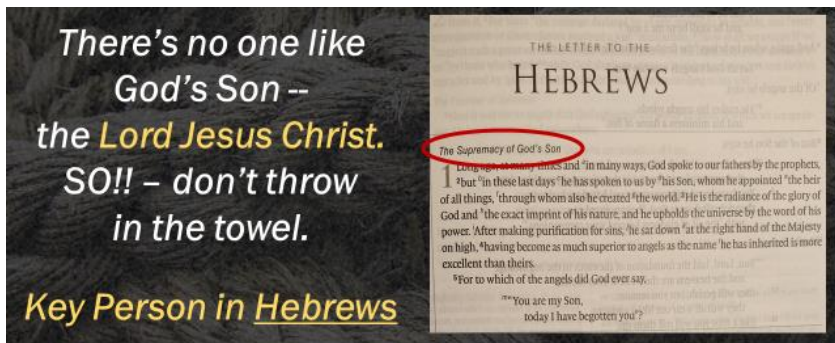
Hebrews 10:32 But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

³⁵ Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

How do you do the will of God when you and I are tempted to be run over by sin, or just give up under the pressure? Do we have a living Savior who knows what we face, and not just getting us through it, but to conquer it?

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (ESV)
Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow.
But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!
And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a **threefold cord is not quickly broken.**





So...Here is what God's Spirit sets before us in Hebrews 4:11-12.

To stay unbroken in the tough stuff of temptation, we have both **a clear call** to guide obedient faithfulness and **a seasoned Advocate** to empower our obeying

**WE HAVE A CLEAR CALL:
God's Word calls to obedient faithfulness
Hebrews 4:11-12**

Hebrews 4:11 Let us therefore **strive to enter that rest**, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.
¹²For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Rightly so, you're probably asking, "What does verse 11 mean? That I should *strive to enter THAT rest?* What rest am I to strive to enter?"

In this 4th chapter of *Hebrews*, the author is comparing the opportunity which the LORD God offered His (O.T.) people Israel to the opportunity we (N.T. disciples) have today? What was that opportunity, after they had been released from slavery in Egypt? It was to enter the land God had promised them, to enjoy as a nation a time of God's blessing and presence in the land God had promised to Abraham. God described that as "entering His rest." They could "enter that rest" if they would believe God's promise and (despite the foes before them, cf. Numbers 13) go in, actively obey God's Word, and conquer the land.

But for one generation of Israel, something went wrong. It's described in Hebrews 3:15-19.

¹⁵As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion" (Ps.95:7-8)
¹⁶For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? ¹⁷And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?
¹⁸And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

An entire generation of redeemed Israelites did NOT enter that “rest,” but died in disobedience wandering in the desert.

So how does what happened to them illustrate our opportunity? Find Hebrews 4:8-10 and listen carefully:

^{4:8-10} For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. **So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God**, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from His.

What's the Spirit saying here? That out ahead, there is a time of reward and joy and **REST** *for the people of God*. Someday, perhaps in the not too distant future, *if we listen to God's word and live in faithful obedience*, we will enter a time of promised Kingdom blessing -- still to be fulfilled -- in which those who have taken God's word seriously (i.e., verse 12) **will enter God's rest**.

So (4:11)...let's fall into that “same sort of” disobedience. And let's not take God's word lightly. (4:12) Let it judge the thoughts and intents of our hearts, so we can “right the ship.” Let's understand we will give an account to God. Let's not give up...let's strive *together* for the “rest” that is coming.

Now, some of us might recoil from that challenge.

You say, “I get it. God has given me a clear call to faithful obedience. But hey, Pastor, I'm not great at consistency. I fall a lot. I sometimes think I'm more flat on my face than forward on my feet. It scares me to think I will have to give an account to God; just makes me anxious instead of motivated. Am I alone in this, or is anyone out there?”

Yep...every one of us here needs that clear call. But,

**WE (also) HAVE A SEASONED ADVOCATE:
God's Son grace-empowers obedient faithfulness**
Hebrews 4:13-14

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, **let us hold fast our confession**. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ **Let us then with confidence draw near** to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

How can we “hold fast our confession?” What confidence to run strong and finish well? It's because of the kind of HIGH PRIEST, seasoned advocate we DON'T HAVE, and the ONE we DO HAVE.

What kind of High Priest “advocate” we DON’T have (vs.15)

- Not someone “unable to sympathize with our weaknesses”
- Ever had that kind of experience – someone who is harsh with you, judgmental of you, someone who hasn’t bothered to “walk a mile in your moccasins”

That phrase, to “walk a mile in someone else’s moccasins, came from poem was written by a brilliant woman named Mary T. Lathrapⁱⁱ (18th century), originally titled “Judge Softly”ⁱⁱⁱ

Pray, don’t find fault with the man that limps,
Or stumbles along the road.
Unless you have worn the moccasins he wears
Or stumbled beneath the same load.

There may be tears in his soles that hurt
Though hidden away from view.
The burden he bears placed on your back
May cause you to stumble and fall, too.

Don’t be too harsh with the man that sins.
Or pelt him with words, or stone, or disdain.
Unless you are sure you have no sins of your own,
And it’s only wisdom and love that your heart contains.

For you know if the tempter’s voice
Should whisper as soft to you,
As it did to him when he went astray,
It might cause you to falter, too.

Finishes:

Take the time to walk a mile in his moccasins.

What kind of High Priest “advocate” we DO have

- (vs.15) “one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

Jesus has taken the time to walk, not just *a mile* in our moccasins, but the entire way in our shoes.

He’s run our race, strained under our load, endured the same headwinds.

WRAPPING UP

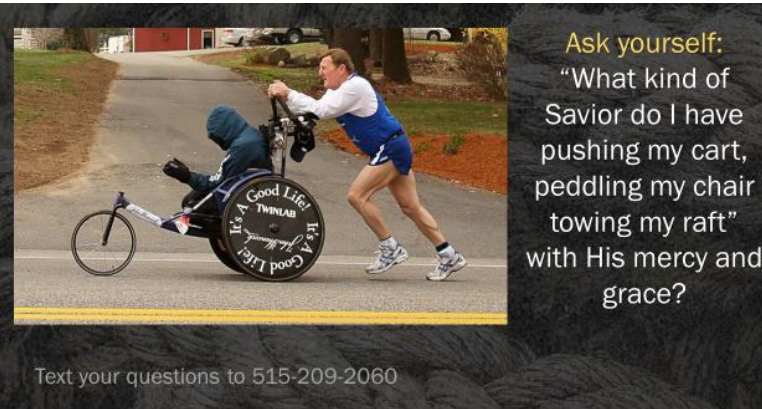
Let me illustrate. Their names are Dick, and Rick, Hoyt.^{iv} Father and son.

When Rick was born, his umbilical cord had wrapped itself too tightly around his neck, leaving a portion of his brain dysfunctional. His parents were advised to put him in an institution. His parents said, “No, we will bring him home and raise him as a normal child.” They could tell by the brightness of his eyes that Rick was very intelligent, and in time, with computer technology, Rick was communicating with sharpness and humor.

One weekend, Rick asked his dad Dick if they could participate in a 5K charity run for a local student who had been paralyzed. Dick hadn’t so much as run a mile at one time in his life, but they entered

and somehow finished. That night, son Rick wrote in his journal, “Dad, today my disability went away.” His father said, “That was a very powerful message to me.”

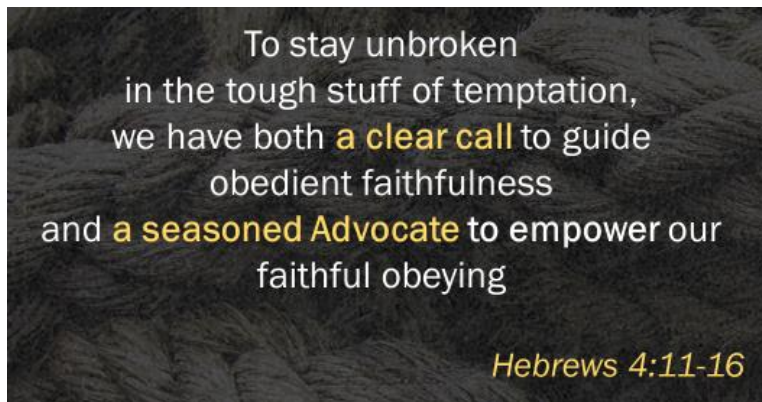
In the last 30 years, over 100 marathons together, over 200 triathlons, at least 4 18 hour Iron Man competitions. Dick’s testimony – “The secret,” he said, “is having a great son. He has helped me fulfill my life as a father.”



We’ve said it the last 3 weeks together. It matters what you think about the Lord Jesus Christ. How you view him in your life. His presence. His strand in your cord. He wants to fulfill His role in your life as a Savior, as

your Advocate. AND...he’s not at God’s right hand to condemn us. He is there to **succor** (Old English word meaning “to give the assistance that is needed”).

To push the cart, peddle my chair, tow me in the raft...Which means we can draw near with open, free confidence, boldly, to the **throne** (not of judgment, but) of grace, to receive mercy and find grace TO HELP (notice the wording) in time of need.



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¹ Joseph’s words to his brothers, fearful of Joseph’s retribution after their father, Jacob, had died and was buried. Cf. Genesis 50:15-22.

² **Mary Torrans Lathrap** (pen name, Lena; April 25, 1838 - January 3, 1895), known as “The Daniel Webster of Prohibition”, was an American poet, preacher, suffragist, and temperance reformer. For 20 years, she was identified with the progressive women of Michigan who had temperance, purity, and prohibition as their watchwords, and the white ribbon as their badge. A licensed preacher for the Methodist Episcopal Church (1871), she served as president of Michigan’s *Woman’s Christian Temperance Union* (1882), co-founded the state’s suffrage organization (1870), and worked on the amendment campaign (1874). From 1862 to 1864, she taught in the Detroit public schools. In 1864, she married Carnett C. Lathrap, then assistant surgeon of the Ninth Michigan Cavalry. In 1865, they removed to Jackson. There, she joined the Methodist Episcopal Church, of which her husband was a member, and became a speaker in the church classrooms. In 1871, she was licensed to preach the gospel and began in the Congregational Church in Michigan Center. Her sermons aroused the people, and for years, she labored as an evangelist, many thousands being converted by her ministry. She took an active part in the Women’s Crusade, was a co-founder of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, and served as president of the State union of Michigan from 1882. Her work was largely devoted to that organization for at least eight years. She labored in various States and was a strong helper in securing the scientific-instruction law, and in the Michigan, Nebraska and Dakota Territory amendment campaigns. In 1878, she secured the passage of a bill in the Michigan legislature appropriating US\$30,000 for the establishment of the Girls’ Industrial Home, a reformatory school, located in Adrian. In 1890, she was a member of the Woman’s Council in Washington, D.C. Her evangelistic and platform work consumed a major part of her life and effort, but her literary work was also important. Her poems were meritorious productions, and she wrote enough to fill a large volume. During the years of her great activity in evangelistic and temperance work, her literary impulses were over-shadowed by the moral work in which she was engaged. Later in life, she wrote more. Her memorial odes to James A. Garfield and John Bartholomew Gough were widely quoted, as were also many other of her poems. Her lectures were always successful, and she was equally at home on the temperance platform, on the lecture platform, in the pulpit or at the

author's desk. Her oratory caused her to be styled "The Daniel Webster of Prohibition," a name well-suited to her. She died January 3, 1895.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Torrans_Lathrap

iii THE ENTIRE POEM:

Pray, don't find fault with the man that limps,
Or stumbles along the road.
Unless you have worn the moccasins, he wears,
Or stumbled beneath the same load.

There may be tears in his soles that hurt
Though hidden away from view.
The burden he bears placed on your back
May cause you to stumble and fall, too.

Don't sneer at the man who is down today
Unless you have felt the same blow
That caused his fall or felt the shame
That only the fallen know.

You may be strong, but still the blows
That were his, unknown to you in the same way,
May cause you to stagger and fall, too.

Don't be too harsh with the man that sins.
Or pelt him with words, or stone, or disdain.
Unless you are sure you have no sins of your own,
And its only wisdom and love that your heart contains.

For you know if the tempter's voice
Should whisper as soft to you,
As it did to him when he went astray,
It might cause you to falter, too.

Just walk a mile in his moccasins
Before you abuse, criticize and accuse.
If just for one hour, you could find a way
To see through his eyes, instead of your own muse.

I believe you'd be surprised to see
That you've been blind and narrow minded, even unkind.
There are people on reservations and in the ghettos
Who have so little hope, and too much worry on their minds.

Brother, there but for the grace of God go you and me.
Just for a moment, slip into his mind and traditions
And see the world through his spirit and eyes
Before you cast a stone or falsely judge his conditions.

Remember to walk a mile in his moccasins
And remember the lessons of humanity taught to you by your elders.
We will be known forever by the tracks we leave
In other people's lives, our kindnesses and generosity.

Take the time to walk a mile in his moccasins.

<https://davidwpierce2001.wordpress.com/2017/09/01/a-mile-in-another-mans-moccasins/>

iv <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/team-hoyt-run-boston-marathon/story?id=23288967>