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FOREWORD BY CHRISTINA EDMONDSON

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# HOPE

AIN'T A  
HUSTLE

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*Persevering by Faith  
in a Wearying World*



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PART 1

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**THE STORM  
BEFORE  
THE CALM**

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InterVarsity Press



# LIVING IN THE DANGER ZONE

*Before we determine how to live in a world where  
our highest hopes are not satisfied, we must ask,  
What does one do under such circumstances?*

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.,  
“SHATTERED DREAMS”

*I was introduced to the CrossFit fitness* training method in 2010. CrossFit is “constantly varied functional movement performed at high intensity.”<sup>1</sup> There are several benchmark workouts known simply as “the girls.” There’s Annie, Barbara, Cindy, Diane, Elizabeth, Fran, Grace, Helen, Jackie, Kelly, Linda, Mary, and Nancy.

Why female names for these benchmark workouts? Well, it doesn’t have much to do with gender. These workouts are named after hurricanes. CrossFit decided to follow the pattern of the National Weather Service, which started to assign female names to storms after 1953 because they believed “short, distinctive given names in written as well as spoken communications is quicker and less subject to error.”<sup>2</sup> Greg Glassman, the founder of CrossFit, wrote, “This convenience and logic inspired our granting a special group of workouts women’s names, but anything that leaves you flat on your back and incapacitated only to lure you back for more at a later date certainly deserves naming.”<sup>3</sup>

These workouts are just like hurricanes. There's a calm before the storm. You're feeling fine, talking with your fellow gym members after the coach has taken you through a nice warm-up, getting you ready to work out. Then she starts the timer, counting down to the start of the workout. "Ten seconds!" she yells. "3-2-1, go!" are the next words out of her mouth and all hell breaks loose. At a certain point, you feel as though you might die. If you can think at all, you're asking yourself, *Why am I here, doing this voluntarily?* The workout ends and you wonder, *Am I dead?* The devastation in the gym is evident as people lay on the floor all over the place, making sweat angels.

This is just what happens in a hurricane. There's calm, and then there's the realization that the storm has hit and you are no longer in control. Once the storm passes, there's chaos. Devastation is all around.

What we discover in the opening chapter of the book of Hebrews is a reversal of that order. There is a storm taking place in the Pastor's congregation.<sup>4</sup> Persecution and suffering are a reality in their lives. Their world has turned upside down. Because of this they are losing hope, tempted to drift away from their faith in Jesus Christ. They want a release from the pressure. Following Jesus is more costly than they had anticipated. They're asking, "Is it worth it?" They're in the height of the workout, when the pressure is most intense, and they want to quit. But they need to endure. The Pastor will say to them in Hebrews 10:35-36, "Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised."

What is interesting, though, is how he begins to address their concerns. He wants them to endure, not to give up. But he does not start out his letter, his sermon, by saying, "Hold on," "Don't be discouraged," or "Keep the faith." These are all statements he will make later in the letter. But his starting point is with the unrivaled glory, majesty, and authority of the Son of God. The supremacy of Jesus Christ is their source of eternal hope in a topsy-turvy, upside-down world.

Key to the concept of hope are our earnest expectations, desires, and wishes. Not only that, but it is commonly understood that what we desire is *good* hope. Indeed, in the New Testament the noun and verb for hope, as well as their derivatives, “never indicate a vague or a fearful anticipation, but always the expectation of something good.”<sup>5</sup> In the book of Hebrews, hope is intimately connected to covenant. The Pastor refers to covenant more than all the other writers of the New Testament combined. The word is directly used or implied twenty-five times in Hebrews.<sup>6</sup>

You see, every one of us faces the dangerous reality of having to live in a world where our highest hopes are not satisfied and often dashed. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. asked, “What does one do under such circumstances?” How do we live with good hope in the danger zone of unfulfilled expectations? When the things that we earnestly desire or wish for if we could have our own way remain out of reach? When what we truly believe in seems to be a lie? When we realize that the world is full of chaos?

## CHAOS

There is perhaps no other chapter in the Bible that displays the divinity of Jesus Christ more strongly than the first chapter of Hebrews. You cannot read it and conclude that the Bible declares Jesus to be a mere prophet. No. He’s God. The message is that the only way you will be able to keep hope alive is if you are clear on who Jesus is.

You see, there’s a question that I have not posed yet: how do we know that what we’re hoping for is what we *ought* to be hoping for? No encouragement to keep the faith is going to have any teeth unless we are gripped by the incomparable glory of Jesus the Christ. Make no mistake about it—unless your heart is beating to the rhythm of the grandeur, the bigness, the glory of Jesus, you’ll never think that being a Christian is worth it.

The letter begins almost like the opening words to Star Wars, “Long ago in a galaxy far far away . . .” But this is no sci-fi tale. The first thing the Pastor wants to remind us of is that God has spoken.

Long ago at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

At various times in history and in different ways, God raised up and anointed prophets to declare his word with authority: Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, and on and on for centuries. God spoke to his people through the prophets to direct them to himself. It was always so that they would know what was necessary for them to honor and glorify him. When he spoke, he said all that he wanted to say. He didn't leave out anything that was necessary.

God has not been silent, but we are often deaf. He spoke so that we would know him and understand who he is. Still, as glorious as the word spoken through the prophets was, it was varied, diverse, and fragmented because the prophets were many in number. A change took place when Jesus came on the scene. In these last days, the Pastor says, God has spoken to us by his unique and only Son.

When God the Son took on human flesh and was born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who are under the law (Galatians 4:4), Jesus' word became the final, complete, full Word of God. That's why he says in the first verse of Hebrews 2, "Therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it." If the word of the various prophets was glorious and authoritative, how much more glorious and authoritative is the message given to us by Jesus? God's word to *us* in Christ has been spoken fully and finally. "These last days," then, are the days of fulfillment—despite what life around us looks like.

In other words, God has upped the ante. The Son is far superior to the prophets. This first verse sets the tone and theme of the whole letter. Jesus is supreme over everything that came before him—prophets, priests, and kings. It all pointed toward him. He is the full and final Word of God.



He is not just one of the prophets. He is the heir of all things. His inheritance is the whole world. He came to lay claim on the whole creation as his own possession because he is the one through whom the world was created. He is the glorious radiance and exact imprint of God's essence. He is God and he makes the glory of God visible to us. That's why Jesus could say to his disciples, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Who else but God upholds the universe by his powerful word? What the Pastor is telling his people is their Savior is the one who carries the universe along to its stated goal. Can you see why, when encouraging Christians to endure, the Pastor begins with Jesus' glory? You almost have to ask how the description could possibly get any better. What more could you say to describe how glorious Jesus is? But then you read the second part of verse 3.

After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

In these few words, he lets us know that Jesus is not only the glorious prophet, but also the glorious priest. Just like the comparison between God's word through the prophets and God's word through the Son, there is a comparison between the ongoing work of the Old Testament priests and the final work of the great high priest Jesus Christ.

In the Old Testament, God appointed Aaron as the first high priest. All the priests came from his lineage. Their basic job description was to offer sacrifices in the presence of God on behalf of the people to cover the sins of the nation. This was necessary because God in his mercy had chosen a people for himself. He promised them, "I will be your God, and you will be my people" (cf. Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 24:7; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Hebrews 8:10). The problem is that all people are sinners and disobey God, and God will not dwell in the midst of sin. The reality of his holiness demands that sin be dealt with if anyone is going to be in his presence.

In the Old Testament, God provided a line of priests whose daily ministry was to atone for their own sins and the sins of the people by sacrificing lambs and bulls and goats.<sup>7</sup> It was a gory and gruesome scene. Blood flowed in the tabernacle every day. That is how seriously God takes sin. He reminds them in Hebrews 9:22, “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”

Every day blood was shed so the people would not be consumed. God’s punishment for sin fell on lambs and bulls and goats. But as the Pastor says in Hebrews 10:4, “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” The blood of bulls and goats could never finally, fully, and completely take care of the problem of sin. So, the same sacrifices had to continually be offered over and over again.

But when the one who is the radiance of the glory of God came, he came as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus came as the unblemished, spotless Lamb of God. He came both as the sacrificial offering and the offeror. He is the great high priest who offered himself as the only one who could crush sin. As he was beaten and whipped, as the blood flowed from his head, his hands, his feet, purification was made for the sins of everyone who puts their trust in him. It is as the hymn writer says,

See from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down:  
Did e’er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?<sup>8</sup>

Jesus made final and complete purification for sins. How do we know that it’s final and complete? What was missing in the tabernacle when the priests went in to offer the blood of atonement? The chair! They had to stand daily offering the sacrifices. There was no chair because there was no rest. But when Jesus made purification for sins, the Bible says that he took his seat. The work was finished. There no longer remains any need of further sacrifice for sin.

Often our struggle to endure with hope is connected to our inability to cleanse our communities by our own efforts. We don't have the ability to permanently cleanse anything, even our own bodies! And we're unable to make anything or anyone spotless enough to appear before God.

The Pastor is showing his readers that Jesus is the glorious priest because they're being tempted to take matters into their own hands. They're tempted to make up their own way of salvation, and his message is that Jesus is the only one who can make the impure pure. The best place to find ourselves is in Jesus, not only because Jesus is the glorious prophet and the merciful high priest, but he's also the great and glorious king. The fact that he sat down tells us that he has completed his work of purification for sins and that he is the supreme king and judge. He didn't sit down in any old place, but at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Jesus prayed to the Father in John 17:4-5, "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed." He completed his work and was restored to his rightful position in heaven as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Because of where he sits, we can only know him today as the glorious king by faith. He reigns supreme over heaven and earth.

But as Hebrews 2:8 tells us, "At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him." Fear, doubt, pain, oppression, hardship, and unbelief cloud our ability to see everything in subjection to him. The declaration that the Son is heir of all things, the exact imprint of God's nature, and the sustainer of the world is sweeping. There is truly no area of existence, material or immaterial over which he does not have absolute authority. This is meant to be a comfort to those who believe and a warning to those who don't. The Pastor is writing to people who claim to know Jesus. He loves them and is pained that some are drifting away because things are getting rough.

What I love about the Pastor is that he's not setting forth the divine nature of Jesus as an idea that's disconnected from life. He's not just giving

them head knowledge. None of this rich theology about Jesus Christ is given in a vacuum. It is the epitome of theology applied to life. Jesus's divinity is important precisely because the world is full of chaos.

In verses 10-12, he quotes from Psalm 102:25-27:

Of old you laid the foundation of the earth,  
and the heavens are the work of your hands.  
They will perish, but you will remain;  
they will all wear out like a garment.  
You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away,  
but you are the same, and your years have no end.

This is what God the Father says to God the Son. But why is he quoting Psalm 102? The psalm's heading from the Hebrew text is, "A Prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint to the Lord."

The psalmist is in the middle of a storm. Jerusalem has been destroyed and the temple is in ruins. He's overwhelmed by the chaos of this world. His world had been rocked. The temple was supposed to be the place where God made his name dwell. It was the evidence that the Lord was with his people. Now, what the psalmist thought was most secure and stable is gone. The Babylonians have crushed them and swept them into exile.

When I was young, my father worked at the World Trade Center. He usually took the train home to Brooklyn from work, but there were a few occasions when we drove into Manhattan to pick him up. I remember being parked outside waiting for Dad to come out and looking up at the towers through the car window. No matter how hard I strained my neck, I couldn't see the top. Those buildings amazed me. In my mind, they were permanent fixtures in New York City, as the pictures of the city skyline always included the Twin Towers.

Obviously, I was wrong as the towers fell on 9/11 and the city was thrown into distress.

The chaos reflected in the faces of New Yorkers that day recalls that of the psalmist.

For my days pass away like smoke,  
and my bones burn like a furnace.  
My heart is struck down like grass and has withered;  
I forget to eat my bread.  
Because of my loud groaning  
my bones cling to my flesh. (Psalm 102:3-5)

Then there's a turning point in verse 12 when he says,

But you, O LORD, are enthroned forever;  
you are remembered throughout all generations.

Amid the chaos that's around him, the psalmist realizes that the only stable, unchanging reality is that Yahweh, the Lord, is enthroned forever.

That's the message of Hebrews 1. The distress you feel is real, but the one who walked the streets of Jerusalem and said "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28) is none other than Yahweh, the Lord your God. He's telling them that Jesus is the one who laid the earth's foundations in the beginning, the one who created the heavens. Those created things will wear out, be rolled up like an old garment, and be changed, but the Lord continues forever. He is the same and his years have no end.

## **CALM**

The glory of Jesus Christ enables calm while chaos is raging. We live in a nation divided and polarized politically, socioeconomically, racially, and on and on the list goes. But the Son loves righteousness and hates wickedness. Therefore he is anointed by God with the oil of gladness (Psalm 45:6-7; Hebrews 1:8-9).

What's so beautiful about the Pastor applying Psalm 45 to Jesus is that it is a wedding psalm. It describes the royal bride as she prepares to marry the king. Her heart overflows because her husband is the most handsome of men. Grace is poured on his lips. Her husband is the mighty one in

splendor and majesty. He rides out victoriously for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness.

But then the psalmist seems to go too far and says of the king, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever” (v. 6). The Pastor is letting us know there’s no problem at all because this psalm is really about Jesus. It is an Old Testament view into the reality of the Trinity, one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit. The one who is addressed as God is anointed by his God with the oil of gladness. Because of the Son’s just and righteous rule, because he loves justice and hates lawlessness, the Father has such unsurpassed joy that he anoints the Son with the oil of gladness.

Jesus is the king and husband, and the church is his bride. He is the one who is the most handsome of men. He is the one with grace on his lips. He is the one who in splendor and majesty rules with absolute justice and righteousness for the cause of truth. And those who are under his rule and authority are the companions of those God describes in verse 9. His joy and righteousness are the blessings he gives his companions.

The recipients of the letter to the Hebrews needed to hear that because life seemed to be unjust. They were suffering persecution for their faith. They needed to know that the justice of the Son overrules the injustice of Rome. The justice of our Savior overrules the injustice of this world. That reality is what empowers the people of God to endure ugly injustice and to see beauty rise from its ashes.

When will we see righteousness and justice rule the day? Where is the world going? The optimist says, “Things are getting better. As technology advances we’re improving the lives of people.” The pessimist says, “Everything’s going to hell in a handbasket!”

But Hebrews reminds us of where the world is really going. It’s going to the place where every knee will bow to Jesus. Creation is not under the authority of angels. It’s not under the authority of presidents and kings. It’s under the Son’s authority.

That’s why what he says in the last verse of the chapter is so encouraging: “Aren’t the angels all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the

sake of those who are to inherit salvation?” Don’t focus on the angels! They serve the Son. He sends them out to minister to his people!

I’m convinced that he says this not just to correct their bad theology, but to encourage them with the truth. There’s a calm that comes after the storm. There’s a day coming when God “will wipe away every tear from [his people’s] eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

There’s not only a calm that comes after the storm, but there’s a calm that comes in the storm for the people of God. This truth becomes our comfort in the danger zone when our highest hopes do not seem to be satisfied.





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