



Hebrews

Path 8: Persevering in Gospel Truth

Hebrews

Supplemental Reading:
“Experiencing the Presence of God”
By: A.W. Tozer

Memory Verses:
1:3, 3:6, 9:27, 10:24-25, 12:1-2

Disciple-makers,

The Gospel Journey is about studying the Word of God, led by the Spirit of God, in a discipleship relationship, to grow in the grace of the Gospel. The Field Guide is NOT to be taught as a Bible Study or even as the primary curriculum for the Gospel Journey. The curriculum is the Word of God, and we want there to be great freedom for those in a group to discuss what the Holy Spirit has been revealing to them in their study that week. We do not want the discussion to be limited to the content covered in the Field Guide.

With that being said, the Field Guide is an effort to prepare you for significant theological terms, concepts, and themes that will likely arise in the course of discussion in a given week of reading. Thus, we encourage you to read over the content we have chosen to include in the Field Guide a couple times before your weekly discussion, so that you are able to explain these terms, concepts, and themes faithfully and clearly as they come up. If they do not come up naturally, we'd encourage you to bring them up at some point in the discussion, as we believe they are things that a mature and equipped disciple of Christ needs to understand.

Again, our hope is that far more than what is covered in the Field Guide be brought up in discussion each week, and that this tool might prepare you to explain foundational Gospel terms, concepts, and themes found in each week's reading. Ultimately the Gospel Journey is about studying the Word of God, led by the Spirit of God, in a discipleship relationship, in order to grow in the grace of the Gospel. May your journey be blessed!

The Harvest Team

Podcast

We created a Podcast as an additional resource that expands on the Field Guide while providing additional insight into the weekly reading. To access this podcast, open the podcast app on your phone and search for “The Gospel Journey.” You can also access the Podcast at: www.harvestmemphis.org/tgj-podcast.



Introduction to Hebrews

The letter to the Hebrews was most likely written between 60-70AD, but the author of the letter remains unknown with any certainty. The apostle Paul is often argued to be the author by some, Apollos is proposed as an author by others, but the reality remains that we cannot ultimately know who God used to pen this letter. This has been a cause for concern for some, but we need to keep in mind that regardless of the human vessel God used, the words of this letter have God as their origin and not a human author. What we do know is that the writer has an intimate knowledge of the church to which he is writing, and he is making a passionate plea for this church to remain faithful to the gospel message. Throughout this letter, the author is making an argument that Jesus is greater than the Old Covenant religion of Judaism, and he is pleading with the people not leave the Christian faith and return to the Jewish religion. The author will offer stern and sobering warnings for anyone tempted to commit the sin of apostasy (leaving the faith), and he will stress that perseverance until the end will be evidence of true and abiding faith.

A Word on the Warning Passages:

The five warning passages in Hebrews are found in 2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; and 12:14-29. The main thrust of these passages is to warn this church not to commit the sin of apostasy and leave the Christian faith and return to Judaism. That said, for centuries these passages have sparked great debate around the idea of “can someone lose their salvation?.” Let’s start by acknowledging that there is a better way to phrase the question of can someone lose their salvation. The simple answer to that question is no. Nobody can “lose” their salvation in the sense that they misplaced it and have searched and cannot find it. Furthermore, no one can lose the promises and blessings of their salvation because of poor performance in the Christian life or because of sin (see also John 10:10). The better question would be, can someone willing, and consciously, renounce their salvation and walk away? The debate over how to answer that question will continue, but if we step back and look at Hebrews and the greater teaching of the New Testament, then we can reasonably conclude that the clear teaching about recognizing true salvation is found in someone’s perseverance. Hebrews urges us to continue in the faith because that is the only way to be certain that we are in Christ. Whether a person who walks away was a believer who forfeited their salvation willingly or if they were simply never truly converted ultimately is a moot point

in the sense that their final destination is the same. Only God truly knows someone's heart, and in the pattern of Hebrews, it is better for us to exhort each other to continue in the faith and entrust the more mysterious and unknowable matters to God.

God's Word to His People (1:1-2)

One of God's great kindnesses to us is that He has chosen to communicate with His creation. In these opening lines of Hebrews, the author reminds us that God has always spoken to His people. In the Old Testament we see God speaking through the prophets, but now, in the New Covenant, we see that God has spoken to us more fully and completely through His Son. Jesus is the greatest and fullest form of a word from God.

See Also: Joel 2:28, 1 Peter 1:20

The Supremacy of God's Son (1:3-13)

Hebrews 1:3-4 are some of the most beautiful and informative verses we have with respects to the person and work of Christ. Jesus is superior to all beings because He is God, and His work is superior to the work of other beings because He did something no one else could and that His "sitting down" signifies that the work of offering sacrifices for sin is complete. The author moves on from this point to begin his argument that will span most of the first two chapters; namely, that Jesus is superior to the angels.

See Also: 2 Cor 4:4, 2 Sam 7:14, Ps 102

The Role of Angels (1:14)

Now that the author has stated Jesus is superior to angels, he takes a moment to remind us of one of the primary roles of angels: ministering to people who have come to know Christ. Thus, an angel cannot be greater than Christ if they are the servants of the ones Christ came to save.

Lastly, it is normal to ask why is such attention given to the relationship of Christ to angels? While we do not usually spend much time thinking or talking on angels today, angels held a high place of honor in some Jewish schools of thought. We must keep in mind that the author is making his case as to why people should not leave Christ and go back to Judaism so he begins by showing that Jesus is greater than the angels that Judaism would have revered.

See Also: Ps 34:7, Gen 28:12, Mt 18:10

We Must Not Drift (2:1-4)

The author begins this section by calling us to conscious, disciplined remembrance of the gospel message declared through the Son. The idea of “drifting away” is a nautical term related to a ship veering off course and no longer heading to the proper port. The author then offers a sober warning that if the Old Covenant came with consequences, then the same would be true of the New Covenant but in more severe ways. This church needs to remember their salvation and the works of God’s power that they witnessed in order to course-correct, so they do not drift away. This has implications for us as well. Often it is our familiarity with the gospel message that causes us to lose sight of the beauty and necessity of our salvation. We too must make conscious, intentional efforts to remember who we were before Christ, the work of Christ, and what is now true of us because of Him. See Also: Acts 2:22, 43; 7:53

Made Perfect through Suffering (2:10)

On the surface, this is one of the more confusing lines in the book of Hebrews, and it is best to start with what it cannot mean. Jesus is God in the flesh, so He was, is, and always will be perfect. This passage cannot mean that Jesus was not perfectly Holy. The idea of being “made perfect” is the idea of bringing something to maturity or completion, and with respects to Christ’s role as a human sent to accomplish God’s plan of salvation, that plan could only be brought to completion through His suffering. Therefore, this verse is a condensed statement referencing Jesus coming in the flesh and accomplishing the Father’s will in securing salvation through suffering on behalf of God’s people.

See Also: Heb 5:9, 7:28

Consider Christ (3:1)

The author begins this section by calling us to devotional concentration when he tells us to “consider Christ.” The idea here is that of focused thought. This is a good reminder for us to take some intentional time to sit and reflect on who Jesus is, what he did, and who we are in Him.

See Also: Eph 4:1, Rom 15:8

Superiority to Moses (3:1-6)

After making his case in chapters 1-2 as to Christ’s superiority over angels, the author now begins to make his case for Christ’s superiority over Moses. This is a crucial point in the author’s case for not leaving the Christian faith and returning to the old covenant system of the Mosaic law. Why would you return to something that is inferior to what you are leaving? This is the author’s question to his people, but it is also a heart-piercing question for us. To what systems, sins, or old ways of living are we tempted to return?

See Also: Num 12:7, Ps 105:26, 1 Pet 2:5

Hold Fast (3:6)

In a community that is experiencing some departing from the faith, the author graciously reminds us that one way to have assurance in

your standing as a son/daughter of God is to cling to Christ and persevere. This is a call to stay faithful until the end. If this defines the trajectory of our lives in Christ, then we will experience the comfort that we indeed will be with Christ for eternity.

See Also: Ps 119:33, Mt 10:22

The Deceitfulness of Sin (3:13)

Before we look into verse 13, we need to acknowledge that this verse is found in the middle of one of the warning passages. Remember to refer back to the beginning of the field guide for some help in navigating each of the five warning passages throughout the book.

The deception of sin is threatening the people in this church by tempting them to consider an alternate path to Christ. Sin's deceit is causing them to question the superiority of Christ and their desire to follow Him. Sin seems to be whispering to them that following Christ is bringing them hardship and persecution so why not go back to your Jewish faith that will not draw as much opposition from your surrounding culture?

This one verse warning against the deceitfulness of sin has tremendous implications for us. In our context, it is always a temptation to depart from God's ways and buy into the cultural narrative on issues of sexuality, gender, marriage, God's wrath, self-centeredness, etc...

We must not be deceived! Generally speaking, if we find ourselves gravitating toward cultural views and allowing those views to determine how we view the Bible, then it is a good time for us to ask the Lord if sin is currently deceiving us. See Also: Is 44:20, Rom 7:11

God's Promise of Rest (4:1, 3, 9)

The idea of “rest” can be found as a Biblical theme from Genesis to Revelation. While most people have applied this in the physical dimension of resting from our demanding schedules (which is a good practical principle), the biblical idea of rest is more significant. Weekly physical rest from our labor is merely a shadow of the ultimate rest that is found in Jesus. This is an all-encompassing rest that puts our souls at peace with God and man. This is a rest that reassures us that a day is coming when we will live with our Lord and the anxiety of sin and stress will no longer exist. The author of Hebrews is arguing that the Old Covenant promises and the promised land the Israelites entered into were insufficient to provide the ultimate rest that all of humanity longs for. This is at the heart of what Jesus is saying in Matthew 11:28 when Jesus calls us to Himself to truly find our rest.

See Also: Ps 95:11, Heb 12:15, Rev 14:13

The Living Word (4:12–13)

God's word is true and powerful. One of the promises in God's word is that His people will be faithful until the end, and that is the promise that the author is urging his readers to heed. He is teaching them that the word of God can pierce every heart and will illuminate real and false faith. This passage is also a good reminder for us to pause and evaluate our relationships with God's word. Do we believe in its power and promises? Do we repent when our lives are not biblically aligned? Do we trust that God's ways are best and allow the scriptures to examine our hearts and motives? These are great questions to ask each other and ourselves as we continue to grow in Christ-likeness.

See Also: Jer 23:29, 1 Pet 1:23, Rev 1:16

Our Sympathetic High Priest (4:15)

One great truth of our faith is that Jesus knows what it is like to be us. Jesus was fully human and felt temptation and suffering to the fullest extent. This gives Christians great comfort in laying our hearts before the Lord knowing that He knows, through tangible experience, what it is to feel what we feel and experience what we experience. We can never go to Jesus and accuse him of “not understanding” or say to Him “if only you knew what it is like to be me.” Jesus does know, and this passage teaches us that He is sympathetic and understanding.

See Also: Is 53:3, 1 John 3:5

The Duty of a Priest (5:1)

Generally speaking, the priests in the Old Testament made the human connection to God visible. They led the people in fulfilling the required sacrifices and feasts the law prescribed in order for God to find the people acceptable. Furthermore, there was one priest who held the office of high priest and once a year his job was to enter into the Holy Of Holies and offer an atoning sacrifice on behalf of all the people. Here the author is telling us that Jesus is the ultimate high priest. He makes the human connection to God visible because He was human and divine at the same time and shows humanity's the path back to God is through Himself. He functions as the great High Priest because He made a final atoning sacrifice for His people so that all who are found in Him are acceptable to God with no additional sacrifice or work needed.

See Also: Heb 2:17; 8:3

Obedience and Perfection (5:8-9)

This is one of the more difficult verses not only in the book of Hebrews but the New Testament in general. What does it mean for Jesus to learn obedience and to be made perfect? While this looks very confusing at first glance, it becomes less intimidating if we see this as speaking about Jesus' humanity. In giving up His heavenly privilege and taking on human flesh, Jesus

experienced what it was to suffer and die as God's appointed sacrifice for our sins. The idea of being made perfect can also be read as "bringing to completion," and that connotes the idea that God's plan of salvation was perfectly completed by Jesus in His suffering and dying on our behalf as a human.

See Also: Phil 2:8, Heb 2:10

Christian Growth & Maturity (5:12-14; 6:1-3)

The author begins this section with an analogy of a child's development and Christian growth. As a child continues in age, they move from milk to solid food. This indicates they are physically growing and maturing in a healthy way. Likewise, Christians who continually have to learn the same lessons and the same points over and over again are not spiritually maturing and growing. The author's point is that his readers shouldn't be past flirting with returning to Judaism, and its practices, because they have already had those discussions and had seemingly moved on. To still be struggling with this is like a child going back from solid food to only drinking milk.

That said, there will always be things we need to revisit and relearn in the Christian life. However, the difference is that we should not need to be continually convinced that Christ is best and that He is the only way back to the Father.

See Also: 1 Cor 3:2, Phil 3:12-14

Impossible to Restore to Repentance (6:4-6)

This is a very difficult passage and some helpful ways to navigate it are found in the introduction to the field guide under the heading “A Word on the Warning Passages.”

See Also: Ps 34:8, Heb 10:32

The Christian Life: Waiting on the Lord (6:15)

In a context where they are suffering for their faith and finding that nothing is coming easily with respects to their earthly life, some of these men and women are growing weary and are tempted to believe that God will never deliver them. It is easy for us to do the same thing. The central question for us is, do we trust God? If so, then even when it is incredibly hard we will wait on the Lord in patience as we believe His ways and His timing are best.

See Also: Ps 27, Rom 4:13

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Jesus, the Greater Priest (7:1-17)

Thus far, the author of Hebrews has presented Jesus as superior to angels and Moses, and now he is making the case that Jesus is superior to the Old Testament (Levitical) priests. To make this point, we are introduced to the character of Melchizedek from Genesis 14. The importance of Melchizedek is seen in several ways, but three main ones are: 1. that his priestly order precedes the Levitical priesthood, 2. Psalms 110 says his priestly order is forever and Jesus is pronounced a Melchizedekian priest, and 3. because Abraham (and by proxy all his descendants) pay a tithe to Melchizedek. These three points establish the Melchizedekian priesthood as superior to the Levitical priesthood and not the further reasons for this community to abandon their Christian faith and return to the lesser priesthood of Judaism.

See Also: Gen 14:18-20, Num 24:16, John 6:57

Able to Save to the Uttermost (7:25)

The idea of “uttermost” is a reference relating to an unending duration of time. Thus, this passage becomes one of great comfort as we are assured that we have the great, resurrected high priest Jesus always assuring us of our standing before God because He continually intercedes on our behalf.

See Also: Rom 8:34, Heb 9:24

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A Covenant with Better Promises (8:6)

Jesus is the greater priest that mediates, a better, New Covenant. The New Covenant is one in which forgiveness of sins is final and assured in the completed work of Christ, and entrance into this covenant is open to all who respond to the work of Christ in repentance and faith.

2 Cor. 3:6-11, Gal 3:21-22

The Fault in the Old Covenant (8:7-9)

It is important that we do not hear the idea of “fault” as God making a mistake or not doing something perfectly. The Old Covenant was never established as God’s final covenant in His saving work. It was a temporary system that was to help God’s people see their sin, their inability to escape the penalty for sin, and then ultimately long for a greater covenant that could cleanse them from their sin.

See Also: Jer 31:31-34, Rom 11:27

Old Covenant: Now Obsolete (8:13)

The Old Covenant has been replaced and is no longer binding or valid. This is another point of emphasis for the author as he is exhorting his people to stay true to Christ and the New Covenant as it is the only covenant through which God now relates to his people.

See Also: Jer 31, 2 Cor 5:17

Regulations for Worship (9:1)

In both the Old and New Covenants, God has ordained a proper way to worship Him. In the Old Covenant, it was displayed in the pattern of the tabernacle/temple and related to the people by the priests. In the New Covenant (see John 4), God says that we are to worship Him in spirit and truth. Worship does not only happen at one location at one time; instead it embodies the idea of a continually obedient lifestyle. See also: Leviticus 10 and Colossians 3:16, 1 Tim. 3:14-15, 2 Tim. 4:2

Perfecting the Conscience (9:9, 9:14)

One great difference between the Old and New Covenants is their actual effect on their members. The Old Covenant was ceremonial and pointed forward to the greater, New Covenant to come. The New Covenant, because of the work of Christ, is able to cleanse and remove sin from its members and make them righteous. The Old Covenant was unable to do this in ultimate ways because the blood of animals failed to meet the requirements of a final, atoning sacrifice for humanity. See Also: Heb 7:19, 1 Pet 4:12, 1 John 1:7

Christ the Mediator (9:15, 24)

One way to think about the role of a mediator is someone who brings two parties together. In this context, Christ is the mediator that brings together God and humanity. He does this first by being both God and man and second by being the man who paid the penalty for sin demanded by God. Thus, in one person the two parties are brought together, and reconciliation is made possible. Jesus now stands before the Father as the perfect intercessor for man and stands before man as the perfect image of God.

See Also: Ex 32:13, Rom 8:28, Heb 8:2

The Coming Judgment (9:27)

This is a sobering and poignant verse. Each of us only has one life to exhaust for the sake of the gospel. We do not get a second chance, and there is no opportunity for salvation after death. There is simply this life, death, and judgment.

See Also: MT 16:27, Rom 6:23

Purpose of the Old System (10:1-4)

This section is another reminder that the purpose of the Old Covenant sacrifices was not to cleanse one from sin as much as they were to remind someone of their sin. This system was meant to make God's people long for a better, final sacrifice that would do what the blood of bulls and goats could not.

See Also: Lev 16:21, Col 2:17, Heb 9:7

Pleasing God (10:5-10)

In this section, the author is urging us to not fall victim to a false gospel of religious ritual. External acts of worship (church attendance, devotional life, evangelism, etc...) are never the basis of our acceptance by God. In fact, we can spend our whole lives doing religious acts without ever actually knowing God relationally. God is after our hearts. The follower of Christ lives a life in response to the love God has first shown us, and not a life that tries to earn love from God through good deeds and religious rituals.

See also Matthew 5:17-48, Luke 22:19, 1 Cor 11:24,

Draw Near to God (10:22)

This verse is a great reminder of the relational nature of God and His love for His people. God's children do not need to fear their Heavenly

Father. We are privileged to draw near and taste, without hesitation, the depth of God's love for us.

See Also: Ezk 36:25, James 4:8

Do Not Neglect to Meet Together (10:24-25)

A life of Christian isolation is a foreign idea in the New Testament. For any of us to live in isolation is to necessarily place ourselves in a vulnerable situation where we hide our sin and are carried away by doubt and unbelief. This is one reason why church membership is so important. We need fellow brothers and sisters in the faith who are committed to encouraging and exhorting one another to finish the race and stay faithful until the end.

See Also: Acts 2:42, Rom 13:11-13

A Final Warning (10:26-39)

This section, like the previous warning passages in Hebrews is a difficult text to navigate, and we again refer you to the introduction of the field guide for some helpful ways to think through this passage. Ultimately, one aspect of this passage that should grip our attention is the horrific fate that awaits those who die apart from Christ. Eternal separation from God is certainly not our only motive for evangelism, but passages like this should stir us to urgent action and compassion toward those who do not know Christ.

See also John 10:22-30, Phil. 1:6

What is Faith? (11:1,6)

One way to think about faith is that it is a tangible expression of trust. Thus, faith is practically seen when our daily decisions are informed by trusting that God's ways are best. At times, the idea of faith has been talked about as being "blind," but that is misleading in a sense. It is true that we are called to trust God even though we do not fully see what He is doing, but our faith is not "blind" in the sense that there is not good, reasonable evidence for our faith. Faith and facts live in a complementary relationship with one another, and facts about God frequently serve as catalysts that deepen our faith (trust) in God. For example, knowing that God is always with me helps me trust Him during the times my emotions tell me He is absent.

See Also: Jer 29:12-14, Rom 8:24, 2 Cor 4:18

Examples of Faith (11:7-12)

Hebrews 11 is widely known for its biography of the faithful giants of our faith. This chapter includes numerous biblical heroes including Noah, Abraham, and Moses. As we read through this list, keep in mind that all of these men and women are great examples of faithful living and faithful finishing. Furthermore, they also all have faithless and sinful moments along the way. This is not the list of the perfect but rather the

persevering, and it is a comforting pattern for us to follow as we all seek persevere until the end.
See Also: Gen 6:13-22, Gen 12:1-4, Gen 17:19

The Rewards of Faith (11:39-40)

After ending his list of biblical heroes, it is interesting to note that the author says his people actually are in a better position than these saints of old. What he means by that is that these figures simply had the promise of the coming Messiah but the recipients of this letter are living in a time when that promise had been fulfilled in the person of Christ. When the author says that these Old Testament saints are being “made perfect” through this New Testament church, he simply means that God is continuing to bring together His people from throughout human history and that this work is becoming more and more complete.

See Also: 1 Pet 1:12, Rev 6:11

Looking to Jesus (12:1–2)

Contextually, this church is undergoing persecution and is seeing friends and family leave the faith with some of them returning to Judaism. In this turbulent and trying time, the author says there is only one way forward, and that is to look to Christ. The same is true of us. Christ is our savior, our strength, and our example. He is our great high priest and our fellow family member. Christ promises to supply us with everything we need to navigate this life with perseverance until we obtain our new, ultimate life with Him for eternity.

See Also: 1 Cor 9:24, Eph 4:22 Heb 10:36

Struggling with Sin (12:3–4)

In our struggle with sin, we are called to remember the victory Christ had over sin, and the power He has made available to us to battle our own sin. We must draw near to Christ knowing that He knows what it is like to be us and He knows what it feels like to undergo infinitely more temptation than we will ever face.

See Also: Mt 10:24, Gal 6:9

The Discipline of the Lord (12:5–11)

We rarely think about the love and grace of God through the lens of discipline, but this is as much a manifestation of God's goodness as is His

forgiveness. God loves His children too much to let them live in sin without consequence. The greatest place for us to be is in an intimate relationship with God, and while Christ has removed us from the ultimate penalty of sin, we are not always removed from experiencing the consequences of our sin. These consequences are meant to be God's means for reminding us that life is not found outside of Him, and they are purposed to call us back to walking with the Lord.

See Also: Deut 8:5, Job 5:17, Ps 94:12

Sinai & Zion (12:18–29)

When reading this passage, it is critical to understand that Sinai and Zion are representative of the Old and New Covenants respectively. These two covenants are contrasted with each other in this section, and one main contrast is seen in the manner and mindset with which we can approach God. At Sinai the people approached with fear while the new covenant replaces that fear with consuming joy. Another contrast is seen in the orientation of the Old Covenant being found in the past while the New Covenant looks forward to an anticipated future in the new heavens and new earth.

See Also: Ex 19:16.19; Hag 2:6, Rev 14:1

Let Marriage Be Held in Honor (13:4)

There is a shift once we get to Hebrews 13 in that the author sets before us conduct that is becoming of people who belong to the New Covenant. One of his examples is the purity of the marriage bed, and we pause here to acknowledge this amidst our current cultural confusion with respects to marriage and sexuality. Marriage was created by God to display Christ's relationship with the church, and sex inside of marriage is the model of bringing two parties together in covenant unity. It is imperative that the church protect and pronounce a healthy, biblical view of marriage and sex as the truthful alternative to the cultural chaos.

See Also: 1 Cor 7:38, 1 Tim 4:3

Free from Love of Money (13:5–6)

If we are not entangled by the sexual immorality warned against in verse 4, then we must also realize that we may be tempted to the love of wealth and the false sense of comfort and control it provides. Often the root of chasing wealth is sinful discontent, and the antidote to sinful discontentment in this world is a vibrant, intimate walk with God.

See Also: Ps 118:6, Mt 6:25, 1 Tim 3:3,

Godly Leadership (13:7, 17)

The idea of authority is not popular with the cultural sensibilities of the modern west, but Christians are not called to arrange their lives around the cultural norms of their day. Submission to leaders is most readily seen in church members submission to the ordained elder leadership above them. Our attitude in this submission is to be one of joyful cooperation as we understand that these men are accountable to God for how they lead and shepherd the sheep entrusted to them.

See Also: 1 Tim 3:1-7, 1 Peter 5:1-11

Closing Doxology (13:20-21)

As the author brings this incredible work to a close, he strategically centers us on the most important truth of our faith, the resurrection of Christ. Without the resurrection, all is lost and none of our other beliefs matter. However, Jesus did rise from the dead, and that resurrection power is at work in God's people to equip and strengthen them to persevere faithfully until the end. May we all continually call upon the Lord's unending, spirit supplied power to enable us to live faithfully until the Lord returns or we go to be with Him.

See Also: 1 Cor 15:1-11, Col 4:18

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