

“Farewell My Lovely”  
Hebrews 5:5-10  
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In 1936 E. B. White wrote a sentimental goodbye to the Ford Model T.

The essay was called “Farewell My Lovely”.

It was originally published under a pseudonym.

The essay is mostly a detailed memory of the characteristics of the car.

And yet, while nostalgic and sentimental - - there is no doubt he has moved on.

He never implies that the Model T should be kept going forever.

The title of the essay after all - - is: “Farewell”.

He writes:

“I see by the Sears Roebuck catalogue that it is still possible to buy an axle for a 1909 Model T. Ford - - but I am NOT deceived. / The great days have faded - - the end is in sight!

Only one page is devoted to parts and accessories.

And yet - - everyone remembers springtimes - - when the Ford gadget section was larger than men’s clothing. / The last Model T was built in 1927 and the car is fading from what scholars call the American scene.”

That said, he still refers to the Model T. with awe and praise: “The old Ford practically WAS the American scene - - It was the miracle that God had wrought”

In the essay E.B. White says that the lore and legend that governed the Ford were boundless. / “Owners had theories about everything - - they discussed mutual problems in that wise infinitely resourceful way old women discuss rheumatism.”

“Springtime in the heyday of the Model T. was a delirious season. Owning a car was still a major excitement - - roads were still wonderful and bad.”

But for all of his delirious enthusiasm, he is telling about a memory.

This is not an argument for keeping the Model T on the road.

It is a farewell.

It is full of fondness and respect.

But it is a farewell.

So to SHIFT GEARS now...

Shifting gears - - now let's look to the Bible for something similar:

Years after the Psalms of the Old Testament were written, the author of the book of Hebrews in the New Testament wrote a farewell - - to the High Priesthood.

The great High Priest was named Melchizedek.

Melchizedek was an enigmatic Old Testament character mentioned only a few times.

Melchizedek appeared to Abraham in the book of Genesis chapter 14.

And the Priest is also mentioned in Psalm 110.

Other than that we don't know nearly as much about Melchizedek as we do about the Model T. / This High Priest was not found on every street in every city. / But priests were.

In the world of the ancient Hebrews - - a priest was the way to access God.

Priests made sacrifices to achieve atonement and reconciliation.

The sacrifices of priests in the life of the ancient Hebrews were common.

But just like cars did not disappear after the demise of the Model T. - - neither did the need for atonement and reconciliation disappear. / In the years after Jesus' death - - people hoped and prayed for forgiveness and reconciliation and atonement for sins. / But now there was a NEW way to do that. / Instead of a High Priest - - there was Jesus.

The book of Hebrews was written to connect Jesus to this new covenant idea.

The old sacrificial system of the Tabernacle was giving way for followers of Jesus.

But they were still deeply - - Hebrew - - and Jewish.

Many of Jesus early followers were - - sentimental about priests.

Or at least they respected the old priestly order.

Or at least they understood it.

In response, the book of Hebrews makes the case for Jesus as the new way to God.

Jesus - - is described as the new and more perfect High Priest.

Jesus - - is described as replacing human priestly intermediaries.

Jesus - - is perfected for this role - - through suffering.

By doing this, Hebrews basically says “farewell” to the old priestly system.

Farewell to the Old Testament way of doing things.

And Hebrews REJECTS NOSTALGIA.

Instead Hebrews points to the future.

Jesus was weak and suffered - - as a sacrifice!

So Jesus suffering and weakness - - was seen as a STRENGTH!

And that was something new.

And in some ways - - a dramatic improvement.

This letter in the New Testament is profoundly hopeful about the future.

SO if you have ever wondered - - can we really have hope in the future?

This may be a letter for you.

If you have ever looked for strength to face the future...

This picture of Jesus might be for you.

One of the questions the letter of Hebrews raises is about NOSTALGIA.

What place do memories of the PAST have - - in HOPES for the FUTURE?

Part of the answer is in our memories of suffering.

Jesus suffering and our suffering are connected.

And remembering mistakes of the past is different from nostalgia about the past.

We have to remember.

On some level if we forget the mistakes of our past - - we are doomed to repeat history.

But we have to figure out a way to move forward as well.

As I was thinking about all this, I delved deeper into the meaning of the word “nostalgia”.

Nostalgia is a compound word in Greek.

“Nostos” is combined with “Algos”.

Nostos-algos - - or: nostalgia.

The two words mean: HOME and PAIN.

Nostos means home or homecoming.

Algos means a pain or an ache.

Nostalgia is an ache or a pain - - associated with home.

It is where the expression “homesickness” comes from.

Originally the word was used in the 1690s in Switzerland to describe soldiers who were away from home. / “Swiss homesickness” was a condition of nostalgia that soldiers suffered from. / Military physicians in the 1600s did not talk about PTSD. / But they did describe soldiers who suffered from “nostalgia”.

By the 1800s the term nostalgia had morphed from being a sickness into a description of psychology and melancholy. / It was only more recently that the word came to mean soft sentimental feelings about things remembered - - or about the past.

What interested me about this history was the idea that there might be something dangerous about taking a seemingly harmless “sentimental journey”.

Maybe the way we deal with the past needs to be examined.

Lately we have had occasions to think about this in all kinds of ways.

Police violence and the history of racism...

These things have rightly led to discussions of police reform.

In other places there is a renewed discussion about reparations for past racism.

Statues have been taken down.

Television advertisements and Dr. Seuss books are under scrutiny.

Whatever you think about any one of these things, suffice it to say:

Maybe the way we deal with the past - - needs to be examined.

To return to the Bible then - - the book of Hebrews is about how we deal with the past.

Jesus is compared to an enigmatic High Priest from the book of Genesis.

Jesus is seen as a more perfect priest.

Perfected in suffering.

But a priest nevertheless.

Can this image for Jesus give us hope for the future?

That’s how it was intended.

Nostalgia about the past is not the way forward.

But neither is abandoning the past completely.

Somehow suffering can strengthen us.

Not that we should glorify our suffering.

But in that suffering we can find Jesus - - with us.

Jesus is a mediator and a companion.

Jesus IS one who prays for us - - when we can't find the strength to pray alone.

So what memories stick with you?

Are there things you want to bid "farewell"?

Do you want to find strength for the future?

Can we keep moving forward in HOPE?

We can - - if we trust Jesus to pray with us and in us.

Hebrews says that Jesus prays on our behalf.

Hebrews describes Jesus loud cries and tears.

Jesus who was so weak and humble that...

...he became stronger than anyone could have imagined.

May we trust that Jesus to come into our lives.

Amen.