

Hebrews: Jesus Is Better

This sermon series through the book of Hebrews was written by Pastor Russell Roberts and preached at Calvary Baptist Church from May through early December, 2019.

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A Better Messenger

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“Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the Lord of hosts. - Malachi 3:1

Today we begin a new series through the New Testament book of Hebrews. Over the next several months we are going to go through it chapter by chapter and verse by verse. We are going to read and discuss every passage in detail. As we do so, I trust that the Holy Spirit will open our minds and hearts to see and understand things we’ve never recognized or known before. Furthermore, this study will reinforce and give us a broader perspective about some things we’ve known for many years.

It is uncertain who wrote the book of Hebrews. Some speculate that Paul is the author, but there are several reasons to doubt this. Most notably, in all of Paul’s other letters he uses a standard greeting in which he names himself as the writer at the outset. This greeting is conspicuously absent from the book of Hebrews. In light of this, other experts have proposed that Hebrews was penned by one of Paul’s associates - perhaps Luke, Apollos, Barnabas, Silas, Philip, or Aquila and Priscilla. While its human author is unknown, we can be certain that Hebrews is inspired by the Holy Spirit and is ultimately the inerrant Word of God.

It is also uncertain to whom the letter of Hebrews was written. The book is placed in Scripture with the general epistles, which are letters written to a universal audience rather than a specific church, group, or individual. Some have disputed this classification by arguing that Hebrews was in fact written to a specific congregation of believers, perhaps those in Jerusalem. Whomever the intended recipients of this letter were, clearly they were Hebrews who had at some point converted from Judaism to Christianity.

Internal evidences found in the text suggest that Hebrews was written sometime around 65 AD. From where it was written is not known, though some have guessed that it may have originated in Rome. While many of the details surrounding its writing remain a mystery, the purpose of the letter is clear. As persecution against Christianity increased, many of the newly converted Jews were reverting back to their old ways. The writer of Hebrews urged them to remain faithful by presenting a thorough explanation of the superiority of Christ. For this reason, I have named this upcoming series “Hebrews: Jesus is Better”.

I. GOD HAS SPOKEN (verses 1-2a)

Since their creation, God has been speaking to and revealing Himself to mankind. He has not remained silent, aloof, or inaccessible. He has not hidden Himself from us. From the very beginning the LORD has continually communed with men. While there are certainly seasons

when God's voice has been absent or rarely heard, these periods are occasional and do not represent normal circumstances. God spoke regularly to people throughout the Old Testament, from the days of Adam through the birth of Christ. These ancient saints are "the fathers" to whom the LORD spoke "long ago".

God speaks to people in a variety of ways. In the Bible we find examples of God talking directly to particular people, speaking through dreams or visions to some, conversing with others through angels, and even sending human messengers called "prophets" to declare His word to many. The Old Testament prophets spoke "in many portions" (some much more extensively than others), which is why we categorize them as major and minor prophets. They also spoke "in many ways" as each prophet had a unique tone, emphasis, and style of delivery.

Throughout the Old Testament era God spoke to His children through the aforementioned channels. But in recent times (from the writer's perspective), which he calls "these last days", God had revealed Himself to the people in a new and better way. This contemporary approach stood in stark contrast to those of the past. Rather than sending more men, who despite their sincere faithfulness were still hopelessly flawed and sinful, instead God now spoke through His Son Jesus Christ.

II. WHO JESUS IS (verses 2b-3a)

Jesus is superior to human prophets. The writer of Hebrews makes this abundantly clear in his description of the Lord. First, God has "appointed" Him to be "heir of all things". This means that Jesus will inherit all of the Father's creation. Everything that God has will be given to the Son, and He will exercise authority and dominion over it all. While the redeemed Children of God can become co-heirs with Christ, clearly Jesus is the primary recipient of God's inheritance.

Not only is He the appointed heir of all things, but God also "made the world" through Him to begin with. God spoke the words and Jesus brought them into being. In other words, Jesus was the agent through whom God created the heavens and the earth. In addition to this, Jesus "upholds" or sustains "all things" by the almighty "power" of God. Everything in the universe continues to function and be maintained by Jesus.

Jesus is further described as "the radiance of" God's "glory". The magnificent light of God's majesty shines in and through Christ. It penetrates and illuminates the darkness of this fallen world. One day, when the heavens and earth are remade, God's glory will replace the sun, moon, and stars as the source of light. God's divine "nature" is represented exactly in the person of Christ. Jesus is the physical, human manifestation of God. He is not a duplicate or copy of the Father, but rather is one with the Father sharing in the same divine essence and being.

III. WHAT JESUS DID (verses 3b-4)

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. His ultimate goal was to give Himself as the preeminent sacrifice for the sins of man. While He languished on the cross, God placed all of humanity's sin - past, present, and future - upon Him. Through His death Jesus voluntarily paid the full debt of sin and satisfied the justly warranted wrath of God. He made forgiveness and redemption possible and available to all. The shed blood of Jesus "made purification of sins" by washing them away and cleansing the repentant sinner's soul.

After His victory over sin and death, Jesus ascended into Heaven and "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high". His redemptive work had been fully completed and there was nothing left to do. Jesus had accomplished His mission. What's more, God the Father had accepted His Son's sacrifice and seated Him in the place of highest honor. As we speak, Jesus is sitting in Heaven at God's right hand waiting until the appointed time in which He will return for His church.

Lastly, Jesus is "much better than the angels" and has "inherited a more excellent name than they" have. This statement will be developed thoroughly throughout the remainder of this chapter. As such, I will withhold my comments on these phrases until next week's message. Suffice it to say that salvation cannot be found through the angels. For there is no other name by which men can be saved other than Jesus Christ!

CONCLUSION

When you think about who Jesus was and what He did, what other messenger could ever compare to Him? All of creation was made through Him and is being upheld by Him. He has been appointed by the Father to inherit and reign over it all. He is one with God the Father, sharing the exact same nature and divine character. In Him shines the fullness of God's remarkable glory. He accomplished the salvation of mankind through His sacrificial death and miraculous resurrection, currently sits in Heaven at God's right hand, and has the name that is above all names.

Jesus is a far better messenger than any other prophet or angel ever could hope to be. And since He is a better messenger, it stands to reason that He came to deliver a better message. This argument is the central theme of Hebrews. The revelations that God made through His Son were far greater than those which had been previously revealed. The proclamations and promises conveyed by the Old Testament prophets all found their ultimate meaning and fulfillment in Christ. Jesus was and is the final and supreme messenger of God. But, as we will soon discover, He is much more than just a messenger...

Is your faith wavering today? Are you entertaining the thought of giving up? Has following Jesus become a burden that you can no longer bear? If so, to whom will you turn? Who else has the words of life? Who else can satisfy your soul like Him? Is there anyone who is His equal? Is there any other who can compare? No my friend, there is none other. So cling to Jesus. Everyone else pales in comparison. Irregardless of who they may be, Jesus is better!

Better than Angels

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“Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.’” - Revelation 5:11-12

Good morning. Last week we began a new sermon series through the book of Hebrews. This morning we will pick up where we left off. But before we do, I want to quickly address a question that was posed to me by a member of the congregation last Sunday following the message. While preaching I made the statement that “God still speaks to people today in a variety of ways”. Is this true or not?

Some people argue that if God still speaks to people today, then the Bible by itself is not complete. The LORD could have or might still say something new or different than that which is contained in the Word of God. This gives credibility to false teachers and religions, such as those espoused by Muhamed or Joseph Smith who both claimed that God spoke to them and told them things that were clearly in conflict with the teachings of the Bible. If you believe that God still speaks to people in this sense, it opens a huge can of worms.

This is not what I meant by the statement, and am happy to give a clarification for anyone who misunderstood. I do believe that the revelation of God was completed in Christ. There is nothing else that God intends to reveal to mankind other than that which is already recorded in the Scriptures. This is why there are warnings not to add to, omit, or alter any part of the Bible.

Though God still speaks, He has already said everything that He intends to say. Therefore when He addresses us today He is either repeating, reinforcing, revealing, or reminding us of things that He has already said. When we hear His voice through the wooing of the Holy Spirit, through the teachings of another person, or perhaps in some other manner, we must understand this. God will not lead anyone to do or say anything that violates, ignores, or appends what is already revealed in the Bible.

I do believe that God still speaks to people today. I have personally heard Him speaking to me in many of the same ways that He used during the Old Testament. But what He is saying is not new or different than that which He has said in the past... Rather it is the same revelation, which was fully clarified and completed in Christ, being spoken to one generation after another both on an individual and corporate level. I hope this explanation was helpful. Okay, moving on...

The writer opened his letter to the Hebrews by describing Jesus as a superior messenger to the prophets who came before Him. In this uplifting description, the writer stated that Jesus had become “much better than the angels” (v4). In today’s sermon, we are going to see the

evidence that supports this statement by reviewing 7 Old Testament quotations cited in the remainder of the chapter. I have titled this message, "Better than Angels".

I. EQUAL (verse 5)

The first quotation comes from Psalm 2:7. This psalm describes the reign of God's anointed Son, Jesus Christ, over the nations of the earth. In Acts 13:33 Paul cited this verse in one of his sermons to refer to the resurrection of Christ. The word "begotten" is translated from the Greek root "gennao". While it usually refers to physical birth, it can also mean "to bring forth" or "cause to arise". Unlike the angels, Jesus was not created or brought into being at some specific point. Rather He has always existed and was "brought forth" (or revealed) at the proper time. Jesus is the second person of the Godhead, wholly divine and co-equal with the Father.

The second quotation comes from 2 Samuel 7:14. This Old Testament passage lays out the promise that God made to establish David's throne forever. While the verse literally refers to Solomon, ultimately it points to Jesus as the Son through whom the Davidic kingdom will continue eternally. God the Father did not promise this position or authority to the angels, but rather exclusively to His only begotten Son. There are a few verses in the Bible in which angels are called sons of God, but not in the sense that Jesus is described here.

II. EXALTED (verses 6-7, 9)

While there is some dispute, the third quotation likely comes from either Psalm 97:7 or Deuteronomy 32:43 (as written in the Septuagint). When Jesus comes into the world again, perhaps alluding to His future return, all of the angels will worship Him. In either citation, it is abundantly clear that God has exalted Jesus far above the angels. As His subordinates they will all submit to and ascribe worship to the Son of God.

The fourth quotation is taken from Psalm 104:4. God describes the angels as "His" winds and again as "His" flames of fire. They are twice said to be "His" which carries the meaning of subjection to Him, and subsequently to Christ who has been exalted above them. Angels are simply messengers and ministers who serve under the rule of and at the discretion of the Lord. They act in accordance to God's sovereign control, like the winds and the lightning.

The fifth quotation comes from Psalm 45:6-7. This is a Messianic psalm that pictures Jesus as the Bridegroom of the Church. Verse 7 of this psalm states that God the Father has anointed Jesus and exalted Him to a place that is "above Your companions". Again, Jesus is described as having a greater station than the angels. While they may be groomsmen, attendants, or serve in other capacities at the wedding only Jesus is the bridegroom.

III. ETERNAL (verses 10-12)

The sixth quotation refers to Psalm 102:25-27. The psalmist is talking about the brevity of life and how quickly it comes and goes. In contrast, he states that God was present before creation and made the heavens and the earth. He will continue to exist even after the universe is no more. Though everything else eventually grows old and wears out, God is eternal. Just as a person changes their clothes, so also the old creation will be someday replaced with a new creation. Even in this, God remains eternal and unchanging forever.

Last we we read several verses that show Jesus at present and working during creation. Like his Father, Jesus already existed in the beginning. He created the angels sometime prior to the creation of mankind. The distinction is obvious - while Jesus is eternal, the angels had a beginning. Again this sets Jesus apart from and above the angels.

IV. ENTHRONED (verses 8, 13)

Going back to the fifth quotation (Psalm 45:6-7), this time the focus is placed on verse 6. This statement describes the Son's throne as one which lasts forever. Jesus has been seated in the Heavenly places and crowned as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He has received a scepter of uprightness, an ornamental staff that designates Him as the ruling monarch of God's kingdom.

The seventh and final quotation in this chapter comes from Psalm 110:1. God the Father tells His Son to be seated at His right hand while He awaits the final destruction of His enemies. The crushing defeat of Christ's adversaries (sin, death, the grave, Satan) has already been accomplished, but has not yet been fully realized. The picture is of Jesus sitting enthroned in glory, patiently waiting until the appointed moment of His victorious return.

CONCLUSION (verse 14)

The writer of Hebrews concludes chapter 1 by stating that angels are ministering spirits who have been sent out to serve those who will inherit salvation. They are not only servants of God, by will also be servants of redeemed humanity. While angels are certainly fascinating to consider, they pale in comparison the Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. He is divine and a co-equal Person of the Trinity. He has been exalted far above the angels and exercises authority over them. He is pre-existent and was active in the creation of the angels as well as humanity. Furthermore, Jesus is enthroned in Heaven where angels presently worship and serve Him.

Angels announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds. They encouraged and ministered to Him during His temptation in the wilderness. They strengthened Him as He agonized in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. They were present at the tomb to proclaim His resurrection from the dead. They even stood by at the Mount of Olives after the ascension and promised that Jesus would someday return in like manner. On every occasion, their actions and words plainly declared the superiority of Christ.

Some people have become entangled in the worship of angels. Our culture seems preoccupied with them. Angels are depicted in statues, ornaments, artwork, and jewelry. They are characterized in books, on television, and in the movies. Be careful not to get hung up on angels. They are not God. Remember this: "Jesus is better than angels!"

First Warning: Don't Drift

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“But before very long there rushed down from the land a violent wind, called Euraquilo; and when the ship was caught in it and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and let ourselves be driven along.” - Acts 27:14-15

Today's message is the 3rd sermon of our new series titled “Hebrews: Jesus Is Better”. The main idea of this book is that Jesus and His teachings are far superior to the ancient prophets and their teachings. Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies and accomplished the salvation of mankind once and for all. He is the final and ultimate revelation of God.

Scattered throughout the book of Hebrews, the writer issues several warnings to his readers. Collectively, these admonitions are referred to as “the warning passages”. They provide intermittent breaks from the writer's main emphasis which concerns the superiority of Christ. While these warnings were originally addressed to the Hebrew recipients of this letter, they still apply to us today.

Before we begin this morning, I want to lay a bit of groundwork. Baptists have historically accepted the doctrinal belief known formally as “The Perseverance of the Saints”. This stance is also commonly called “The Eternal Security of the Believer” and is often summarized as “Once Saved, Always Saved”. There is ample Biblical evidence to support the idea that once a person has truly been born-again, nothing can cause them to lose their salvation.

This truth must be kept in mind when interpreting the “warning passages” of Hebrews. The writer was addressing a mixed group of people - some who had sincerely repented and received the salvation that only Christ offers, and others who were present and perhaps even involved in the work of the church who had never truly been saved. This distinction has always existed among church-goers.

The “warning passages” take on different meanings depending upon whether or not a person has actually been regenerated. As we encounter them throughout the book, we will consider their admonishments from both perspectives. We will deal with the first of these cautions today in a message titled “Don't Drift”.

I. PAY ATTENTION TO IT (verse 1)

This warning opens with the phrase “For this reason”. It refers back to that which the author has just finished discussing. In the previous chapter Jesus was compared to and convincingly shown to be much greater than the angels. His supremacy over the angels forms the basis of the writer's warning in these verses.

The instruction is to “pay much closer attention to what we have heard”. In other words, to give more careful and thoughtful consideration to the gospel. Apparently some had heard it, generally agreed with it, but followed rather casually and without any real commitment to Jesus. While their service to the brethren was certainly desirable and appreciated, they lacked a genuine personal relationship with Christ.

Jesus is the anchor that secures a Christian even in the most difficult times. When doubts and fears assail them, a true believer finds their strength and stay in the Lord. Some people, however, accept Jesus in their heads but not in their hearts. They know Him intellectually but not personally. Such folks are not Biblically saved, lack the Anchor, and are therefore in grave danger of slowly being carried away from the ways of Christ by the currents of this fallen world.

Lost people are subject to drift away into destruction because they don't truly know Jesus. Christians are in danger of drifting off course in their walk with the Lord. While they won't lose their salvation, such drifting can render them unfruitful and useless to the kingdom of God. In either case, the warning is noteworthy and pertinent to the reader.

II. DON'T NEGLECT IT (verses 2-3a)

The writer describes the Old Testament revelation as “the word” which was “spoken through angels”. People during this time period generally thought of the ancient laws and prophecies as either having come directly from or having been ordained and confirmed by the angels. This belief is also cited in the writings of Paul and Luke (Galatians 3:19; Acts 7:53).

The Old Testament law, which was given at Mt. Sinai, contained numerous commandments and statutes to be followed by the people of Israel. Over the centuries the governing authorities interpreted and applied these laws meticulously. Most carried a specific punishment which was strictly enforced. These punishments were the just consequence of disobedience.

Many critics today say that the Law was too harsh and argue that God must therefore be cruel and hateful. But history suggests that the punishments prescribed by the Law were rarely carried out and apparently served as an effective deterrent to crime. That said, which is worse? Having severe consequences that basically eradicate crime, or having light punishments that encourage rampant lawlessness? Perhaps God's reasoning was merciful after all...

The Law, which was given to men by angels, was to be taken seriously. Those who violated it faced certain repercussions. Seeing that Jesus Christ is so much greater than angels, it stands to reason that His commands carry an even greater weight than the Law. Jesus warned people that their sin separated them from God and urged them to repent. There is no way to escape the condemnation that awaits those who neglect salvation through Jesus Christ.

III. THEY CONFIRMED IT (verses 3b-4)

In contrast to the old revelation that came through the angels, the gospel was “first spoken by the Lord”. While the ancients prophesied of it and pointed to it, Jesus plainly declared it. He taught this good news to His apostles, to the women and other disciples who followed Him, and to the masses who heard Him preach in various places. Jesus boldly stated that salvation could only be granted by the grace of God through faith in Him. What's more, this amazing gift of salvation was available to everyone - not just the Jews.

Jesus commissioned the disciples to be His witnesses. After He'd ascended into Heaven, they carried His message throughout the known world. These brave men and women had physically walked with Christ and had personally heard Him speak. As they shared their experiences with others, many joyfully embraced their testimony. This first generation of believers repeated and “confirmed” the teachings of Christ leading to the subsequent salvation of many others... and so the process continues.

God empowered many of these New Testament saints with the ability to perform “signs”, “wonders”, and “miracles”. These Spirit-given gifts gave credibility to the disciples' teachings and thereby helped them to establish the early church. There are many Christians today who believe that these particular spiritual gifts have ceased or been eliminated because they are no longer necessary. This argument is similar to rocket that needs boosters to take off but soon jettisons them after breaking free from the earth's gravity.

CONCLUSION

Let's close by pulling all of this discussion together. Apparently, the writer of Hebrews (and his companions) came to faith through the teaching of those who had heard directly from the Lord and thereby confirmed the gospel message that He'd proclaimed. This provides rather convincing evidence that Paul did not pen this book, as He was converted during a personal encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road.

Once born-again, the writer came to appreciate the greatness of Christ and His message. Furthermore, he or she understood the dire consequences that await unrepentant sinners. He or she shuddered at the prospect of eternal separation from God in a place called Hell. In light of this, the writer issued the first of several warnings. He cautioned his audience against drifting away from Jesus. He urged them to remain faithful to and close by the Lord's side every day.

As our invitation, I want to extend this warning to us. What is your personal, relational proximity to Jesus today? Are you near to Him or have you begun to drift away? How far have you gone? Is the distance between you and the Lord hindering your Christian witness and fruitfulness? If you've never been saved, would you respond to His calling and receive Jesus this morning? Beloved, cling to Christ and “don't drift” because Jesus is better!

Better than Men

Originally Preached 5/26/2019

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” - Philippians 2:5-8

After cautioning the Hebrews not to drift away from Christ, the writer of Hebrews now resumes his argument that Jesus is greater than any other. He has already shown that Jesus is a superior messenger over all of the Old Testament prophets who came before Him. Furthermore, using several scripture references he has proven that Jesus is higher than and exalted far above the angels. Jesus is the divine Son of God, the second Person of the Godhead, and a co-equal member of the Holy Trinity.

The Bible repeatedly and undoubtedly teaches that Jesus Christ is God. Because God is spirit, some cynics have reasoned that Jesus was never a physical human being, but rather just a convincing ghost. These heretics state that while He appeared to be a person (even fooling those closest to Him), in actuality He was an immaterial spirit. Others have suggested that Jesus never had a human mind, soul, or will. They concede that He may have been partially human, but insist that He was always more God than man. These and other similar teachings present a false picture of who Jesus really is.

Besides being God, Jesus was also a man. The dual nature of Christ is an important bedrock of Christianity. This doctrine is formally known as the “hypostatic union”. It teaches that Jesus is both fully divine and fully human. These two natures are distinct yet inseparable. They are not mixed with or diluted by each other. Instead they both co-exist wholly and eternally within one united Person, the God-man Jesus Christ.

In the second part of chapter 2, the writer of Hebrews turns his attention to the humanity of Christ. He not only asserts the Lord’s personhood, but also teaches why it was absolutely necessary for Jesus to become a man. In today’s message we will discover why it is essential that Jesus be a human being. The sermon is titled, “Better Than Men”.

I. EARTH SUBJECT TO MAN (verses 5-8)

In accordance with His perfect will, God has subjected the earth to man. This is made clear by the instructions that He gave to Adam in the Garden of Eden. The LORD told Adam to rule over the earth while cultivating and keeping it in good condition. God gave man dominion over His creation and tasked them with the responsibility of providing care for it. But despite man’s God-given authority over the earth, nature continuously resists and rebels. Creation is not yet

under full and complete submission to mankind, as proven by those weeds that just keep popping up in the yard...

The fallen earth will never fully resign itself to man's control until the curse against it has been lifted. When that time finally arrives, "the world to come" will fall under total and peaceful submission to mankind. All things will be subject to his rule as the caretaker of God's creation. This role has not been given to the angels, but rather is reserved exclusively for humanity. This provides some insight into the possible activities of those who will spend eternity in/on the New Heavens and New Earth..

To reinforce his position, the writer references Psalm 8:4-6. In this ancient psalm, David is awed by God's unconditional and unwarranted love and concern for mankind. In amazement he recognizes that while man is and will be "lower than the angels for a little while", one day he will be elevated to a greater position than they. What's more, David marvels that God would entrust frail humanity with custodianship of the earth.

II. JESUS BECAME A MAN (verses 9-13)

Though still and always fully God, Jesus voluntarily chose to come to this earth as a man. He humbled Himself by temporarily becoming "lower than the angels" in His humanity. This reduced status, though short-lived, is convincing evidence that Jesus was, in fact, a man. After fulfilling His mission, Jesus ascended back into Heaven, was "crowned with glory and honor", and resumed His original position over the angels. While redeemed humanity will someday be elevated over the angels, as the divine Son of God Jesus will always and forever be highly exalted over both mankind and the angels.

It is only "fitting" that Jesus should suffer for the sins of man as a man. Interestingly, during His earthly ministry Jesus often referred to Himself as the Son of Man. In this sense, both the Savior and those being saved come from the same Father. This explains why Jesus was "not ashamed to call" His disciples "brethren". Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary as a human being. This is what is meant by the incarnation of Christ.

Again the author of Hebrews cites a few scriptures to make his case. While the words of Psalm 22 were originally composed by David, they were repeated and amplified by Jesus (see verse 1 especially). From this perspective, it is Jesus speaking to His "brethren" in Psalm 22:22 thereby asserting His humanity. Furthermore, in Isaiah 8:17-18 the prophet likens the Son of God to the children of God showing them to be of the same Father.

III. DEATH CONQUERED FOR MAN (verses 14-18)

Because Jesus "partook of the same" nature as other men, He became an acceptable substitute for them. By sharing in the same "flesh and blood", the Lord successfully defeated the devil and rendered him "powerless". Through His resurrection Jesus conquered death and made eternal

life available to all. The fear of death had always shackled people in chains and held them in slavery, but the Son of Man has made the freedom of mankind possible.

This salvation is not available “to angels”. The Bible indicates that angels have been created as either good or evil. They do not possess faith in Christ like human beings do. The great ransom that Jesus paid at Calvary was and is expressly for “the descendant of Abraham”. While these descendant Hebrews were the primary recipients of this letter, more broadly this phrase refers to all people who share in the faith of Abraham - both Jew and Gentile alike. The apostle Paul elaborates on this truth in his letter to the Romans (chapters 4 & 5).

Jesus “had to be” a man in order to rightly appease God’s wrath as the propitiation for humanity’s sin. Jesus is our “merciful and faithful” High Priest, both the Offeror and the Offering. Introduced here, this concept will be developed much more thoroughly in the coming chapters. Because Jesus subjected Himself to the same temptations and struggles as faced by all other people, He understands our plight and is able to “come to the aid of those who are tempted”. Jesus cannot be the Savior of men with being a man Himself.

CONCLUSION

Several years ago, while I was working as a financial advisor, I planned an outdoor sales function at the local park. Knowing that it would be hot that afternoon, I thought it might be wise to set up a canopy for shade. Unfortunately, at the time I didn’t have one. Rather than buying a canopy, I asked a friend if I could borrow theirs. After a long and rather unsuccessful day at the park, I folded up the canopy to leave. Somehow, as I did so, the frame bent and then broke. When I later returned it to my friend, they were understandably upset.

I offered to pay them the full price of the canopy, plus a little extra since I broke it, but they didn’t want money. It was not their responsibility to go to the store, to search for and find another canopy, to purchase it, and then bring it home. Instead they wanted me to give them another canopy - exactly like the first one - as the proper restitution for that which I had ruined. So I shopped until I found it, bought it, and took it to my friend. Once they received it, their anger subsided (somewhat) and they were finally satisfied. To this day, I still have that broken canopy and it serves as a vivid reminder of this painful experience.

A canopy for a canopy... a man for a man. The only appropriate and acceptable reparations for the sins of man must have been made by a sinless man, namely Jesus Christ. To deny the humanity of Jesus erodes the very foundation of Christianity. He is both the Son of God and the Son of Man simultaneously.

What a joy to know that Jesus can identify with our human condition! He has been there, and has walked in our shoes. He knows what it means to hurt, to hunger, to thirst, and to grieve. As such, we can trust Him with all of our doubts and fears. He understands us, better than we even understand ourselves. He is truly “better than men”.

Better than Moses

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“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.” - Deuteronomy 18:15

A few years ago our congregation did an extensive study of the exodus. After almost 400 years of slavery, the LORD chose a man named Moses to deliver His people from Egyptian bondage. Moses boldly confronted Pharaoh, who was stubbornly unwilling to let the Hebrews go. God sent a series of 10 devastating plagues upon Egypt until finally Pharaoh relented. However, only a few days after releasing them Pharaoh changed his mind and pursued the children of God to the shores of the Red Sea. The LORD miraculously parted the waters allowing Moses and His people to cross, then closed them suddenly on the Egyptian soldiers who were following close behind so that they all drowned.

From there Moses led the children of God to Mount Sinai where they remained for almost 2 years. At Sinai the LORD gave them the 10 Commandments and the rest of the Law. From there, the people traveled to the edge of the Promised Land, but ultimately chose not to enter. As a result, they wandered in the wilderness for the next 38 years until virtually all of the original generation had died. Finally Moses brought them to the plains of Moab on the eastern border of Canaan. The Jordan River was all that separated them from reaching their long-awaited destination. There Moses graciously stepped down as leader, passing the torch to Joshua, and climbed atop Mt. Nebo where he died.

Moses is regarded and revered as one of the greatest prophets and leaders in Jewish history. God used Moses to rescue His people from Egyptian captivity. His faithful obedience to God's call upon his life led to the deliverance of the Hebrew children. Yet, even in light of his great significance, the writer of Hebrews explains that Jesus is superior to Moses. As we resume our sermon series this morning, we will begin to explore this topic deeper in a message called “Better than Moses”.

I. A COMPARISON (verses 1-3a)

The writer of Hebrews invites his readers to “consider Jesus” on the basis of that which he has already discussed in chapters 1 & 2. Notice that he describes his readers as “holy brethren” and “partakers of a heavenly calling”. Certainly they were people who had heard the gospel message and showed some degree of allegiance to the church. This does not necessarily mean, however, that they were all saved.

Jesus is called “the Apostle and High Priest of our confession”. An apostle is one who is sent. The high priest was the one who offered sacrifices in order to make atonement for the people. Therefore, these 2 titles together describe Jesus as the One who was sent by God in order to

make a sacrifice that would secure the LORD's forgiveness of humanity's sin and bring about the reconciliation of God and man.

Jesus was "faithful" to God "who appointed Him". He willingly and obediently followed His Father's will by giving His life on the cross. Jesus' faithfulness to God made the salvation of mankind possible. In similar fashion, Moses was also faithful "in all His house". In other words, Moses' faithfulness to God was demonstrated by His loyalty to the people of God's house - ie, the children of Israel. Moses saved them from the yoke of Egyptian oppression. But while both men were faithful, Jesus has "been counted worthy of more glory than Moses." Why?

II. A CORRELATION (verses 3b-6)

"The builder of the house has more honor than the house." This statement forms the basis of the correlation made in these verses. Houses don't just come into being on their own. Someone has to design the structure and then put it all together. That someone is responsible for the creation of the house. Spiritually speaking, Jesus is that builder and the house represents His people. Simply put, Jesus is greater than mankind.

Notice in the previous verses that Jesus was described as being faithful to God, while Moses was described as being faithful to God's people. This distinction is intentional in order to make a particular and important point. Seeing that God is greater than mankind, logically the One who is faithful to God is thereby greater than the one who is faithful to His people. This reasoning is used to show Jesus' superiority over Moses. Furthermore, if Jesus is the builder of the house and God is the builder of all things then Jesus is God.

Moses sacrificially served the people of God during the exodus. His actions have been persevered in the writings of the Old Testament and are a vivid "testimony" to the work of Christ. His deliverance of the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage foreshadowed Jesus' redemption of mankind from their slavery to sin. But while Moses was a "servant" in God's house, Jesus is a "Son" over God's house. Again, God's house is made up of all born-again believers whose "hope" and "confidence" is in Christ.

Before leaving this point, it is important to point out that faithfulness to God and faithfulness to His people are not mutually exclusive. The contrast being made in these verses is a literary device used to highlight Jesus' excellence. It doesn't imply that someone can't be faithful to both. Obviously faithfulness to God will naturally result in some level of faithfulness to His children. Jesus and Moses serve as examples of this truth.

III. A CONSEQUENCE (verses 7-11)

In these verses, the writer cites an Old Testament passage found in Psalm 95:7-11. While this ancient Psalm was written by David, he was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as he wrote. Thus these words are rightly attributed here as a quotation of the Holy Spirit.

The author of Hebrews urges his readers to hear and submit to the LORD's voice, unlike their predecessors who were deaf to it during the exodus. Under Moses, the people had rebuked and rebelled against God in a multitude of ways. They grumbled, complained, and doubted constantly. As a result, they provoked the LORD's wrath and were forced to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. They were not permitted to enter into the Promised Land, the place of God's rest. Instead this privilege was passed to their children.

Moses plainly declared that God's will for the Hebrew children was to enter into and take possession of the Promised Land. He bravely led them to Kadesh Barnea and positioned them perfectly to accomplish the LORD's directive. However, ignoring all that God had miraculously done for them up to that point, the people disobeyed Him and refused to enter Canaan due to their misplaced fear and anxiety. Consequently, they missed out on the rest He had set aside expressly for them.

CONCLUSION

I want to close the message today by pointing out a few similarities between Moses and Jesus. Perhaps they will help us better appreciate both of these remarkable men.

- Moses was sent to Egypt from his home in Midian, while Jesus was sent to Earth from His home in Heaven.
- Moses was sent to deliver God's people from Egyptian captivity, while Jesus was sent to deliver sinners from their slavery to sin and death.
- Moses successfully brought the people out of Egypt, but did not take them into the Promised Land. Jesus died to secure the forgiveness of all sinners, but does not compel them to receive it.

God crushed Pharaoh and the Egyptian army thereby setting His people free. Likewise, Jesus forever defeated sin and death and set sinners free. But freedom from bondage is useless if one chooses to remain in it! Though they had been rescued, the children of Israel opted to wander in the desert and to die outside of God's will. How many sinners will continue to grope around in the darkness while neglecting the light of salvation that Jesus freely offers?

My friend, there is absolutely no excuse for rejecting Christ. Jesus has delivered you from your captivity to sin. Nothing or no one prevents you from receiving the forgiveness that He offers. It is now wholly up to you. Will you place your faith in Jesus and allow Him to bring you into the promised rest that He has prepared for you, or will you languish for all of eternity in the barren wilderness separated from God?

Second Warning: Don't Doubt

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“But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” - James 1:6-8

In the first half of chapter 3, which we studied last week, the writer of Hebrews compares Jesus with Moses. He reasons that both men were used by God to deliver people. While Moses led the exodus which brought the descendants of Jacob out of Egyptian captivity, Jesus died on the cross to deliver sinners from the bondage of sin and death.

Though their missions were similar, Jesus is worthy to receive more glory than Moses. Jesus' superiority is shown in 2 ways. First, Moses is described as merely a servant of God while Jesus is named the only begotten Son of God. Obviously, a son is greater than a servant. Second, as a human being Moses led as a faithful member in God's house while Jesus, who is both God and man, rules faithfully over God's house. The house of the Lord is also called the Body of Christ or the church, and Jesus is its head. Being over is better than being in.

When we consider the story of Moses, we remember that despite having been freed from Egyptian slavery the Hebrew children doubted God and refused to enter the Promised Land. As a result they died in the wilderness and missed out on the glorious rest that God had set aside for them. The tragic ramifications of their actions serve as the basis for the warning given in the second half of chapter 3.

A few weeks ago I told you that the writer of Hebrews occasionally breaks from his discourse on the superiority of Christ to offer his readers a warning. The first of these, which we encountered back in chapter 2, cautioned Christians against drifting. In today's message we'll examine the second warning passage of Hebrews with a sermon titled "Don't Doubt".

I. TAKE CARE OF EACH OTHER (verses 12-13)

Notice that these verses have both an individual and corporate application. The writer urges the group to "take care" that no individual among them, including themselves, has an "evil, unbelieving heart". The congregation is called to "encourage one another" constantly in hopes of preventing any one from becoming "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin". In other words, the whole is to take upon itself some degree of responsibility for the spiritual well-being of each of its members. Mature and healthy Christian congregations encourage, pray for, and caringly support one another. This is one of the major functions of the local church.

The warning to the group is to watch out for "evil, unbelieving" hearts that fall "away from the living God". This phrase must be viewed through the entirety of Scripture which teaches that

once a person has been truly saved they cannot lose their salvation. Thus, falling away from God as used in this passage must be understood to mean either that a Christian has become backslidden and out of fellowship with God (though still saved) or that a non-Christian who for a time may have mimicked the appearance of a saved person has reverted to their previous sinful ways. Either of these types of individuals would have a negative impact on the congregation.

Everyone experiences occasional moments of doubt. Hopefully, as a believer grows in their personal walk with Jesus such doubts decrease while their faith increases. These seasons of doubt are common to all Christians, and are not the subject of these verses. The doubt being described in this passage is deep, consistent, and chronic. The writer also uses the adjective “evil” to describe this type of “unbelieving” heart. It is diametrically opposed to the goodness of God. It persistently doubts God’s character, His motives, His abilities, and perhaps even His existence. This degree of doubt is evil.

Christians should lovingly identify and encourage lost people in their midst to put away their doubts and to accept Jesus and their Lord and Savior. Likewise, they should look out for fellow believers who are struggling with doubts and seek to encourage and strengthen them in their faith. Also, they should guard their own hearts against doubt and place their trust fully in God.

II. HOLD FAST TO THE FAITH (verse 14)

By using the pronoun we, the writer includes himself in the statement “For we have become partakers of Christ”. Though his identity is unknown, as an accepted and credible author of a Holy Spirit inspired book of the Bible, it seems safe and reasonable to assume that he is a born-again believer. Seeing that he identifies with this group, the phrase “partakers of Christ” most likely refers to repentant sinners who have trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation.

True believers “hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end”. In other words, their faith and confidence in Christ is sustained from the moment of their salvation until their death. This perseverance of faith is not the reason for their salvation, but rather a mark of their salvation. Sinners are not saved by their faithful allegiance or obedience to God, however saved people will exhibit faithful allegiance and obedience to Him. Perseverance is a sign of redemption. Those who have made genuine professions of faith in Jesus and have been regenerated by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit are eternally secured by the almighty hand of God.

As mentioned earlier, even Christians sometimes experience seasons of doubt. But if they are genuinely saved, they will always eventually repent and return to the LORD so that their faith “in the end” is restored to that which it was in “the beginning”. On the contrary, those who fall away from the faith and never repent or return do not show this unyielding perseverance. Because true faith always endures, such deserters couldn’t have been authentically saved to begin with.

Only God knows the condition of a person's heart. Therefore, when someone strays from the Lord it is impossible for others to know whether or not they might someday repent and return. For this reason, believers should never give up on the prodigals. Perhaps they might still come home and thereby demonstrate the perseverance of a saving faith, and if not, perhaps there is still time for them to be truly saved before it is eternally too late.

III. LEARN FROM THE PAST (verses 15-19)

The writer first introduced a passage from Psalm 95 earlier in this chapter, but now refers to a portion of it again. He reminds his readers through a series of questions that the children of Israel whom Moses led out of Egypt provoked the LORD, causing Him to become angry with them for 40 years. Because of their sin and disobedience, God swore that they would not enter the Promised Land and they instead fell dead in the wilderness.

This chapter ends with a sentence that summarizes what happened to the Hebrew children - "they were not able to enter because of unbelief." It was their doubt that prevented them from receiving that which God had reserved for them. This is the peril of unbelief... doubt will cause people to forfeit the things which God desires to give them.

CONCLUSION

We have now read and discussed the first 2 warning passages found in the book of Hebrews - "Don't Drift" and "Don't Doubt". Those who drift away from God will be unable to escape the penalty that comes from neglecting His great salvation. And those who doubt Him will miss out on the blessings that He has lovingly prepared for them, perhaps even salvation itself.

Next week, we will return to our conversation regarding the supremacy of Christ. Due to their unbelief, the sons of Jacob were not permitted to enter into God's "rest". While this obviously and literally refers to the Promised Land, which flowed with milk and honey, might it also carry a deeper symbolic meaning? What exactly is meant by the phrase "God's rest" and how can we access it? We will explore the believer's rest thoroughly in chapter 4.

As we close, is there anyone present this morning who is struggling with doubt? Perhaps there is someone who has never truly believed in God or trusted in Jesus for salvation. The Bible teaches that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to receive forgiveness of sins and secure the promise of eternal life in Heaven. If you have never accepted Jesus as your Savior, though you might have been a church-goer for years, I plead with you to receive Him today.

Maybe there is a Christian here this morning who is wrestling with doubt. Though your salvation is certain, this doubt is presently robbing you from experiencing God's best. During this invitation I encourage you to place your doubts on the altar of God and to leave them there. Ask Him to quell your doubts while restoring and strengthening your faith. Trust in Jesus... because He is better!

A Better Rest

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“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” - Matthew 11:28-30

One of the most important activities for promoting your physical health is getting enough quality sleep. Resting your body is critical for your overall well-being. Medical studies show that it is helpful in a number of ways. Those who do not sleep well tend to eat more and have a much higher risk of being overweight. Poor sleepers have an increased rate of heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes. Lack of sleep is also linked to depression and negatively impacts emotions and social interactions. Sufficient rest improves concentration, productivity, and athletic performance while also strengthening the immune system’s ability to fight off infection.

Resting is one of the best ways to fend off sickness. Whenever I am really sick, I take some medicine and go to bed. Usually a day or 2 of good sleep is all it takes before I start feeling much better. The body needs seasons of rest to fend of germs and to restore itself. Sleeping is not a waste of time, but rather an important life function like eating and breathing.

To be honest, I have always loved sleeping. Even in college, while my peers were up all night, I was usually out by 10:30pm and up by 8:00am. The same is true today, as I average around 9 hours of sleep each night. I could probably get by with less sleep, but why deprive myself? As a matter of fact, I have even been known to take in a nap from time to time just as a bonus!

I’m no doctor, but I do encourage all of you to get plenty of quality rest everyday. That said, try to stay awake during the sermon, and if you can’t please don’t snore. It’s incredibly distracting... you know who you are!

While physical rest is valuable to the body, spiritual rest is necessary for the soul. This morning’s message touches on the importance of such rest in the life of a believer. As we examine the passage today, I am going to present the verses in a different order than they are written. I will not change their meaning, but rather arrange them in a way that helps me to explain them better. This sermon is titled “A Better Rest”.

I. THE PROMISED REST (verses 5-8)

Back in chapter 3, the writer compared Jesus with Moses and spent a great deal of time reminding his readers about the rebellious behavior of the Children of Israel during the exodus. In the early part of chapter 4 he again he cites Psalm 95:11 which states “They shall not enter My rest.” However, although they disobeyed God and did not go into the Promised Land, there “remains” a rest “for some to enter”.

Joshua led the Hebrew Children into Canaan sometime around 1400 BC, and yet David wrote Psalm 95 almost 400 years later. Referring to the epic conquest of their ancestors, David pleaded with the people of his generation urging them to listen to God's voice and to enter into God's rest. Now if the rest that Joshua had given the people of old by settling them in the Promised Land was complete, why would David be speaking of another rest centuries later?

The LORD has fixed "a certain day" for people to enter into His rest. That day is "Today", or this present moment, meaning that right now any person can still enter into and enjoy the rest that God has made available. While the exodus was an actual historic event, it also represents this marvelous and ongoing truth. At Calvary Jesus Christ delivered mankind from the bondage of sin and death so that they could live eternally in the promised rest of God.

II. THE SABBATH REST (verses 4, 9-10)

In these verses, the writer of Hebrews introduces another comparison to further reinforce his teaching on God's rest. He recalls a statement recorded all the way back in Genesis 2:2 which reads, "He rested on the seventh day from all His works". After the 6 days of creation, in which the LORD made all of the natural universe - the stars, the moon, the earth, the plants, the animals, and mankind - the Bible says that God rested, not because He was tired (God doesn't get tired) but because He was done.

In keeping with this pattern, God commanded the Jews to set aside the 7th day of each week as a day of rest. This day was called the Sabbath, and there was to be no work done on it. It was a time to remember God's handiwork and reflect upon His holiness. The Old Testament Law wisely and intentionally prescribed a weekly day of rest for the people, which aided their physical and spiritual well-being.

This ancient law points to a present reality. The writer of Hebrews states, "There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God". Christians are still able to enter into and enjoy the LORD's rest, but it is accessible only through faith and not by works. It is impossible to attain God's glorious rest through works. Those who have acquired it have "rested from" their "works, as God did from His".

III. THE BELIEVER'S REST (verses 1-3)

God has made an enduring promise of an available rest to every person of every generation. Unfortunately, far too many people "come short of it". The church should strive to ensure that as many as possible enter into His rest. It should burden Christians to think about those who don't know Jesus personally or experience the soothing rest He provides.

For hundreds of years humanity has "had good news preached" to them. The gospel has been declared to people all around the world from one generation to the next. Sadly, this message of

salvation has been of no “profit” to many because “it was not united by faith in those who heard”. Hearing about Jesus does not bring about redemption and the forgiveness of sins. Only those who have truly repented and placed their faith in Him will “enter that rest”. The promised rest, the blessed Sabbath rest, is reserved specifically for believers.

CONCLUSION

God’s rest has both a present and future application. The Sabbath Day is something we experience repeatedly during our lifetimes. Whenever we are tired from our toils and labors, we can turn to the Lord and find rest in Him. The rest that awaits in the Promised Land is a destination to be reached after we die. Those who have accepted Jesus as Savior have the comforting hope of an eternal rest in Heaven. In other words, believers can enjoy the rest of God right now and in the life to come.

Could it be that someone listening to my voice today is in desperate need of spiritual rest? If so, such rest is readily available. But we can only enter into it and enjoy its benefits through faith. Would you turn to Jesus today, believe in Him as the divine Son of God, and receive Him as the Lord of your life? If you will trust Him, He will give you rest.

Sometimes the most difficult thing to do is to rest. We have been conditioned to believe that we must always be doing something. As Christians, many serve God to the point of exhaustion and beyond. For them, ministry becomes a source of consternation and dread. They struggle to find joy in their work because they are constantly tired. As a result, their effectiveness for Christ is greatly diminished. I’ve been there my friend, and I trust you have been too.

Brethren, perhaps you are already saved, but are not well rested spiritually. Remember David’s words in Psalm 23, “He makes me lie down in green pastures”? When was the last time you took a break, a spiritual season of rest, to refresh and revive your soul? I’m not advocating spiritual laziness, but rather urging those who are weary to cast their burdens on to Jesus and to take a short break from their cares. Beloved, sometimes we need rest for our souls, and only the Lord can provide it. He gives “a better rest”.

Third Warning: Don't Disobey

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"Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams." - 1 Samuel 15:22

Good morning. Earlier this year we began a new preaching series titled "Hebrews - Jesus Is Better". We do not know who the author of Hebrews is, but the theme of the book is quite clear. It convincingly teaches that Jesus, His message, and His works are far superior to any and all others. In short, Jesus is better. Though we are only about a quarter of the way through this book, let's pause for a moment to review.

In the introduction of Hebrews, we are told that Jesus is "A Better Messenger" than any other who came before Him. God made His final and ultimate revelation to mankind through Christ. Being the Son of Almighty God, Jesus is highly exalted above and therefore much "Better than Angels". Still He willingly chose to leave His throne in glory and came to earth as a human being, thereby becoming "A Better Man" than any of us. Jesus rescued fallen humanity from their captivity to sin and death and has become our Great Deliverer - even "Better than Moses". By placing our faith in Christ, we can enjoy and enter into "A Better Rest" than either the Promised Land or the Sabbath could ever offer.

So far, we have encountered a couple of warnings along the way as we've examined the opening chapters of Hebrews. The first cautioned us to not "drift" away from the godly things which we've heard and been taught. There is no escaping the judgment that will fall upon those who neglect the Lord's salvation. The second advised us not to "doubt" the words or directions of God. He is trustworthy and will enable us to accomplish those things that He desires of us. Those who doubt miss out on the blessings that God has promised and set aside for them.

In preparation for our journey through Hebrews, I have been reading through and am carefully studying the entire book again. Most commentaries identify 5 distinct warning passages which are scattered throughout Hebrews, but I will actually present 6 of them during this study. Most of these warnings are found in the first half of the book, including the 2 mentioned in the preceding paragraph. This morning we will discuss a third warning - "Don't Disobey".

I. BE DILIGENT (verse 11)

The first half of this chapter describes the marvelous rest that God has in store for those who trust in Him. It is something to be strongly desired and sought after. Because of its supreme excellence, the writer warns his readers to be "diligent" in their pursuit of this rest, so as not to "fall" or miss out on it due to their "disobedience".

The Greek word *spoudazo* is translated “diligent” in this verse. It means “to make haste” and describes someone who is “fully applying themselves”. Not only is their commitment to the cause complete, but it also acts quickly and without any hesitation. Christians should always be both ready and eager to obey God, and should do so wholeheartedly without any reservation. Such diligence is pleasing to the LORD, yet it is sorely lacking in the lives of countless believers. Many tend to serve God begrudgingly, lazily, and with tainted motives.

II. GOD KNOWS (verse 12)

God’s Word is both “living” and “active”. It is not an antiquated or outdated relic of the past, but rather is ever-fresh and always contemporary. The timeless truths found in the Bible apply to every generation. In addition to this, the Scriptures are extremely potent and powerful - able to accomplish that for which they are intended. God’s Word, whether written or spoken, is always effective and never returns void.

God’s Word is “sharper than any two-edged sword”. The Greek word *machairan* which is translated here as sword more accurately refers to a dagger or large knife. The emphasis is not on the size of the weapon, but rather its sharpness. This type of instrument can make fine, meticulous cuts which can separate “joints and marrow” similar to a surgeon’s scalpel. The metaphor teaches that God’s Word can pierce to and even divide “the soul and spirit”.

God’s Word judges “the thoughts and intentions of the heart”. To understand how this is possible, it is helpful to know that the Bible often speaks of Jesus as the Word of God. He is the Living Word who became flesh and dwelt among men. He is the Word of God personified. Jesus is the Righteous Judge of all mankind, and the Bible contains the standards by which He makes His judgments. Because Jesus is omniscient He knows what people are thinking and what motivates them to act. He knows their deepest secrets and judges their hidden thoughts.

Because this particular verse is quite popular it is often quoted in isolation. It is sometimes printed on decorative signs, bookmarks, or other such things. Usually, this is done without any consideration of the verses around it. However, when considered in context, this delightful description of God’s Word takes on a slightly different connotation. The writer of Hebrews is warning his audience not to disobey God because the LORD knows what they are thinking and will judge them accordingly.

III. GOD SEES (verse 13)

“There is no creature hidden from His sight.” In other words, no one is exempt from the watchful eye of God. Not only does He see every single person, but also everything that they do. There is no private or secluded place where anyone can go to escape the LORD’s vision. There is no way to conceal one’s deeds or keep them from being seen. “All things are open and laid bare to the eyes of” God Almighty.

In the Bible, there are several stories about people who thought they could hide either themselves or their actions from God. When the LORD called Jonah to go to Nineveh, he instead boarded a ship sailing in the opposite direction. Jonah thought he could travel beyond God's sight, but soon learned otherwise. After committing adultery and murder, King David thought he could cover up his sins so that no one would ever know. But God saw what David had done, and the truth soon came out. Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property and pretended to give all of the proceeds the church, when in fact they secretly held back a portion of the money for themselves. God knew what they had done, and brought about swift and decisive judgment.

God sees every sinful deed. He knows every wicked thought. Disobedience cannot be hidden from the Lord. Trying to keep things for Him is impossible. God cannot be fooled or mocked. He is not unaware of or oblivious toward sin, but rather merciful, longsuffering, and patient. That said, God's judgment will not wait forever...

CONCLUSION

A person's closeness to God can be seen in and measured by their obedience to His will and commands. Those who truly love the Lord will do what He asks them to do. God would much rather us obey His word than to constantly be seeking His forgiveness because we've broken it. We are called to be doers of the word, and not hearers only. But obedience isn't always easy... as it often demands that we sacrifice our own fleshly desires and ambitions.

Do you remember playing "Hide and Seek" when you were a kid? I can recall a few different occasions when someone hid themselves so well that no one was able to find them. We would wander around for what seemed like hours calling their name and hoping they'd come out. Do you remember searching for Easter Eggs when you were younger? There were times when we couldn't find all of the eggs that our parents had hidden. A few days later we could smell them rotting in the backyard. Beloved, such things never happen with God. He knows and sees everything, nothing remains unfound, and we are foolish to ever believe otherwise.

Here is the summation - those who disobey God will be seen, known, and judged accordingly. Therefore, don't disobey. If you do, understand that God is already fully aware of what you've done, that at some point it will be made known, and that you will be held accountable. When that day comes, don't act as if you haven't been warned.

But the good news is this - forgiveness is available through Jesus Christ. He died on the cross as our substitute and paid the penalty for our sinful disobedience. Will you trust Him to be the Lord and Savior of your life?

Better Than Aaron

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“Then bring near to yourself Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the sons of Israel, to minister as priest to Me” - Exodus 28:1a

What is the difference between a Hebrew, an Israelite, and a Jew? All 3 of these names are used in Scripture to describe the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Their story makes up most of the historical narrative contained in the Bible. Although these names generally refer to the same group of people and are often used interchangeably, each has a unique origin.

The term “Hebrew” was first used to describe Abraham in Genesis 14:13. It is uncertain where the word originally came from. Some scholars believe that it refers to Eber, an ancestor of Abraham, and means “the sons of Eber”. Others argue that it comes from a Hebrew root-word meaning “to pass over”. Abraham was called out of Chaldea, passed over the Euphrates River, and eventually settled in the foreign land of Canaan. The natives referred to him as a Hebrew.

The name “Israel” was first used when God renamed Jacob in Genesis 32:28. This event took place at daybreak after they had wrestled throughout the night. Several different meanings have been suggested for this name and the proper interpretation remains uncertain. Israel had 12 sons who were recognized as the tribal leaders of God’s chosen people.

The word “Jew” originated much later. It first appears in 2 Kings 25:25, several centuries after the patriarchs lived. At first it referred specifically to the inhabitants of Judah or the Southern Kingdom. After the Babylonian captivity however, it was used more broadly to describe all of the exiles who had returned to Israel - including those from the Northern Kingdom.

The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish believers. Though the nation of Israel as a whole had rejected Jesus, many individual Jews accepted Him as the Messiah. But due to increasing persecution, some of these new Christians were beginning to second guess their commitment to the Lord and even renounce their faith.

This morning’s message marks the 9th installment of our current series. It is called “Better than Aaron”. As I sometimes do, I will present a few of the verses out of their written order in hopes that it will make them more easily understandable. Hang on, here we go...

I. EVEN AS AARON (Hebrews 5:1-4)

The high priest was the supreme religious leader of the Israelites. This office was originally established and defined by God in the Mosaic Law. Only direct descendants of Aaron were eligible to serve as high priest. The high priest had several specific responsibilities, but generally speaking he “offered both gifts and sacrifices for sin” on “behalf” of the Israelites.

Because the high priest was himself a man “beset with weakness”, he was “obligated” not only to offer sacrifices “for the people” but also “for himself”. It was imperative that he keep himself personally clean and upright before God so that he’d be an acceptable representative of his people. Even the high priest experienced temptation and committed sin, which enabled him to “deal gently” with those who struggled with confusion, doubt, and ignorance.

To serve as high priest was an “honor” not to be “taken” or assumed. The office was conferred only to those who were “called by God”. Aaron, who was from the tribe of Levi and was the older brother of Moses, was specifically chosen by the LORD as the first high priest. He assisted Moses as leader during the exodus. Those who followed him as high priest down through the years were not merely chosen because of heredity, but because God’s calling was upon them and their family. The catalyst is the calling, not the bloodline...

The high priest was a man just like everyone else. He was not exempt from the requirements of the Law. They applied to him in the same way as they did to others. This is an important principle - leaders (both spiritual and civil) should never be above the law. They should be subject to the same rules and face the same consequences as those whom they serve. In fact, in light of their calling to a higher office, arguably their scrutiny should be even greater and they should aspire to live beyond reproach.

II. DESIGNATED BY GOD (Hebrews 5:5-10)

Jesus did not “glorify Himself so as to become High Priest”. In other words, Jesus did not presume any claim on the office. Instead, He was “designated by God” to hold the position. Jesus was born in the tribe of Judah - not Levi - and was not a direct descendent of Aaron. That said, He was chosen by God to be the high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek was the King of Salem and high priest of God (Genesis 14:18-20) during the days of Abraham, centuries before the Aaronic Priesthood was even established.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus “offered prayers and supplications” to “the One able to save Him from death”. He asked the Father for strength to overcome the many obstacles that He faced, including the cross. Because of His “piety”, the LORD heard and answered Jesus’ prayers. Though He was God’s Son, Jesus was not shielded from or spared of suffering. Christ personally experienced the difficulties of manhood, and can thereby relate to people’s ups and downs. Through these many challenges “He learned obedience”.

Jesus faithfully did the will of His Father. He never faltered in His obedience and was completely without sin. After the resurrection, Jesus was restored to His previous place in Heaven ‘having been made perfect’. Similar to a human high priest who would secure temporary forgiveness for his people by offering a spotless sacrifice, Jesus Christ gave the perfect sacrifice and became “the source of eternal salvation” “to all those who obey Him”.

Jesus is the Perfect High Priest. At this point, the author is simply introducing this concept by showing how Jesus' priestly service compared to and exceeded that of Aaron and his sons. This teaching on the high priest and priesthood will continue and be developed more thoroughly in the coming chapters.

III. SINCE WE HAVE (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Realizing that Jesus is "a great high priest who passed through the heavens" Christians should "hold fast" to their "confession". Jesus is the head of the church, a Savior who is worthy of all honor and praise. The Jewish high priest would enter into God's presence once a year in the Holy of Holies, but Jesus went to dwell perpetually in Heaven itself. He gave a perfect sacrifice and secured forgiveness for all who would receive it. Believers should boldly stand upon this remarkable truth.

Because Jesus was both fully God and fully man, He was "tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." His humanity subjected Him to worldly temptation while His deity enabled Him to overcome it. As such Jesus can "sympathize with our weakness". He knows what it is like to be human, and can identify with the numerous trials and difficulties of life. People should find great comfort in this!

Finally, believers should "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace." The High Priest, Jesus Christ, has cleared the way by forever tearing away the veil that once separated men from God. In His name, repentant sinners and regenerated disciples can come into the very presence of the Father through prayer and supplication. In His presence they "may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

CONCLUSION

Similarities between Jesus and Aaron include...

- Both Jesus and Aaron were qualified to serve as high priests because God called them to that office.
- Both Jesus and Aaron were men who faced temptation and prayed regularly to God the Father, yet Jesus never sinned.
- Both Jesus and Aaron could identify with and relate to the sinful condition of men.

A major difference between Jesus and Aaron is...

- Aaron's offerings for sin were limited, temporal, and required repetition. Jesus' offering for sin was unlimited, eternal, and not to be repeated.

As you can see, Jesus is better than Aaron.

A Better Understanding

Originally Preached 7/21/2019

“Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.” - 1 Corinthians 14:20

I hope you are learning a lot of new things and enjoying our current sermon series. We are now about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the way through our in-depth study of Hebrews. Though we have already uncovered and analyzed several valuable principles in this book, there are still many left to discover. The message today is titled “A Better Understanding”. We will be looking closely at Hebrews 5:11-14.

In the first half of this chapter, which we discussed last week, the writer introduced what is perhaps the main teaching of his letter to the Hebrews. He argued that Jesus even greater than Aaron. Jesus is our Perfect High Priest. In the coming chapters he will present and explain several concepts that support this conclusion. But before he begins to make his compelling case for the superiority of Christ, the writer pauses to address the Hebrews directly.

Before heading out on a long drive across the country a person should take a few moments to check the condition of their vehicle. They should inspect their tires to make sure that they are properly inflated and not too worn. They should check the level of their fluids, and even change the oil if necessary. They might even assess their lights, windshield wipers, and other such things to make sure the car is completely ready to go. It is wise to make an evaluation of your vehicle before starting your trip, and it can potentially save you from a lot of problems.

This is somewhat comparable to what we see in today’s message. Before he begins to emphasize the major points of his letter, the writer briefly turns his attention to its recipients. Are they ready to hear and receive the truths that are forthcoming? Will these teachings be overly complicated for them or will they be able to grasp and understand what is being taught? Are they prepared for what lies ahead? What type of spiritual condition are they in?

I. DULL OF HEARING (v11)

The focus of the coming chapters will be on Jesus as the Great High Priest. This is indicated by the opening phrase “Concerning Him we have much to say”. Chapters 7-10 will highlight several topics related to the high priest, the priesthood, the sacrifices, and the sanctuary. In these chapters he will present and thorough, systematic, and eye-opening explanation of why “Jesus is Better”.

However, from the very outset he warns that these things will be “hard to explain”. Generally things are hard to explain for one of two reasons. Either the topic itself is extremely complex and difficult for anyone to understand, or the learners have certain deficits that prevent them from

grasping what should otherwise be easily comprehended. For example, non-English speaking students might struggle in certain academic classes because they are not familiar with the language being used - not because the questions are too difficult.

Unfortunately, many of the Hebrew Christians had become “dull of hearing”. This doesn’t mean that they were spiritually deaf or incapable of hearing and understanding God’s word. The word “dull” used here in this verse comes from the Greek term “nothros”. It literally means sluggish or slothful. The writer is telling his readers that they had become spiritually lazy. Their lack of discipline and commitment to the teachings of God had limited their knowledge base and hampered their understanding. Because of this ignorance, the things that he intends to teach will be more difficult for them to understand.

II. ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES (v12)

The Hebrew believers to whom this letter was written had been saved for a while. They weren’t brand new Christians. They had been followers of Christ for a fairly long period of time, perhaps several years. As such, the writer expressed that by now they “ought to be teachers”. It is certainly reasonable for someone who has been recently saved to lack a comprehensive understanding of the Bible, but for those who have been long-time Christians such ignorance is highly discouraging.

Every field of study has basic, foundational elements. In order to form words one must first understand letters. In order to make sentences one must first understand words. In order to do basic mathematical operations one must first know the digits. In order to make longer and harder calculations one must master their basic math facts. The same is true spiritually. While the “elementary principles of the oracles of God” are the starting point upon which everything else is built, there are more complex truths that Christians should learn.

The writer of Hebrews was clearly disheartened by the spiritual illiteracy of his audience. Though this would not prevent him from presenting his lesson, he was obviously concerned that many would not grasp what was being taught. Sadly, this same ineptness rampant in churches today. Many who have been Christians all their lives still lack confidence in their knowledge of Scriptures and feel intellectually unable to teach others. While in a few cases there may be a valid reason for this, the overwhelming majority of the time there isn’t.

III. MILK OR MEAT (v13-14)

In the closing line of verse 12 the writer states that his Hebrew readers have come to “need milk and not solid food”. In the King James translation of the Bible this solid food is called meat. Spiritually speaking, the one who “partakes only of milk...” “...is an infant.” This has nothing to do with their actual age, but rather their understanding of and obedience to God’s Word. It is an issue of spiritual maturity.

Those who remain spiritually immature are “not accustomed to the word of righteous”. They lack an intimate familiarity with the principles and precepts contained in the Bible. Many have never even read the Scriptures. Others have casually looked at them or heard them being spoken, but have failed to take them seriously. As a result, they find it challenging to learn more complex doctrinal concepts because they have never really studied God’s Word for themselves.

“But... the mature...” “...have their senses trained to discern good and evil.” This ability comes from and is refined by “practice”. It isn’t automatic to the new believer. Maturity is not a spiritual gift that can be received in its entirety. Rather it must be developed over time. Spiritual growth is the result of ongoing discipleship. Like a daily exercise regimen, it takes commitment and follow-through. It involves obedience to and faithful application of God’s Word in one’s life.

CONCLUSION

Unfortunately many people have no idea what the Bible says. Others may know some of the basics, but not much else. Still others may have a pretty good head knowledge of Scripture, but don’t truly practice a lot of it. In each of these cases, the person being described is and will remain spiritually immature. They are still infants who constantly need to be retaught the elementary principles of God’s Word.

There is a scene near the end of the movie “A Few Good Men” in which Jack Nicholson’s character, Colonel Nathan Jessup, shouts from the witness stand “You can’t handle the truth!”. It is an iconic line in American movie history. He is accusing the military lawyer questioning him, Lieutenant Daniel Kaffee who is being played by Tom Cruise, of not having the depth, capacity, and/or experience to understand the realities of war. In a more compassionate sense, this is pretty much what the writer of Hebrews is saying..

Spiritually speaking, there are far too many Christians today like these early Hebrew believers who can’t handle the deeper truths of God’s Word because they have never really grown in it. They have no real grounding. But Jesus desires to foster within us a better understanding of His teachings and ways. Through disciplined training and obedient practice we can mature in our wisdom of and walk with the Lord. When, if ever, will we grow tired of eating baby food and move on to the steak and potatoes?

Fourth Warning: Don't Depart

Originally Preached 7/28/2019

"But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons," - 1 Timothy 4:1

The opening portion of Hebrews chapter 6 can be difficult to comprehend. There are several differing interpretations of these verses put forth by many respected people. In today's sermon, we are going to carefully consider this passage and seek God's wisdom in understanding it.

Earlier this week I read an article about a former megachurch pastor and best-selling Christian author who was prominent during the Purity Movement of the 1990's and early 2000's - commonly called "True Love Waits". After several years of professing Jesus as his Lord and Savior, preaching and teaching from the Bible to thousands of listeners, and engaging in all sorts of charitable services and good works, this man has now renounced his faith in Christ and abandoned the faith. How could such a startling reversal be possible? He is a perfect example of the person described in our focal passage today.

This message is titled "Fourth Warning: Don't Depart". It is the fourth of six warning passages found in Hebrews.

I. PRESSING ON (v1-3)

In the final verses of the preceding chapter, the writer rebuked his Hebrew audience for their spiritual immaturity and unfamiliarity with God's word. Because of their overall spiritual ineptness, he knew that some of his teachings would be hard to explain. Perhaps some of the Hebrew Christians would understand them, but many wouldn't. Still he prepared to move forward with his presentation. Thus, he writes here "let us press on to maturity" by going beyond "the elementary teaching of Christ".

He lists a few of these elementary teachings which will be foundational to his coming thesis. The first is "repentance from dead works" and "faith toward God". By now the Hebrew believers should understand that no amount of good works has the power to save, but rather that salvation only comes by faith in God through Jesus Christ. The second basic instruction concerns "washings" and the "laying on of hands". They should already know that water cannot wash away sin, nor can a person's sin be imputed to another by the laying on of hands. The third truth deals with "the resurrection of the dead" and "eternal judgment". These Hebrew Christians should realize that those who have been born again will be raised to new life with Jesus while those who are lost will face eternal judgment separated from God.

With these fundamentals in place, the writer of Hebrews now plans to proceed with more advanced teaching. However, this will only be meaningfully communicated "if God permits". It is

the Holy Spirit who opens the eyes and illuminates the minds of people to understand the LORD's words. Without Him, no one could see God or grasp His teachings.

II. FALLING AWAY (v4-6)

In this passage the writer gives 5 descriptors of the person he has in view. They have been "enlightened" to know at least some things about God. They have "tasted of the heavenly gift" which could refer to them being baptized or participating in the Lord's Supper. They have been made "partakers of the Holy Spirit", though this is not the same as being indwelt by Him. They are familiar with and have experienced the "good word of God" in their lives. Finally, they have seen firsthand and acknowledged the "powers of the age to come" through the miraculous works of God. In other words, they appear by all accounts to be born again believers.

However, the writer states that some of these people "have fallen away". As stated earlier in this series, the Bible clearly and definitely teaches that a person's salvation is both granted by and secured by God. Therefore, once a person is truly saved they can never lose their salvation because it is wholly dependent on God and He will not revoke His promise. This doctrine is called the "Perseverance of the Saints" - sometimes referred to as "Once Saved, Always Saved". Therefore, this passage cannot be teaching that a saved person can again become lost. Rather it is stating that a lost person who convincingly appears to be a Christian can and likely will at some point fall away from the faith.

When someone who has lived the Christian lifestyle and been active in the church for a long period of time abandons the faith, it is "impossible to renew them again to repentance". This phrase is best understood in light of Jesus' declaration to the disciples in Matthew 19:26 regarding the salvation of rich people. He says "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." In other words, unless God Himself acts in the life of this wayward person they will never repent and turn back. It is impossible for human influence alone, even that of the saints, to restore them to the faith.

In the case of the Hebrews, if they were to depart from Christianity and return to their former ways it would be Judaism. The Jews were the ones who crucified "the Son of God and put Him to open shame." In effect, those who walked away from the faith would "again crucify to themselves" the very Jesus whom they had professed to be their Savior.

III. BRINGING FORTH (v7-8)

In writer closes this section of his letter with an analogy. He compares a person's life with the ground. For a time it may bring "forth useful vegetation" which is beneficial to others. As such, this individual might even receive limited "blessings from God". If however this same field begins to produce only "thorns and thistles" it becomes "worthless", "close to being cursed", and "ends up being burned". This agricultural example demonstrates how a person's entire life can change dramatically, such as when they fall away from their faith in Christ.

To extend this analogy a bit, people are not saved based upon the quality of the vegetation their lives produce. Even though someone may yield a useful crop for a time, if Jesus is not the Lord of their lives they remain unsaved. In other words, it is the owner of the field that matters - not the quality of produce that it yields.

CONCLUSION

The verses we've studied today are often used by those who reject the eternal security of the believer. They falsely teach that a person can lose their salvation. In closing, I want to remind us all of the broader teachings of the Bible regarding this important topic.

Referring to His sheep Jesus says: "and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." (John 10:28-29) - No one and nothing can keep prevent a redeemed person from receiving their salvation.

Scripture says: "Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy..." (Jude 24) - You see? It is God who keeps us from stumbling and Jesus who presents us blameless before the Father. He alone is responsible for our salvation. It is not up to us to keep it or lose it.

How about this one? "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30) - Notice that our salvation isn't sealed until the day we sin and fall away, but rather is sealed until the day of our final redemption. It is secure.

Beloved, there are dozens of verses in Scripture (in addition to these) that teach and repeatedly affirm the eternal security of the believer. It is well-established doctrine. Therefore this passage does not suggest that saved people can again become lost, but rather reveals how closely those who fall away from Jesus (and were never truly saved to begin with) can appear to be Christians. Finally, it gravely warns those who renounce their faith and depart from the Lord that any future chance at repentance is highly unlikely.

The convicting work of God through the Holy Spirit enables lost sinners with brief opportunities to receive salvation. These moments of conviction are few and fleeting for anyone, much less a chameleon Christian who has turned his or her back on God. Don't walk away from God, because you may never be given a chance to return.

A Better Promise

Originally Preached 8/4/2019

"For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." - 2 Peter 1:4

Have you ever made a promise that you failed to keep? I have. Truth be told, probably all of us have broken promises at some point or another. Some big. Some small. It is a grim reflection of our sinful human condition. The Bible urges us not to make a promise at all if we don't intend on keeping it. It also stresses the importance of keeping the promises that we make. When we break a promise, it undermines our trustworthiness and hurts our reputation.

This morning we will explore a passage of scripture that deals with God's promises. While this letter was written to a specific group of Hebrew believers many years ago, the promises of God mentioned here extend to us as Christians today because we share in the same faith. The sermon is titled "A Better Promise".

I. BETTER THINGS FOR YOU (v9-12)

The writer's closing comments in chapter 5 and the opening words of chapter 6 are extremely critical. The writer charged the Hebrew Christians of being spiritual infants - dull of hearing and unaccustomed to the word of righteousness. He then sternly warned them not to fall away from the faith saying that it is impossible to renew those who depart again to repentance. This admonition suggests a strong suspicion that some of these professing Hebrews may not have been truly saved.

Despite his harsh tone, the writer now expresses confidence that God "has better things" in store for the Hebrew believers. His assurance is based on a strong belief that God will not "forget" their "work and the love" that they'd shown toward both Him and His saints (perhaps referring to those in Jerusalem). God will remember, honor, and bless anyone who sincerely and wholeheartedly serves Him.

With this in mind, the writer of Hebrews urges his audience to also "show the same diligence" and "realize the full assurance of hope". If they shared the same degree of confidence in God that he had for them, they would not be so "sluggish" in their service to the Lord. Instead they would press forward with a bold and resolute spirit, characterized by "faith" and "patience".

The same thing is true for the church today. Despite our many imperfections, I am convinced that God has better things ahead for us too. God is always good and in the ages to come He plans to show us the surpassing riches of His grace and kindness (Ephesians 2:7). He has not

and will not forget about us. For those who have trusted in Him as their Savior and Lord, the best is yet to come.

II. GOD'S UNBREAKABLE OATH (v13-18a)

In the Old Testament God appeared to Abraham and made him a promise. The LORD promised to bountifully bless Abraham and his offspring. Overtime, this promise was realized. The descendants of Abraham, through Isaac and Jacob, were set apart as the people of God and eventually became the nation of Israel. In addition to making this promise, God also swore an oath that He would keep the promise.

Though similar in meaning, an oath is slightly different than a promise. People who take an oath are swearing to tell the truth or to faithfully execute some duty or charge. For example, a trial witness must swear to "tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" before giving their testimony. People who make a promise are pledging themselves to do something. For example, a parent might promise to buy their child an ice cream cone if they make an A on their report card.

When men make certain commitments, they sometimes take an oath as "confirmation". In most cases "they swear by" something or someone "greater than themselves". By doing this, they are further bound to their pledge. If they break their word, they also violate or desecrate the greater authority by which they swore. This would presumably lead to dire consequences, thus compelling them to take their promises more seriously to begin with.

God not only promised to bless His people, but then swore that He'd keep that promise. Because there is no higher authority by which He could swear, God "swore by Himself". Both of these things - the original promise and the affirming oath - are "unchangeable" because it is "impossible for God to lie". The Bible repeatedly teaches that it is against God's nature to lie. God's promises are absolutely trustworthy all by themselves, yet He went above and beyond by confirming them with an unbreakable oath!

III. SURE AND STEADFAST HOPE (v18b-20)

Those who have "taken refuge" in Jesus can rest in the certainty that God's promises are true. This should be a source of "strong encouragement" which enables Christians to "take hold of the hope" that is "set before" them. Born again believers should be the most hopeful people in the world. They should live each day with the confident expectation that God will honor His word.

Such hope is both "sure" and "steadfast". It is an "anchor for the soul". In the midst of a raging storm, it is the anchor that keeps a boat from drifting off course or being capsized. In the same way, Christians are better equipped to face the howling winds of this life because they are

secured by hope. It keeps them grounded and on course, even during the most extreme trials and tribulations.

Redeemed believers have been granted permission to enter “within the veil” into the very presence of God. Jesus made this possible as a “forerunner” for humanity, by removing the barrier of sin that separated mankind from God. When He died on the cross, the temple veil that shielded the entrance to the Holy of Holies was rent from top to bottom. Acting as a “high priest” “according to the order of Melchizedek”, Jesus offered a sacrifice that fully and eternally satisfied God the Father.

The writer originally introduced this line of teaching back in chapters 4 and 5 when he compared Jesus with Aaron. But after identifying Jesus as the Perfect High Priest, he briefly turned his attention to the Hebrew believers themselves. Now, having finished his critique with a warning, he again returns to the main point of his letter - the superiority of Christ.

CONCLUSION

I read this week where someone has estimated that there are approximately 8,810 promises in the Bible. He states that there are over 7,000 in the Old Testament and over 1,000 in the New Testament. Another person has written and published a book which lists 3,000 of these wonderful promises in an easily readable format. We can trust that all of these promises - without exception - will be kept, because our God is always faithful.

Perhaps the LORD’s greatest promise is that of salvation for all of those who genuinely place their faith in Jesus. He promises to give eternal life to anyone who will accept Him as their Savior and Lord. For those of us who have already received Christ, the absolute certainty that we will someday be in Heaven with Jesus gives us incredible strength, comfort, and hope to carry on in the face of all obstacles.

In Christ we have a better promise. Are you an heir of this amazing promise? If not, would you repent of your sins and accept Jesus today?

A Better High Priest

Originally Preached 8/11/2019

“Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” - John 5:45-47

One day, while the Children of Israel were camped at Mount Sinai, Moses asked God to show him His glory. God answered by saying, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!” (Exodus 33:20). As you may recall, Moses was subsequently hidden behind a rock and was only permitted to see the LORD’s back side as He passed by. Though he had only seen a portion of God’s glory, Moses’ face still glowed for many days afterwards.

Immediately prior to this encounter, Moses is seen going to and conversing with God outside of the camp in a special place called “the tent of meeting”. Whenever Moses went into this tent the pillar of cloud which signified God’s presence would descend from heaven and stand at the entrance. Inside the LORD would “speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend.” (Exodus 33:11)

Here, in the same chapter, less than 10 verses apart, we find 2 verses that seemingly contradict each other. The Bible says that Moses spoke with God face to face (presumably on several occasions) and yet also says that no person can see God’s face and live. How can both of these statements be true?

I believe the restriction against seeing God’s face, which is referred to multiple times elsewhere in Scripture, applies exclusively to God the Father. Therefore, when Moses spoke with the LORD “face to face” he was actually conversing with God the Son. This simple explanation would satisfactorily resolve any conflict between the 2 statements. It also reveals that God the Son - who would later come to earth as Jesus Christ - made physical appearances on occasion during the Old Testament.

In today’s message, we will discuss another instance which I strongly believe to be an Old Testament appearance of Christ. It is related to Jesus’ role as our Great High Priest. Are you ready to get started? Let’s go.

I. WHO IS MELCHIZEDEK (v1-3)

Melchizedek is described as “king of Salem” (the city which later became Jerusalem) and “priest of the Most High God”. His name means “king of righteousness” and “king of peace”. He appears and disappears suddenly in the Old Testament narrative, appearing briefly in only one encounter (Genesis 14:17-20), and is therefore a somewhat mysterious Biblical figure.

An alliance of kings, led by Chedorlaomer, had defeated the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and taken numerous captives including Abraham's nephew Lot. In response, Abraham and his men went up and defeated this alliance and liberated their hostages. Upon his return from battle, Melchizedek the priest met with Abraham. Melchizedek presented bread and wine to Abraham and his weary men. He then blessed Abraham and praised God for the decisive victory. Abraham recognized Melchizedek as God's chosen priest, and gave a tenth of his spoils (a tithe) to him.

Melchizedek is said to be "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life". If taken literally, this means that he is an eternal being. The only Persons who fit this description are God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Melchizedek is further said to be "like the Son of God". Based upon this verse, many Bible students identify Melchizedek as a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ.

There are several instances in the Old Testament where Jesus (not yet named Jesus) appears to people. These occurrences are called either theophanies or, more accurately, Christophanies. Some of them include Jesus' appearances to Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. It seems quite possible, if not probable, that Melchizedek is in fact a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus himself, the divine Son of God.

II. RECEIVING THE TITHE (v4-10)

In these verses, the reader is invited to "observe how great" Melchizedek truly was. The writer seeks to demonstrate this greatness by comparing him to those priests who descended from "the sons of Levi". While the Levitical priests collected tithes from among their brethren - the descendants of Abraham, Melchizedek collected a tithe from Abraham himself.

Melchizedek didn't just receive a tithe from Abraham, but he also blessed him. Abraham was God's chosen man, the "patriarch" of Israel, and the recipient of His amazing "promises". Among the Jews there is no one more highly revered than Abraham. Yet everyone knows that "the lesser is blessed by the greater" - it is without "dispute". This indicates that Melchizedek, priest of the Most High God, was superior even to Abraham.

The human priests who received the people's tithes were "mortal men", but the one who received Abraham's tithe "lives on" eternally. Figuratively speaking, all of the Levitical priesthood paid tithes to Melchizedek through the humble actions of their ancestor Abraham, thereby showing themselves to be inferior. Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek took place hundreds of years before the Law was given, while Levi was "still in the lions of his father".

Without digressing too much, I want to point something out. Notice that Abraham practiced tithing long before it was ever prescribed by the Law. This principle predates the Law. While it was eventually codified by the Law, it clearly existed prior to it. Those who argue that tithing

today is now obsolete because the Law has been fulfilled should consider the generous behavior of Abraham who willingly tithed completely apart from the Law.

III. ANOTHER PRIEST ARISES (v11-17)

“Perfection” could never be achieved through the Levitical priesthood, thus necessitating that another priest arise from the “order of Melchizedek” rather than from the line “of Aaron”. It would be up to this priest to accomplish what they could not. This new priest would come from “another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar.” “It is evident” that Jesus fits this description, as He was a member of the non-priestly tribe of Judah.

Earlier in the book of Hebrews, Jesus was identified as the Perfect High Priest. In these verses it becomes clear that Jesus was not appointed to this office “on the basis of a law of physical requirement”. In other words, He did not assume the role of high priest because He was a direct descendant of Aaron or Levi. Rather, Jesus arose as High Priest “according to the power of an indestructible life”.

Centuries before the birth of Christ, David wrote in Psalm 110:4 that God had already designated the Lord Jesus to be “a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”. The writer of Hebrews cites and emphasizes this verse as the basis of his argument. His main point is clear - Jesus is a better high priest than any human priest could ever be.

CONCLUSION

In ancient times, the high priest was Israel’s representative before God. He approached God on behalf of the people in order to make intercession for them. He offered sacrifices to God in order to atone for the people’s sin. He was responsible for the spiritual well-being of the nation. All of these actions were intended to foreshadow the work of Jesus Christ.

Jesus’ exalted position as our Great High Priest is revealed - at least in part - by His pre-incarnate appearance as Melchizedek during the days of Abraham. As we’ve discussed today, Abraham willingly and humbly showed respect and reverence to Lord who was manifested as Melchizedek - the Priest of the Most High God. Likewise, we as mature believers should acknowledge and recognize Jesus as our perfect and eternal High Priest.

A Better Priesthood

Originally Preached 8/18/2019

And He ordered him to tell no one, "But go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing, just as Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." - Luke 5:14

Before the Levitical priesthood was established, from the time of Adam down through Moses, many kings and leaders served as priests on behalf of themselves, their kingdoms, and/or their families. Cain and Abel offered the first recorded sacrifices to God. Later Noah gave a burnt offering to God. Many of the patriarchs such as Abraham and Jacob made sacrifices to Him. Even Job regularly made burnt offerings to the LORD on behalf of his children.

During this ancient period, the people of God were a population "of priests". No one was excluded or restricted from offering a sacrifice because of their family tree. If so led, practically anyone could make an offering to the LORD. With the advent of the Levitical priesthood, this arrangement was drastically altered. God's chosen people Israel became a nation "with priests". Specific men were set aside to offer sacrifices on behalf of others.

The fundamental nature of the priesthood changed, at least for a while. In today's message we will compare the Levitical priesthood with that of Jesus Christ. Any guesses as to which is better? You probably already know the answer, but let's dig into the Scriptures to find out why.

I. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PRIESTHOOD (v18-19)

The Levitical priesthood was weak and useless in that it could never bring about perfection. It could never rightly reconcile the severed relationship between sinful men and a holy God. Therefore, it had to be set aside and replaced by something more effectual. The new priesthood of Jesus Christ accomplished what the former priesthood could not. In Christ, repentant sinners are perfected by the imputed righteousness of Jesus.

Whenever a lost person places their faith in Jesus as their Savior, they become a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). They aren't merely cleaned up or repainted to look like new. Rather, they are perfectly remade and reconciled with Almighty God. As such, Christians have "a better hope" or a more confident expectation of eternal life. Because they have been forgiven and justified by Him, they are free to "draw near to God" without restriction or reservation.

If someone who suffered from extreme headaches took Tylenol and it didn't help, surely they would try other medications. Perhaps eventually they would find something that would adequately soothe the pain. In a similar fashion, the priesthood of Aaron was woefully unable to resolve man's sin problem. But where it failed miserably, the priesthood of Jesus succeeded!

II. THE BASIS OF THE PRIESTHOOD (v20-22)

The Levitical priesthood was based upon several statutes contained in the Mosaic Law. These were given to the Children of Israel by God while they were camped at Mt. Sinai during the exodus. All of the rules and procedures concerning the priests, the sacrifices, the sanctuary, and other related things are collectively called the Ceremonial Law.

The priesthood of Jesus Christ is based upon God's solemn oath. In Psalm 110:4 David wrote that the LORD swore that Jesus would be "a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." God appointed His Son Jesus to be the Great High Priest and vowed that His priesthood would continue eternally.

The Levitical priests were not required to swear an oath in order to become priests. They were qualified for the office by being born into the tribe of Levi, specifically from the lineage of Aaron. But Jesus was designated to be the High Priest expressly by God's oath, and therefore "has become the guarantee of a better covenant". This better covenant will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter.

III. THE NUMBERS OF THE PRIESTHOOD (v23-25)

The Levitical priesthood "existed in greater numbers" because of aging and natural death. A new priest(s) arose with each passing generation to lead the people. According to a traditional listing of the Jewish high priests, more than 80 different men held this office during the tabernacle/temple period starting with Aaron and spanning until the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. Even this thorough list is incomplete, as there are known gaps in the official chronology. If the historical records were completely accurate, this already lengthy list would include several additional names.

The priesthood of Jesus Christ consists of only one divine Person. Because Jesus never dies, His role as High Priest "continues forever" and He holds the office "permanently". There is no need for a replacement. As discussed in last week's sermon, Melchizedek appears to be a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. If so, the priesthood of Melchizedek is rightly understood as an early revelation of the priesthood of Jesus, since in fact they are the same Person.

Jesus lives eternally and is therefore able to "make intercession" for His people continuously. In so doing Jesus is able "to save forever those who draw near to God through Him". His redemptive work applies to all generations, thereby making salvation available to anyone who will humbly accept Him as their Savior and Lord.

IV. THE PURITY OF THE PRIESTHOOD (v26-28)

The Levitical priesthood consisted of defiled men. They were required to "offer up sacrifices" for themselves as well as their people on a "daily" basis. They were plagued by sin, and often just as corrupt as the people they represented. The Bible names several high priests who brazenly

sinned against God and were punished severely for it, such as Nadab and Abihu who offered strange fire before the LORD (Leviticus 10:1-2).

The priesthood of Jesus Christ is “undefiled”. Jesus is “holy”, “innocent”, “separated from sinners”, and “exalted above the heavens”. He does not have to repeatedly offer up new sacrifices on behalf of Himself or His people. Jesus “offered up Himself” as a single and acceptable sacrifice to God “once” and “for all”. This great sacrifice will be the focus of an upcoming chapter in Hebrews.

Jewish priests made multiple offerings to God each day on the altar for an interval of almost 1,500 years. There were certainly seasons when the priestly work was suspended or postponed for various reasons, but these were generally sporadic and short-lived. During the Levitical priesthood era, literally thousands of animals - including bulls, goats, and sheep - were killed. Yet all of these sacrifices combined could not even begin to equal the atoning work of Jesus on the cross.

CONCLUSION

The priesthood of Jesus Christ is far superior to that of Aaron and the Levites. In today’s sermon we have highlighted 4 major reasons why this is so. Let’s briefly review them:

- The Levitical priesthood was unable to “perfect” sinners, but the priesthood of Jesus can and does make sinful men perfect before God.
- The Levitical priesthood was based upon the Mosaic Law which has since been fulfilled, but the priesthood of Jesus is founded upon God’s solemn oath which endures forever.
- The Levitical priesthood consisted of many men as new priests were chosen for each passing generation, but the priesthood of Jesus consists of only one Divine Man - the Son of God - who holds the office permanently and never dies.
- The Levitical priesthood was impure and its priests had to continuously offer up sacrifices for their own sins as well as those of the people, but the priesthood of Jesus is “holy” and “innocent” (without sin) and He only offered up a single sacrifice for His people that was pleasing to God “once for all”.

Next Sunday we will continue our journey through Hebrews with a message about the ministry of Christ. I trust that God will speak to us abundantly through His word, just as He has today. May you all have a blessed week.

A Better Ministry

Originally Preached 8/25/2019

“You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” - 1 Peter 2:5 & 9

In last week’s message, we considered how the nature of the priesthood has changed throughout history. Prior to the Law anyone could act as a priest before God on behalf of themselves, their family, their city, or their kingdom. During the Levitical Priesthood era particular individuals were designated to represent and serve the general population as priests. In Christ, we see a more clearly transparent return to the original order.

In truth, I believe that Jesus has always been our Perfect High Priest. Though His role as mediator was not recognized during the original patriarchal priesthood, it existed nonetheless. The mention of Melchizedek, a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ in the Old Testament, confirms this. The Levitical Priesthood was established as a means to foreshadow the coming revelation of Jesus as high priest, never to serve as a substitute for it. After His death on the cross, Jesus’ exalted office as our Great High Priest was finally and fully disclosed. This sequence is an example of “progressive revelation”.

“The Priesthood of the Believer” or “The Universal Priesthood” is a widely held doctrine among many Christian denominations, including Southern Baptists. It teaches that all Christians have equal and direct access to God through Jesus Christ. Because of Jesus’ finished work on the cross, human priests are no longer necessary (they never truly were) and the Levitical priesthood is obsolete. Christ alone serves permanently as the divine mediator between God and man. This amazing truth is made abundantly clear throughout the New Testament.

While “The Priesthood of the Believer” stresses a Christian’s unfettered and privileged access to God, it also highlights their responsibility to Him. We as believers are to serve as priests by daily offering sacrifices that are pleasing and acceptable to God. These sacrifices are made by the things we say and do. We are to become “living sacrifices” in that we fully commit our entire selves to the LORD - body, soul, and mind. It is not someone else’s job to do this on our behalf; for in Christ we are fully competent and accountable to stand before God on our own.

The message this morning is titled “A Better Ministry”. It is the 15th installment of our sermon series through Hebrews called “Jesus Is Better”. It focuses on Hebrews chapter 8, verses 1-6. Open your Bibles and let’s begin.

I. THE HEAVENLY TENT (v1-2)

The author of Hebrews begins this portion of his letter with a remarkable statement. He declares that Jesus, the Great High Priest, is currently “seated at the right hand” of God in Heaven. Following His ascension from the Mt. of Olives, Jesus Christ reassumed His stately position at the Father’s right hand in glory. The Lord’s location is repeated and confirmed several times both in the New and Old Testament.

In ancient times a person with the highest rank stood or sat at the king’s right hand. This special location conveyed great authority and/or closeness. Even today people might call a friend or companion who is very important or close to them their “right hand man”. Jesus’ position at God’s right hand is a picture of the deep relationship between He and His Father. Further it declares His dominion and power.

From His lofty position, Jesus serves as “a minister in the holy places”. He acts as our high priest in “the true tent”, which was “set up” by the Lord and not by man. Jesus intercedes for us in this heavenly tabernacle before God Himself. Amazing! The apostle Paul attests to this in Romans 8:34 where he says, “Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.”

II. THE EARTHLY COPY (v3-5)

Earthly priests (including the high priest) offered sacrifices on the brazen altar which was located in the outer court of either the tabernacle or temple. Of course, this required the use of animals and/or other gifts to be sacrificed. All of this was done in strict adherence to the rules and procedures which were laid out in the Mosaic Law.

God personally provided Moses with specific and detailed instructions for building the tabernacle and its furnishings. There are several chapters in the Old Testament that pertain to this particular issue. While many view these passages as extraneous and even boring, clearly the LORD was concerned that the tabernacle be constructed in a particular way. Moses was not allowed any freedom in the design or construction of the tabernacle, but rather was to follow God’s strictly prescribed “pattern”.

The design and functionings of the earthly tabernacle were intended to mimic the heavenly tabernacle. They served as “a copy and shadow of heavenly things”. For this reason, it was important for them to appear and operate exactly as God intended. Only in this way could they properly portray and provide insight into the heavenly reality after which they were modeled.

III. THE DIVINE MEDIATOR (v6)

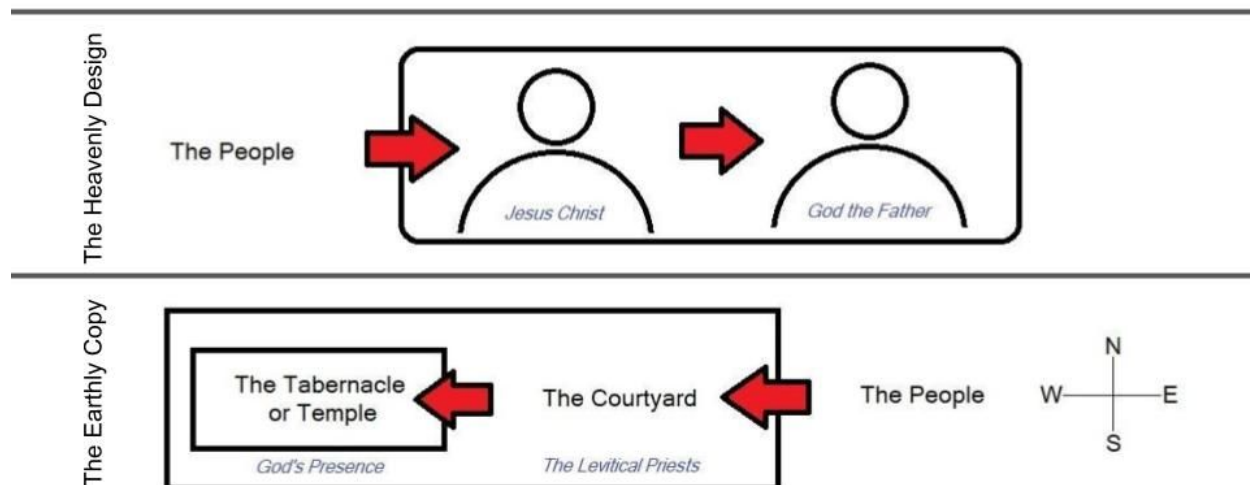
The writer concludes this portion of his teaching by saying that now Jesus “has obtained a more excellent ministry”. He is referring to Christ’s role as mediator between God and man. The risen Lord has returned to His heavenly home, again taken His place at the Father’s right hand, and is actively serving as an intercessor for Christians.

Jesus mediates “a better covenant” which is founded upon “better promises”. Back in chapter 6:9-20 the writer already talked extensively about God’s “better promises”. The LORD has promised salvation to anyone who will repent of their sins and place their faith in Jesus Christ. In the remaining verses of chapter 8, the writer will discuss the “better covenant”. This will be the topic of next week’s message.

CONCLUSION

The content of today’s message is illustrated by the diagram below. Take a few moments to study the images and consider how “The Heavenly Tent” and “The Earthly Copy” are similar yet different. Do you see and understand how the Levitical copy depicts God’s original design?

Man’s Access to God



We as believers have access to God through our intermediary, Jesus Christ. He patiently and lovingly appeals with the Father on our behalf. In Him alone we have reconciliation and peace with the LORD. This is the ongoing work of Jesus - as you can see, it is truly “a better ministry”.

A Better Covenant

Originally Preached 9/1/2019

“In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’” - 1 Corinthians 11:25

This morning’s message will be the 16th in our series through the book of Hebrews. It is titled “A Better Covenant”. At the conclusion of our discussion last week, the Biblical author stated that Jesus ministers as the Mediator of a “better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises”. This covenant will be the topic of our sermon today.

A covenant is a binding agreement or contract between two parties. Typically, when we speak about Biblical covenants we are referring to those that God has initiated between Himself and mankind. Scholars recognize 7 such covenants found in Scripture - the Adamic Covenant, the Noahic Covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant, the Land Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and the New Covenant.

These covenants are generally categorized as either conditional or unconditional, though some have elements of both. A conditional covenant is structured so that the promise(s) made by God contained in the agreement are contingent upon man’s ability to adhere to its terms. An unconditional covenant is structured so that God’s promise(s) are binding regardless of man’s abilities or actions. For example, God’s conditional covenant with Adam promised eternal life in the Garden of Eden in exchange for not eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of God and Evil. His unconditional covenant with Noah made no human demands but rather promised to never destroy the earth again by flooding.

Conditional covenants can be thought of as works-based covenants. Man’s actions or works determine whether or not he will receive God’s promises or maintain His favor. Notably, in every instance of a conditional or works-based covenant mankind has failed to uphold the terms of the agreement. Unconditional covenants, however, can be described as grace-based covenants. Man’s works have no bearing upon God’s promises. He graciously acts solely on the basis of His own righteous character and will.

It is essential that Christians have some general knowledge about the two types of covenants. It helps us to better interpret and understand the meaning of Scripture. This will be of particular importance in our message today.

I. THE NEED FOR A NEW COVENANT (v7-9a)

The first covenant, which is also called the old covenant, was flawed and faulty. The fault was not with God, but rather with man. It was a conditional covenant that fallen humanity simply

couldn't keep. It was unable to perfect humanity. As such, a new and better covenant was needed. This coming covenant was foretold hundreds of years earlier in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

What's more, the former covenant applied most specifically to the children of or nation of Israel. In other words, it had limited participation. A new covenant was needed that had a broader application to all people. While it was originally introduced to the Jews, this new covenant would expand to include everyone - including the Gentiles.

II. THE NATURE OF THE NEW COVENANT (v9b & 12)

The former covenant is sometimes referred to as the Law. Under it, people typically received God's blessings if they obeyed His commands and punishments if they did not. For example, when the Hebrew children refused to follow God's directive to enter into the Promised Land they were forced to wander in the wilderness. God "did not care for them" because of their disobedience. While He still loved them and desired their repentance, He justifiably withheld His promised blessings.

God is fully aware of men's depravity and inability to live without sin. He knows that a corrupted and imperfect people always will fail to keep up their end of the bargain. When left to unholy men, inevitably the end will be curses and condemnation. So in order to redeem them, the LORD enacted a new and unconditional covenant characterized by mercy and forgiveness. It is founded on grace through faith.

III. THE PLACEMENT OF THE NEW COVENANT (v10a)

The old covenant consisted of many laws, ordinances, and statutes that were either written on tablets of stone or in scrolls of paper. While the moral laws pre-existed the former covenant and were simply included in it, the ceremonial and civil laws were all new. These laws were externally imposed upon man by God. Together they functioned as the governing rules of Israeli society and religion.

The new covenant is written into people's "minds" and onto "their hearts". It is affected by God internally within man. It emphasizes universal morals and ethics which are inherent to every person. These are seared into the human conscience. Because all people are created in the image of God, each naturally has some sense of good and evil. Unfortunately, this discretion is often blurred by sin.

IV. THE FAMILIARITY OF THE NEW COVENANT (v10b-11)

Because the old covenant was based on external laws which defined what was legal and illegal, it had to be taught by and/or shared between people. There was no innate understanding or awareness of it. People had to hear and learn these precepts from others if they intended to

follow them. They weren't naturally familiar the old covenant's requirements or even the God who prescribed them.

The new covenant is rooted in humanity's internal recognition of right and wrong. While this can and certainly should be developed and refined through additional teaching and discipleship, everyone instinctively knows that some things are fundamentally good while others are not. In addition, everyone has an inborn awareness that God is real. Some may try to suppress or deny this knowledge, but it exists nonetheless.

V. THE END OF THE OLD COVENANT (v13)

With the advent of the new and faultless covenant which was enacted by Christ, the old has become "obsolete". It is no longer necessary or viable. That said, there remains great value in studying the old covenant. The commandments contained therein provide considerable insight into the character and heart of God. While they are no longer strictly binding, they may still be beneficial to a person's or people's well-being.

CONCLUSION

God purposely initiated the old covenant, which demanded obedience as the means of obtaining His blessings and salvation, in order to show us our utter helplessness and hopelessness. The Lord was not intentionally setting us up to fail, but rather was revealing to us that we could never succeed. This was an act of grace on His part, because it made us aware of our desperate need for a Savior.

Let's review the comparisons we've made between the old covenant and the new covenant:

- The old covenant was faulty, but the new covenant is faultless.
- The old covenant was conditional upon man's obedience, but the new covenant is an unconditional expression of God's grace through faith.
- The old covenant was written on stone and paper, but the new covenant is written on hearts and minds.
- The old covenant was external and had a limited application, but the new covenant is internal and has an unlimited application.
- The old covenant is obsolete, but the new covenant is in effect.

Last week I introduced the concept of "progressive revelation" and explained how it relates to the priesthood of Jesus Christ. This same principle also applies to God's covenantal relationship with mankind. In truth, salvation has always come to repentant sinners by grace through faith. This process has never changed throughout time. Prior to the Mosaic Law there was virtually no widespread understanding of this, during the time of the old covenant it was being vaguely portrayed, and in Christ it is fully declared and made transparent.

The new covenant is merely the complete revelation of that which was always in place. Wow!

A Better Sanctuary

Originally Preached 9/8/2019

“Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them.” - Exodus 25:8

Earlier in this series we discussed the origin and etymology of the words “Hebrews”, “Israelites”, and “Jews”. All 3 of these names generally refer to the same group of people and are sometimes used interchangeably. However, each was derived in a different way and during a different period of history. This got me thinking... is there any particular reason why this Bible book is named “Hebrews” rather than “Israelites” or “Jews”? Could it be more than just random chance? There is no definitive reason that I know of, but I do have an interesting theory.

When used in the Old Testament, the term “Hebrews” is mostly spoken by those from other nations. The Canaanites, Egyptians, Philistines, and perhaps others referred to the children of God as the “Hebrews”. In so doing, they were designating them as foreigners. The word “Hebrews” carries the connotation of an outsider or someone who is out of place.

Now follow me here... could it be that a reason this book is called “Hebrews” is because it highlights a subset of the Jews that were estranged from the larger population? Because they had turned away from the traditional observance of Judaism and had instead placed their faith in Jesus, these Messianic Jews were fiercely ostracized and persecuted by their kinsmen. These believing Jews were shunned and despised as foreigners by their own people. Though they were technically descendants of Abraham, they didn’t belong anymore.

In the same way, the Bible calls Christians of all ages strangers and pilgrims. Our citizenship is in heaven, not on earth. This planet is merely a temporary abode. We as born again believers should act and speak differently than the lost world around us, which in turn makes us a strange and peculiar people. The Bible warns that we will be hated by others. We are foreigners living on the earth, destined to soon return to our heavenly homeland. We are, in this sense, like these Hebrews. Okay... I digress.

The sermon today is called “A Better Sanctuary”. We will be discussing several aspects of the tabernacle. This passage serves as a transition point in the writer’s discourse about Jesus.

I. THE ARRANGEMENT OF THE SANCTUARY (v1-5)

The first covenant - that is the Law of Moses - included “regulations” that pertained to worship in the earthly sanctuary or tabernacle. This tabernacle, and later the temples, were carefully designed according to the pattern given by God. It was divided into 2 rooms with particular items or furnishings in each.

The outer room of the tabernacle was called the Holy Place. According to the writer, in this room there were 2 items of furniture - the lampstand and the table of showbread. Priests would enter this room on a daily basis to minister before the LORD. The inner room of the tabernacle was called the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest was allowed to enter this room once a year on the Day of Atonement. According to the writer, there were 2 furnishings in this room also - the altar of incense and the ark of the covenant. Inside the ark were 3 items - the stone tablets upon which God had written the 10 commandments, a jar of manna from the exodus, and Aaron's budding rod. The ark was overshadowed by cherubim.

The arrangement of the furniture described in this passage differs slightly from the original design given by God in the Old Testament. The book of Exodus places the altar of incense in the Holy Place instead of the Holy of Holies. This discrepancy has been explained in a number of ways. Perhaps the most plausible is that, on the Day of Atonement, the altar of incense was temporarily moved from its usual position outside of the veil into the Holy of Holies. There are multiple verses in Scripture that lend support to this theory. Because this special arrangement of the furnishings better demonstrated his point, perhaps the writer of Hebrews described it in this way rather than the normal arrangement recorded by Moses.

II. THE WORK OF THE SANCTUARY (v6-7)

The priests entered the outer room of the tabernacle - the Holy Place - "continually" in order to perform acts of "divine worship". Each day - once in the morning and again in the evening - a selected priest would go in and tend to the lampstand and altar of incense. The lampstand was to remain lit perpetually and incense was to be offered twice daily. On a weekly basis, that is every Sabbath day, the priest would change out the showbread as well.

Only the high priest was allowed to enter the inner room of the tabernacle - the Holy of Holies. What's more, he only did so "once a year". Before going in, special sacrifices were made on the brazen altar in the outer courtyard. The high priest then carried some of the blood from these slain animals with him into the Holy of Holies. He could not enter without this blood. Once inside, he sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant as an offering to atone for himself and the "sins of the people".

III. THE LIMITATIONS OF THE SANCTUARY (v8-10)

The Holy Spirit signifies 2 limitations of the earthly tabernacle or temple. The first is that it doesn't provide the true "way into the holy place". So long as the tabernacle is standing - either physically or symbolically - many will mistakenly view it as the agency into God's presence. In fact, it is only a "symbol for the present time". Access to the LORD is not restricted by the tabernacle or its related laws.

The second limitation is that the "gifts and sacrifices" offered in the tabernacle are unable to "make the worshiper perfect in conscience". This inability has been mentioned already in

previous chapters. The offerings rendered in the earthly sanctuary pertain only to physical and temporal things such as “food and drink and various washings”. These needed to be reformed in order to affect eternal and spiritual cleansing and forgiveness within the heart of the believer.

IV. THE ENTRY INTO ANOTHER SANCTUARY (v11-12)

With this statement the author of Hebrews concludes his lengthy and comprehensive presentation of Jesus Christ as the Great High Priest “of the good things to come”. Through His death, Jesus entered by the true way into the “greater and more perfect tabernacle” where God the Father dwells. This heavenly tabernacle was not made by human hands and is not of this created world.

The focus now turns to Jesus as the redeeming sacrifice for mankind. The high priest was required to carry the shed blood of “goats and calves” with him into earthly Holy of Holies. So also Christ was unable to enter the heavenly sanctuary apart from the shedding of “His own blood”. Jesus, the Lamb of God, offered Himself as a sacrifice to God in order to obtain “eternal redemption” for humanity.

CONCLUSION

The tabernacle or temple was the place where, under the old covenant, priests offered sacrifices to God. Both of these things - the priests and the sacrifices - foreshadowed the work of Christ and the New Covenant that He established. Chapters 7 & 8 highlighted Jesus' role as our High Priest. The remainder of chapter 9 and most of chapter 10 presents Jesus as our perfect and pleasing sacrifice. He is both the giver and the gift simultaneously! Jesus gave Himself for us!

A Better Sacrifice (Part 1)

Originally Preached 9/15/2019

"The next day he [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" - John 1:29

Have you ever played Word Association? It is a simple game in which someone says a word and another person responds with the first word that comes to their mind. For example, if I said "cat" you might immediately answer "dog". Or if I said "moon" you might reply "stars". Pretty simple right? As you might expect, playing Word Association can be quite fun and inciteful.

Certain words can be linked to one another by either their meaning, usage, or for a host of other reasons. This is certainly true for Biblical vocabulary as well. Christians connect the name "Jesus" with titles such as "Messiah", "Savior", and "Lord". They associate the concept of "hope" with words such as "confidence", "assurance", and "expectation". These and other correlations are helpful to those seeking a greater understanding of Scripture.

For the purposes of today's message, let's turn to the Bible and briefly consider the relationship between 2 important words. They are "blood" and "life". The key verse that ties these words together is Leviticus 17:11 which states: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement." This statement makes it clear that, in God's economy, blood represents life. The blood that was shed on the altar flowed from and was symbolic of the life that was given in order to secure atonement from sin.

The name of today's sermon is "A Better Sacrifice (Part 1)". It is the first of 2 messages that focus on the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. As Christians, whenever we talk about the blood of Jesus we should think about His life which He freely gave for us. When we say that Jesus bled for us, we mean that He died for us!

I. A QUESTION ABOUT THE BLOOD (v13-14)

The writer introduces his discussion of Christ's sacrificial death with a question. He challenges his readers to consider which was greater - the sacrifices of animals during the tabernacle and temple era or the recent sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary? In the remainder of this chapter he will compare and contrast these 2 sacrifices in order to emphatically demonstrate the superiority of one over the other.

According to the Law, "the blood of goats and bulls" that was shed during animal sacrifices was used by the priests to secure atonement from sin. So also, "the ashes of a heifer" were used to bring about purification for those who had been defiled (Numbers 19:1-10). Both the blood and the ashes sanctified "for the cleansing of the flesh".

When Jesus gave His life on the cross, His divine blood cleansed the “conscience from dead works.” During His death, all 3 Persons of the Trinity were present. Jesus offered Himself to God (the Father) through the eternal Spirit (The Holy Spirit). Jesus’ death on the cross and His subsequent resurrection are the most significant events in history.

II. THE NECESSITY OF BLOOD (v16-22)

Covenants between God and man cannot be established or made valid apart from “death”, which is symbolized by the shedding of blood. There is some dispute over the proper interpretation of these verses, but the language used seems to suggest that the person who made the covenant must themselves die. Perhaps this is more akin to receiving an inheritance after a family member passes away. Jesus gave His own life to enact the New Covenant, while the first covenant was “inaugurated” with the blood of animals. However, it is noteworthy that Moses did die prior the Hebrews’ entry into the Promised Land.

A special ceremony was conducted to introduce and initiate the Old Covenant (Exodus 24:3-8). Having received the Law from God, Moses recounted it and then wrote it down in a book. After reading this book aloud to the children of Israel, Moses collected “the blood of the calves and the goats” which he’d previously sacrificed and sprinkled it on both the people and the book. He said, “This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you”. Furthermore, he sprinkled the “tabernacle” and “vessels of ministry” as well.

“According to the Law... all things are cleansed with blood.” Blood was used in order to sanctify or set someone or something apart for God’s purposes. It was used to purify anyone or anything that had been defiled or become unclean in some way. It was used to atone for the sins of individuals and well as the nation at large. God’s established precedent was clear - “Without [the] shedding of blood there is no forgiveness”. Jesus did not seek to avoid this requirement, but rather to fulfill it.

III. THE POWER OF CHRIST’S BLOOD (v15, 23-28)

Jesus died on the cross, spilling His own blood, in order to obtain “redemption of the transgressions” of men. These sins, which are violations of God’s law as prescribed “under the first covenant”, have been forgiven and “the promise of the eternal inheritance” is now available to all repentant sinners who place their faith in Christ. His blood doesn’t just purify the flesh, but also purifies the soul thereby reconciling man with God.

As discussed in a previous message, Jesus entered into a better, heavenly sanctuary where God himself abides. There He offered Himself “once” as the eternal sacrifice for humanity’s sins. It is not necessary for Jesus to offer Himself again or suffer repeatedly because His death on the cross covered all sin past, present, and future. It was all encompassing and fully complete. Jesus’ sacrifice did not merely “cleanse” temporarily, but rather “put away sin” permanently.

Like Jesus, "it is appointed for all men to die once". After physical death "comes judgement". Those who have never been saved will face condemnation and punishment. However, those who are born again and covered by the blood of Christ will receive "salvation without reference to sin" because their sins are forgiven! This will take place when Jesus returns "a second time" and it gives all Christians a reason to "eagerly await Him."

CONCLUSION

God is just. He demands a life for a life. Therefore, at just the right time, the LORD sent His only begotten Son to uphold this righteous requirement. God did not suspend, amend, or ignore the conditions He'd set. Instead, He lovingly gave that which was most precious to Him in order to redeem fallen humanity.

Jesus came to earth for one main purpose - to give His life so that sinful men might live. His death was the ransom that set us free. It paid the debt of sin that you and I owed. Jesus became our substitute and bore the penalty that we deserved. His blood washes away our sin fully and eternally. His death was and is "a better sacrifice".

If you have never accepted Jesus as your Savior, I urge you to do so right now. He died in order to forgive you of your sins, reconcile you to God, and give you the promise of eternal life! What could be better than that? Turn to Jesus, repent of your sins, confess Him as Lord, place your faith wholly in Him, and receive the life that He alone offers.

A Better Sacrifice (Part 2)

Originally Preached 9/29/2019

“For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;” - 1 Peter 3:18

This morning we are going to complete the second half of our message called “A Better Sacrifice”. In the first sermon of this pair, we focused our discussion on the potent blood of Jesus. When we refer to the blood of Christ, it reminds us of His sacrificial death on the cross. We learned that all covenants are established and validated by blood. We read that the blood of bulls and goats which was spilled on the altar during countless Old Testament offerings was unable to cleanse the conscience, but the blood of Jesus provides forgiveness of sins.

In today’s message, we are going to discuss the sufficiency of Jesus’ sacrifice. The word sufficient means adequate or enough. As we have done previously, we will again contrast the offerings of animals under the Old Covenant with the grueling crucifixion of Jesus which established the New Covenant. By making this comparison, we will see yet another reason why the Lord’s sacrifice was and is far superior.

For most of our married life, my wife and I (mostly her I’ll admit) have hand-washed our dishes. I find washing dishes to be quite therapeutic at times. Even now, we don’t have a dishwasher in our home. So almost every night, after supper is over, there is a sink full of plates, bowls, cups, and other such things that have built up over the course of the day that need to be washed. Our routine is to get them cleaned before settling in to relax for the evening. This is an activity that must be repeated daily, as the dishes never stay clean for long (especially with 3 kids in the house) and have to be rewashed again and again.

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if there was a way to wash something one time so thoroughly and completely that it would never become dirty or defiled ever again? Could such a wondrous cleansing even be possible, and if it was, what would it pertain to? The answer to these questions is found in today’s message...

I. A CONSTANT REMINDER (v1-4)

The writer of Hebrews begins this portion of his letter by again reminding his audience that the sacrificial offerings made under the Law, which was the basis of the Old Covenant, were unable to “make perfect those who draw near”. This has been a major and often repeated theme of this book. Because of their inadequacy, they had to be repeated “continually year by year”. Had they been able to fully cleanse and purify the heart, these sacrifices would have ceased long ago. Instead, the worshiper’s “consciousness of sins” remained despite these sacrifices.

The numerous and ongoing animal sacrifices were a constant reminder of sin. Every time someone traveled to the tabernacle or temple to make an offering, they were again confronted with the persistent nature of their own sinfulness. The dirtiness and impurity that it caused might be dealt with temporarily, but it would soon return. This would require yet another future sojourn to the temple and another sacrifice to the LORD. This bleak and burdensome cycle seemed unbreakable, as it continuously highlighted the presence and accumulation of sin within a person's life.

Even worse, despite their earnest sincerity, these tireless efforts to obediently follow the Law by repeatedly making such sacrifices were of no avail. "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins". The practice of animal sacrifice was merely "a shadow of the good things to come". When it comes to the actual remission of sins, this entire exercise was a mission of futility.

II. THE LORD'S DISPLEASURE (v5-10)

Here the writer of Hebrews cites the words of David in Psalm 40:6-8. In this psalm David thanks and praises the Lord for hearing his cry and sustaining him through tribulation. Some scholars speculate that this psalm was written after David returned to the throne following Absalom's rebellion. This citation, as it is used in Hebrews, concerns the work of Jesus Christ.

God the Father does not "take pleasure in" or "desire" burnt offerings or any other sacrifices for sins made or given under the Law. These are wholly unacceptable and inadequate to Him. The only sacrifice that pleases God is that of Christ's own "body" which was given in accordance to the LORD's divine "will".

That which was first - the Law, the animal sacrifices, the Old Covenant, etc. - has been taken away in order to establish the second - God's grace, the sacrifice of Jesus, the New Covenant, etc. By His death at Calvary, Jesus sanctified - that is to say, cleansed and set apart for Himself - all who would believe on His name. He rectified the Lord's displeasure.

III. ONE SUFFICIENT OFFERING (v11-18)

Like a factory worker on an assembly line, who mindlessly repeats the same mundane task time and time again, so also the priests would offer the "same sacrifices" day after day - though they could "never take away sins." In contrast, Jesus made a single and all-sufficient sacrifice. After doing so, He then ascended into Heaven where He now waits at God's right hand until His enemies are vanquished under His feet.

"For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." The Holy Spirit testifies to this very truth. This was foretold in Jeremiah 31:33-34 which is mentioned here and was previously cited back in chapter 8. Because the forgiveness effected by Christ on the cross is all encompassing, there is no need for repeated sacrifices under the New Covenant.

All of us take showers virtually every day. During our showers, we generally take a few minutes to wash our hair. Have you ever noticed the instructions on your shampoo bottle? Many of them say, "Lather, Rinse, Repeat". Simple and easy to follow, right? While this repetition may be recommended for cleaning your hair, thank God it isn't necessary to cleanse repentant sinners from their sins. Jesus accomplished this once and for all time. Hallelujah!

CONCLUSION

Beloved, the sin issue has already been dealt with. Jesus has forever conquered sin and death. As He shouted from the cross, "It is finished!" There is no need for any additional sacrifice. The wrath of God has been fully appeased. The gift of forgiveness through Jesus Christ has been made available to everyone. Salvation is freely offered to any and all who will receive it. Those who come to Christ by faith are justified and rightly reconciled to the LORD.

Over the course of the past 3 chapters, the author of Hebrews has presented Jesus as our Perfect High Priest who entered into the heavenly sanctuary in order to offer Himself as an all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins of mankind. In so doing, He established a new and greater covenant which is built upon God's amazing grace through faith in Christ. What a glorious thought! We are free from the rigorous demands and requirements of the Law. We are forever free from the bondage of sin.

But as they say, "With freedom comes responsibility." In next week's sermon we will consider a few of these responsibilities. Until then, may the never ending wonder of Jesus' sacrifice fill your heart with joy and your mind with awe.

A Better Way

Originally Preached 10/6/2019

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.’” - John 14:6

Each year the Southern Baptist Convention, of which our church is a member, holds its annual meeting in some major American city. Representatives from SBC churches across the nation come together to hear the latest news and address current issues facing Southern Baptist churches. One of the major activities of these meetings is to draft and vote on formal resolutions which generally express the position of the SBC on certain matters. Typically, the Convention passes around 10 such resolutions each year.

These resolutions are always written in the same format. They begin by stating certain truths, such as Biblical principles or commands, proven research or statistics, and/or other known facts related to the topic at hand. Then, have presented these as a foundation, the resolution concludes with 1 or more statements which express the positions and/or intentions of the Convention on the particular issue being addressed.

During its 2019 meeting this past summer in Birmingham, Alabama, the SBC approved resolutions on several topics including “Sexual Abuse”, “Church Accountability”, “Racism”, “Personal Identity”, and “Abortion”. These and other resolutions from past years can be found online at the Convention’s website. Through these statements, the Southern Baptist Convention expresses its stance on the moral and political issues of our day.

The message this morning is titled “A Better Way”. It is the 20th sermon in our series through the book of Hebrews. The passage we will examine today brings closure to the arguments that have been presented in chapters 7-10. It is written in the form of a resolution, similar to those we’ve discussed above. It encourages believers to do certain things and make certain commitments in response to the undeniable truths of God’s Word.

I. SINCE WE HAVE (v19-21)

The writer begins these verses with the word “Therefore”. He is referring back to the teachings of the previous chapters. He mentions the “blood of Jesus” which was shed on the cross when Christ gave His life as an offering to atone for the sins of mankind. Jesus’ blood is powerful enough to cleanse the conscience by washing away sins and sufficient for covering all sins for all time for all people. Jesus’ sacrificial death made forgiveness for and justification of repentant sinners possible.

Furthermore, because Jesus is a great “priest over the house of God” all Christians now have direct access to God through Him. Redeemed believers may enter into “the holy place” - ie,

God's presence - with confidence because Christ has "inaugurated" this "new and living way". Jesus approached God on behalf of sinners when they couldn't do so themselves in order to bring about restoration and reconciliation of the relationship between man and God.

II. LET US DRAW NEAR (v22)

Christians should value and appreciate their access to God. They should take advantage of it by coming to the LORD with every question and burden of life. Because God is holy and perfect, He does not permit the entry of sinful people into His presence. Through Jesus, however, believers have "hearts" that are "sprinkled clean" and "bodies" that are "washed with pure water" so that they might approach God in righteousness. This is a remarkable truth that should never be taken for granted!

Just as presenting oneself before the Lord is important, but so also is the attitude in which it is done. Not only should Christians draw near to God frequently, but they should do so with "a sincere heart" and "in full assurance of faith". Those who have been redeemed should approach the LORD honestly and forthrightly. They should do so with confidence - not in themselves but in God. He doesn't begrudge their presence, but rather delights in it!

III. LET US HOLD FAST (v23)

Those who have been born again should stand firm on their convictions and their "confession" of Jesus as the Christ. They should be steadfast "without wavering" because the Lord is "faithful". Far too many professing Christians have a wishy-washy faith that is weak and anemic. They lack the courage necessary to confront the evils of this world and the resolve to remain faithful to Jesus in every circumstance. They are quick to abandon their beliefs when the going gets tough.

As noted several months ago when this series began, many of these Hebrews Christians were seriously considering forsaking their newfound faith and reverting back to Judaism. Some had already done so because of the increasing persecution against them. This book was written in order to explain the superiority of Jesus over their former religion and traditions while encouraging them to remain faithful and committed to Him.

IV. LET US CONSIDER HOW (v24-25)

The children of God should spur one another "to love and good deeds". As His family, believers should "encourage" and support each other as they work together in unity to exalt and advance the wonderful name of Jesus. There are many adversarial people and forces in this world that constantly seek to tear Christians down. Thus, it is critical for the Lord's followers to build each other up and bolster one another's faith and practice.

Christians must understand the importance of “assembling together” regularly. Such gatherings are the main avenue through which they “stimulate” one another, develop relationships, and grow in the image of the Lord. Sadly, many do not recognize the great value of frequent church attendance and have forsaken this once-treasured exercise. Instead of meeting less, born again believers should be meeting “all the more” as the return of the Lord approaches.

CONCLUSION

Let’s end today’s message by presenting this passage in the form of an official resolution. As a matter of fact, let’s recite it together as a congregation. May these words express our sincere, heartfelt commitment to God.

*SINCE WE HAVE a Savior, Jesus Christ, who offered Himself as the all-sufficient sacrifice for man’s sin, and
SINCE WE HAVE a Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, who reigns supremely over the house of God, then...*

*LET US draw near to the LORD frequently and fervently, not discounting the privileged access we have to Him through Christ, and
LET US hold fast to our convictions and stand firm on our beliefs, not forsaking the One in whom our faith is grounded, and
LET US encourage and support one another, and regularly assemble ourselves together to worship, fellowship, and serve Almighty God.*

Jesus has blazed a trail for us. We can walk this path with God in confidence, boldness, and unity. He has made a better way!

Fifth Warning: Don't Disregard

Originally Preached 10/13/2019

“Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; The sun will be dark when it rises and the moon will not shed its light. Thus I will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud and abase the haughtiness of the ruthless.” - Isaiah 13:9-11

As we learned earlier in this series, there are several warning passages scattered throughout the book of Hebrews. These are serious admonitions which caution readers about the dangers of certain behaviors. They have differing applications to Christians and non-Christians, and must always be understood in a manner consistent with the broader, well-established Biblical doctrine known as “the eternal security of the believer”.

It has been some time since we encountered one of these warning passages. The extensive teaching about Jesus’ priesthood and sacrifice in chapters 7-10, arguably the main part of this book, has dominated our discussion for the past several weeks. However, as we draw this section of Hebrews to a close, we find yet another warning passage. We haven’t seen one since way back in chapter 6, so let’s take a moment to review...

The first warning passage was found in chapter 2, verses 1-4. It was a warning against drifting away from the truth of the gospel. The second warning was given in chapter 3, verses 12-19. It gave notice that doubting would prevent us from entering God’s rest. The third warning passage was found in chapter 4, verses 11-13. It advised us not to disobey because God sees and knows everything. The fourth was issued in chapter 6, verses 1-8, and it cautioned against departing from the faith because renewal would be impossible.

This morning’s message will focus on the fifth warning passage of Hebrews. It serves as another alarm to prevent us from wandering away from the Lord. These warnings are not intended to scare or intimidate, but rather to lovingly protect us from harm. The name of the sermon is “Don’t Disregard”.

I. RESPECT THE LORD (v26-31)

This warning is directed toward those who “go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth”. These are people who have an intellectual knowledge of who Jesus is, but not a heart knowledge. They know of Him, but don’t know Him personally. They are still unsaved sinners who continue to practice iniquity and live in darkness despite having heard the glorious gospel message. For them, the atoning “sacrifice” of Jesus is of no effect, and all that remains is

“a terrifying expectation of judgement”. They will experience the “fury” of God’s consuming fire as described in Isaiah 26:11 and elsewhere.

Under the Old Covenant, those who committed a capital offense could be given the death penalty based on the testimony of 2 or 3 witness. Under the New Covenant, which is far greater, those who reject Christ are held personally responsible for His death and face a much more serious consequence. They “deserve” a “severe punishment” because they “trample under foot” the Son of God, they regard His blood as “unclean”, and they “insult” the Holy Spirit (see Matt. 12:31). Such crimes against God will surely incur His wrath.

The LORD is a vengeful God. He will exact retribution upon those who disrespect and rebel against Him. This is reinforced with excerpts from Deuteronomy 32:35, 36, & 41. These Old Testament verses are a part of “The Song of Moses” which assures the children of Israel that God will, in His time, repay those who mistreat and abuse them. Those who align themselves against God should be very afraid, because His wrath is terrible beyond imagination.

II. REMEMBER YOUR PAST (v32-34)

The Hebrews were urged to remember their “former days”, after they had first heard and pursued the gospel message. Because of their decision to follow Jesus, they had and continued to endure a “great conflict of sufferings”. This persecution wasn’t hidden or done in secret. It was a “public spectacle” in which many leading Christians faced “reproaches and tribulations” of various sorts. Others shared in this misery by sympathizing for the “prisoners” who had been taken and by “joyfully” accepting the seizure of their own property.

The Hebrews were willing to forfeit their earthly things because they had a “better” and “lasting” possession to come. As they thought about the pain and oppression they’d already endured, they were challenged to become even more resolute in their stance for Christ. If they were to abandon Him now, all of these difficulties would have been for naught. To go a step further, if they were to walk away from Jesus it would reveal that they never truly knew Him to begin with.

III. RECEIVE HIS PROMISES (v35-39)

There is “a great reward” waiting for those who have trusted in Jesus for salvation. Therefore, Christians should not “throw away” their confidence in Him. On the contrary, they should “endure” persecution by faithfully doing “the will of God” until receiving that which was “promised”. Believers should find assurance in the prophecy of Habakkuk 2:3 which states that the Lord is “coming” again soon and “will not delay.”

Jesus is the LORD’s “righteous One”. Though He faced unspeakable scorn and suffering, He refused to forsake the mission of redemption that God had called Him to. Had He done so, the Father would have taken “no pleasure in Him”. By remaining faithful, Jesus forever conquered sin and death, made forgiveness for mankind possible, and set an example for all Christians to

follow. True believers will never “shrink back to destruction”, but instead will stand firm in the faith that preserves their souls.

CONCLUSION

I recently heard about a large private company that sold products to the public. Over time, it received several reports from customers that these products were harmful. In response to these complaints, the company conducted some internal research and discovered that their product was indeed defective and potentially dangerous. Fearing that they'd be sued and lose a tremendous amount of profit, the company ignored and even hid their findings.

Eventually, after several more incidents, a class-action lawsuit was brought against the company by those who had been adversely affected by the product. During the trial it was revealed that the company had known the truth for some time, yet had failed to act upon it. The jury was appalled by the company's indifference, and found it guilty of committing a criminal offense. In the end, the company was forced to pay a staggering sum in damages and soon went out of business altogether.

This story vividly demonstrates the danger of a blatant or reckless disregard for the truth. In like manner, when a person hears the message of Christ - which is undeniably true and right, but willfully chooses to ignore it and continue in their sinful ways, they can and should expect to be judged accordingly. While God's justice may not be immediate, it will come soon and without mercy. This is why sinners should repent today, while the opportunity still remains...

Jesus is the divine Son of God who died on the cross and then rose from the grave in order to save fallen humanity. He alone offers forgiveness of sin and the promise of eternal life. This is the truth. Acknowledge it, embrace it, receive it, and be transformed by it - but whatever you do, don't disregard it.

Faith Is Better (Part 1)

Originally Preached 10/20/2019

“...for we walk by faith, not by sight...” - 2 Corinthians 5:7

One of the places that I'd like to go someday is the Pro Football Players Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio. I would very much enjoy looking back over the years and reflecting upon those players, coaches, and others who have made lasting impressions and contributions to the game. I think it would be a fun and fascinating trip. Did you know that there is a “Hall of Fame” in the Bible? Well, sort of...

This morning we will begin a 2-part message through chapter 11 of Hebrews. This great chapter of Scripture is often called “The Hall of Faith” or “The Heroes of Faith”. It specifically names several Old Testament men and women who exhibited remarkable faith in God. Though they lived and died thousands of years ago, these incredible people continue to be wonderful examples for Christians today.

Besides just providing a list of faithful believers, the broader message of this chapter further confirms one of the main and recurring teachings of Hebrews. Throughout all of history salvation was never granted on the basis of obedience to the Law, but always on the basis of God's grace as received by faith. This is the central point of the “better covenant” and “better way” that we've been discussing in this series. Legalism or trying to merit God's favor by doing good works according to some religious framework is foolhardy and always has been.

Just because we call something new doesn't necessarily mean that it didn't exist before. Did North America come into existence when Columbus discovered it? After all, everyone called it “The New World”. Of course not. The land itself was not new, but rather the knowledge of its presence was new. The same can be said of the New Covenant. Jesus revealed something “new” that had, in fact, always been in place. But now, in Him, people could finally understand this mystery more readily - salvation comes through faith, not by works. This was God's redemptive plan since the creation of mankind.

I. WHAT IS FAITH? (v1-2)

At the beginning of this chapter, the writer of Hebrews provides a Biblical definition of faith using 2 separate statements. The first of these describes faith as the “assurance of things hoped for”. The word for assurance used in this verse is also translated as “confidence in”, “substance of”, and “reality of”. Faith is a present certainty that future hopes will come to fruition. Believers trust that God will keep His promises because He has a perfect record of doing so in the past.

Secondly, faith is the “conviction of things not seen”. The word conviction is rendered in other Bible translations as “evidence”, “proof”, and “certainty”. Faith is a steadfast belief that certain

things exist though they cannot be physically seen. Though God is not presently visible to the human eye, there is ample evidence of His existence. These proofs contribute to and undergird the believer's conviction that God is real and true.

Thus, faith involves both an assurance that the unseen Lord exists and that His promises will be fulfilled. By having such faith, the "men of old" gained God's approval. This phrase is referring to the saints of God who lived during the Old Testament era, prior to the coming of Christ and the establishment of the New Covenant. For centuries before the Law as given to Moses during the exodus, there were numerous men and women who exercised saving faith in God Almighty.

II. FAITH BEFORE THE FLOOD (v3-7)

Faith enables mankind to understand how God created the heavens and the earth. His spoken word formed that which is seen from that which isn't seen. God made something out of nothing! By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice to the LORD than his brother did, thereby obtaining a testimony of righteousness that still speaks to this day. Because of his exceptional faith, Enoch did not experience physical death but was translated by God directly to heaven. By faith, Noah built an ark because he had been warned that God was about to destroy the earth with a flood. In so doing, he saved his family and became an "heir" of "righteousness".

"Without faith it is impossible to please" God. Since the time of creation, God has always desired that his people be faithful. Those who come to God "must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him". Notice that these 2 expressions are in exact alignment with the definition of faith given in verse 1. People who doubt in God's existence and/or the reliability and truthfulness of His word are dissatisfying to Him.

III. FAITH BEFORE THE CAPTIVITY (v8-12, 17-22)

By faith Abraham followed the Lord's direction to an unknown and foreign land. He settled there among pagans, awaiting God's promise of a better inheritance. By faith Sarah conceived and bore a son in her old age. By faith Abraham willingly offered up this cherished boy Isaac, believing that God would raise him from the dead if necessary in order to fulfill His promise. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph. By faith Joseph prophesied of the coming exodus and expressed his earnest desire to someday be buried in Israel.

All of these patriarchs exercised faith in God. Despite their many weaknesses and failures, it was their faith that was pleasing to the LORD. Not long after Joseph's death, the Hebrew children were enslaved by the Egyptians and remained in captivity for the next 400 years. Even then, God found pleasure and took delight in those who had faith in Him.

IV. FAITH FINDS FAVOR (v13-16)

God instituted a covenant with Abraham in which He promised to make Abraham's descendants a great nation, to give them a land as their possession, and to use them as a blessing to the entire world. This covenant continued through the line of Isaac and Jacob. All of these men died prior to this promise actually coming true. Yet all 3 faithfully believed that God would honor His word and bring it into reality someday. Thus, their strong faith was demonstrated by their "assurance of things hoped for".

These men also realized that they were "strangers and exiles on the earth". They were seeking a better country - that is, a heavenly one. They wanted an inheritance far greater than this world has to offer. As such, God was not ashamed to call them His own. In fact, He has prepared a city for them just as He has for all who place their faith and trust in Him. Without question, it is faith that finds favor with God.

CONCLUSION

Faith is more than mere belief. Faith is belief that is put into action. The classic example of this is the story of a man and a chair. A man might look at a chair and, based on his observation, believe that the chair will support his weight. However, until he actually goes and sits in the chair he has not exhibited faith. Faith requires the confidence to live by and act upon one's beliefs - not just have them. Many people believe that God exists, but are unwilling to trust Him with their lives.

Most world religions falsely teach that people must do things to earn God's favor. By attaining some level of goodness or morality, they merit salvation and the blessings of God. These heresies leave followers constantly working in efforts to appease God, and always wondering if they've done enough to receive His affections. But Christianity teaches us that only faith pleases God. If lost sinners will simply repent of their sins and place their faith in Jesus for forgiveness they will be saved. No stress, no pressure, no uncertainty... faith is better.

Faith Is Better (Part 2)

Originally Preached 10/27/2019

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.” - Galatians 2:16

Over the years, different models have been developed as frameworks for understanding Scripture. Several of these have been helpful to me in my personal studies. For the purposes of today’s message, let’s view the Bible in terms of 3 distinct periods or eras. Each of these is characterized and distinguished by its own covenant.

The first era is known as “The Age of the Patriarchs”. It spanned from the creation of man through the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai. The covenant associated with this period is called “The Redemptive Covenant”, and was God’s promise to redeem or save those who placed their faith in Him. The Redemptive Covenant was widely unknown and often misunderstood during these generations, however there were some to whom it was revealed. These included Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph (among others) - all named as heroes of the faith in the first half of Hebrews chapter 11.

The second era is referred to as “The Age of Israel”. It covered the centuries from Moses through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The covenant associated with these years is known as “The Old Covenant” or “The Law”. It was given specifically to the Hebrews and included numerous commands that governed all areas of life. The Old Covenant did not replace or change the workings of the Redemptive Covenant, but rather sought to make God’s plan of salvation more widely known by providing a literal representation of it. Unfortunately, much confusion still remained. Several more heroes of the faith lived during this period, and we will mention some of them in today’s reading through the latter half of Hebrews chapter 11.

The third era is called “The Age of the Church”. It began on the morning of Jesus’ resurrection, continues still today, and will end with the Rapture taking place. The covenant associated with this time period is called “The New Covenant”, which states that salvation comes through the repentance of sin and profession of faith in Christ alone. The New Covenant did not replace or change the Redemptive Covenant either. However, unlike the Old Covenant which merely sought to symbolically represent God’s plan, the New Covenant provides a complete and clear revelation of it through the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.

Salvation is a work of God’s grace, received through faith. Under the first covenant this truth was largely hidden and remained secret, under the second it was hinted at with physical clues such as the priesthood, animal sacrifices, and the sanctuary, and under the third it was finally and fully revealed by the atoning work of the Lord Jesus. I referred to this process earlier in the

series as “progressive revelation”. It is our faith that pleases God and garners His approval. That said, let’s resume our 2-part message titled, “Faith Is Better”.

I. FAITH UNDER THE OLD COVENANT (v22-32)

By faith, Moses’ mother hid him for 3 months after his birth. When he had grown to adulthood, it was his faith that compelled Moses to identify with and endure the sufferings of His Hebrew brethren. By faith he left the Egyptian palace, instead choosing to live in obscurity on the plains of Midian. By faith Moses boldly confronted Pharaoh and observed the first Passover. By faith he led the Children of God out of captivity and across the Red Sea.

By faith, Joshua led the sons of Israel across the Jordan River into the Promised Land and oversaw the conquest of Canaan. Faithfully trusting in the bizarre battle plan that he’d received, Joshua marched around the city of Jericho and its walls fell flat. By faith, Rahab the harlot was spared from the slaughter because she had helped the Hebrew spies.

By faith, numerous judges delivered the various tribes of Israel from their enemies. These included faithful men such as Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah. After becoming a nation, Israel was led most notably by the faithful King David. In addition to these, numerous faithful priests and prophets - such as Samuel - lived and served during the era of the Old Covenant. Though it emphasized obedience to the law, even then faith triumphed.

II. FAITH OF UNNAMED HEROES (v33-38)

Having already listed several heroes of the faith, the writer says that time simply wouldn’t allow him to name them all. There were numerous godly men and women who had lived during the Old Testament era who exemplified faith in God. The Hebrews to whom this letter was written could find encouragement and strength to stand firm on their convictions by remembering the precedent of faith that was set and demonstrated by these countless unnamed saints.

By faith they were able to accomplish many amazing things. They “conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, and put foreign armies to flight.” There are even 2 accounts of faithful prophets raising young children from the dead. All of these remarkable occurrences took place as the result of faith.

That said, faith does not always result in earthly success. Sometimes faith leads to severe persecution and even martyrdom. Many of these unnamed champions of the faith were “tortured” or chose to remain imprisoned rather than denying their beliefs. Some experienced “mockings”, “scourgings”, and other forms of punishment. Others were “stoned”, “sawn in two”, “tempted”, and “put to death with the sword”. Some “went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated” and “wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and

holes in the ground.” Sometimes holding on to one’s faith is difficult, but the promises of God are worth the struggle.

III. FAITH GAINS APPROVAL (v39-40)

These men and women of old, who practiced sincere and saving faith in God, did not immediately receive that which had been promised. Rather than entering immediately into Heaven when they died, these redeemed people went to a place called Abraham’s Bosom or Paradise. There they waited patiently, separated from those condemned in Hell, until the crucifixion. The Bible teaches that, after His death on the cross, Jesus descended into this place, freed those who were there, and led them to Heaven (Eph. 4:8-10, 1 Pet. 3:18-20).

These Hebrews, and all other born-again believers who’ve lived since Jesus’ resurrection, now go directly to Heaven when they die. Abraham’s Bosom has been permanently vacated. This is definitely “something better”, as God’s promised inheritance of rest is now received immediately. The Old Testament saints were not “made perfect” differently or “apart from” the New Testament saints. All reside together in the same Heaven, as recipients of the same inheritance, in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, each having gained God’s approval through faith.

CONCLUSION

To make the point a final time, all people are (and always have been) saved on the basis of faith. We cannot (and never have been able to) earn our salvation through good works or self-righteousness. We cannot (and never have been able to) live in perfect obedience to God’s will or in perfect adherence to His commands. We cannot (and never have been able to) purchase salvation with material wealth or achieve it through fame, popularity, or status. The only way to merit the Lord’s favor, to win His approval, and to attain His saving grace is through faith. And in the light of the New Covenant, we know that our faith is to be placed in Jesus Christ - the Savior who died to pay mankind’s sin debt and give us the hope of eternal life!

A Better Example

Originally Preached 11/3/2019

“The one who says he abides in Him [Jesus] ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.” - 1 John 2:6

Every 4 years the Summer Olympics comes on television. The second week of coverage is always dominated by track and field events. On occasion, I will watch some of these incredible athletes compete in various races. I am always impressed by their speed, stamina, and skill. Running was never my strong suit and I didn't participate in track during high school. That said, I admire and respect those who are able to run - whether it be sprints, hurdles, relays, or marathons. I sure can't do it...

The reason I mention this is because a portion of our morning's message involves a comparison between Christians and runners. This analogy is used elsewhere in scripture too, especially in the letters of Paul. Anyway, the sermon is titled “A Better Example”. It is the 24th installment of our current series through the book of Hebrews. That said, runners take your marks because it's time to get started....

I. RUN WITH ENDURANCE (v1-4)

This verse refers back to chapter 11 and to all of the great men and women of faith who have already passed away. Collectively, these numerous saints are called “a great cloud of witnesses”. Based in part on this verse, many Christians believe that those already in Heaven are looking down upon and cheering for believers on the earth - like spectators in a grand stadium watching runners compete. Others interpret this phrase to mean that their lives of faith provide a compelling testimony or witness for those who follow to emulate. Perhaps both of these explanations are true.

The text counsels Christians to “lay aside” every weight and sin. Those who continue to practice such things will surely be weighed down by them, which will hamper their ability to run as God intends. Even those who live do righteously will need “endurance” to run and finish the race of life well. This world is broken, cruel, and filled with obstacles. The course is not easy, and it becomes even more difficult for those who run while encumbered with sin.

Believers should focus on Jesus, “the Author and Perfecter of faith”, who has already completed the race and is waiting for them at the finish line. He voluntarily “endured the cross”, its “shame”, and “hostility by sinners” and then “set down at the right hand... of God”. Following His example, Christians can run the race of life and “not grow weary” or “lose heart”. Runners should fix their eyes on Jesus, realizing that He endured far more suffering than they have.

II. APPRECIATE THE FATHER'S DISCIPLINE (v5-11)

This passage begins with the repetition of Proverbs 3:11-12. It advises Christians to not despise the Lord's discipline or resent His rebuke. Rather they should realize that such discipline is an act of love. If God didn't care for His children, He would let them do whatever they wanted, without any consequence. But He does love them, and therefore corrects them whenever they do something wrong.

Studies have repeatedly shown that children who grow up without any boundaries, who are left largely uncontrolled and undisciplined, most often develop into lawbreaking, self-serving, and unproductive adults. Therefore, it is imperative for a father to lovingly discipline his children. It is not always an easy thing to do, especially in the short-term, but the long-term benefits are critical for the child's well-being. Kids need parents who love them enough to discipline them when they misbehave, just as God does to His children.

The pain of discipline is typically short-lived. The soreness of receiving a spanking may last a few minutes, the shame of being placed in time out may linger for an hour, or the discomfort of being grounded might continue for a couple of weeks or months. This temporary sorrow, though unpleasant, produces lasting character. The discipline of the Lord produces endurance and - if received rightly - "yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness" in those whom He loves that they might "share His holiness".

III. BEHAVE RIGHTEOUSLY (v12-17)

In the previous verses, the writer has compared Christians to athletes running in a race and children receiving their father's discipline. Now he begins to provide some practical, straightforward advice for them to heed. This instructive comments are intended to help believers run faster and better, while staying out of trouble.

Those who have placed their faith in Christ should encourage one another to press on, to persist, and to never give up. They should lovingly reach out to and bolster those who are "weak" and "feeble". They should aspire to live godly lives by running a "straight path" which others can easily follow. "Lame" believers move slowly, are prone to turning aside, or perhaps even quitting altogether. But these spiritual injuries which impair them can be "healed" through sincere love and encouragement.

Furthermore Christians should pursue peace and sanctification. As they aspire daily to become more like Jesus, individual believers should also look out for one another to ensure that "no one comes short of the grace of God." In other words, the members of God's church share a degree of mutual responsibility for one another. They should be careful not to allow any "root of bitterness" to spring up between or amongst them, which would certainly cause trouble and perhaps even the "defilement" of some.

The church should not blindly or blissfully allow “immoral or godless” men, like Esau, to abide within it. They can cause great damage to the Body of Christ. These are people who reject the blessing of God the Father in exchange for their own carnal lusts and desires. After his sin, Esau tearfully sought restoration and longed for Jacob’s blessing, but it was too late. In the same way, those who are confined in Hell for their rebellion against the LORD now regret their decisions - but their opportunity to repent has passed.

CONCLUSION

Jesus is our example of an athlete running with endurance. He showed us how to run the race of life successfully. If we run as He did, we will finish as winners. I am reminded of a statement that Paul made to Timothy in the final days of his life. He wrote, “I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith.” (2 Timothy 4:7, ESV) How well are we running our races today?

God is our example of a loving father who disciplines His children. He has established limits and given us commandments to follow in order to protect us from harm and to train us in holiness. Remember the story of Job? He experienced great suffering and calamity, yet even he said to his friends, “Do not despise the discipline of the Almighty; for He wounds, but He also heals.” (Job 5:17-18) The LORD is more concerned about our character than our comfort. How kindly do we accept and appreciate the Father’s discipline?

Finally, we ourselves are to set an example for others by living righteously. We should encourage one another - especially those in the faith who are struggling. We should be at peace with each other, not divided or embroiled in conflict. We should deal with issues promptly and carefully, so that they do not become larger and cause division or defilement within the church body. What type of example are you setting today within your home, your school, your workplace, your congregation, and elsewhere?

A Better Mountain

Originally Preached 11/10/2019

“Now it will come about that in the last days the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it.” - Isaiah 2:2

I don't travel much - especially outside of Texas. But several years ago, on a whim, I decided to go spend the weekend with my cousin in Colorado. We were both in college at the time, and were much more adventurous then than we are now. So I packed a bag, hopped in the car, and set out from my small apartment in Canyon, TX. I traveled across the northwestern Panhandle and into New Mexico. I climbed the steep incline through Raton Pass and continued toward Colorado Springs. As I approached, I saw something that I'd never seen before. There, towering in the sky, was the snow-capped mountain known as Pikes Peak.

I've been skiing at Red River, sightseeing in Santa Fe, and honeymooning in Ruidoso so I've seen a few mountains, but Pikes Peak stands out in my memory. Having grown up in the Permian Basin, I am used to the land being flat. When I was younger, my family visited the Davis Mountains in west Texas, but they didn't seem very tall. A few years ago I took my kids camping at the Wichita Mountains, which are really just large hills. Pikes Peak is different though. At over 14,000 feet, it is a beautiful and majestic mountain. To this day I can still remember the awe-inspired feeling that came over me as I beheld its grandeur.

In this morning's message, we are going to consider and contrast 2 differing mountains described in the Word of God. As he has done previously with others, the writer uses this comparison to again demonstrate the supremacy of Christ. This is the 25th sermon of our series through Hebrews, and after today only 3 more remain - the end of this study is growing near! The title of today's message is, "A Better Mountain".

I. MT. SINAI (v18-21)

When Pharaoh finally let the Hebrew Children go, Moses didn't immediately lead them toward the Promised Land. Instead, they crossed the over barren wilderness, walked through the Red Sea, and ended up at the foot of Mount Sinai. God had instructed Moses to go there first, to worship Him and receive additional instructions (Ex. 3:12). Sure enough, while they were camped at Mount Sinai, God established His covenant with Israel and gave them the Law.

Shortly after arriving, God called Moses to meet Him on the mountain top. The LORD instructed Moses to prepare the people, as He intended to speak to them directly. In three days time, He was going to descend upon Mount Sinai in a thick cloud. When they heard the blast of the ram's horn, they were to come and gather before Him. The people were to stand at a distance, behind pre-marked boundaries, and were not permitted to touch the mountain as they listened. Moses

shared this information with the congregation, they consecrated themselves, and got ready for the LORD's appearance.

When the 3 days had passed, the trumpet (ram's horn) sounded and the people came to meet God at the base of the mountain. Thunder boomed and lightning flashed as a thick cloud fell upon Mount Sinai. The mountain was in smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire, and it quaked violently. Then God began to speak out of the cloud in the hearing of all the people, and delivered to them The 10 Commandments. They were terribly afraid and trembled at His voice. Thus, they asked Moses to speak privately with God on their behalf from that point forward and he did so.

II. MT. ZION (v22-24)

Zion was originally the location of the Jebusite stronghold that David captured during his conquest of Jerusalem. It was an elevated hilltop upon which he built his royal palace. Later Solomon built the temple there as well. Thus, the name Zion is sometimes used in Scripture to mean the city of Jerusalem in its entirety and other times it refers primarily to the temple area. In addition to this, it is also used figuratively to represent the people of Israel and spiritually to describe the kingdom of God.

In the last days, the nation of Israel and its capital city Jerusalem will be restored. Christ will reign over the new heavens and earth from there. The nations will stream to Mount Zion and bow before Him. An innumerable multitude of angels will be present worshiping and serving Him. The church - those who accepted Christ as their Savior and received a greater inheritance as "firstborn" children - will be there also. So will the saints of old, who trusted in God and were credited with righteousness. Of course God the Father will be present there, "the Judge of all". From this heavenly mountain, Jesus will mediate the new covenant established in His blood. While Abel's death speaks of jealousy, bitterness, and sin Jesus' death speaks of forgiveness, salvation, and grace.

III. A DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE

The Jewish people drew near to God differently than the Christians did. Their experience and relationship with Him was shaped and influenced heavily by their perception of Mount Sinai. They approached the LORD in much the same way as their ancestors had done centuries earlier. In contrast, those who placed their faith in Jesus and trusted Him for salvation had a completely different experience.

At Mount Sinai, the people were terrified by the voice of God. They trembled and shook before Him. This uneasy, unsettling feeling characterized the nation at large in the centuries that followed. To a large degree, Israel served God out of fear throughout the Old Testament. They carefully kept His commands because they dreaded the dire consequences of disobedience.

Conversely, Christians come to Mount Zion cheerfully to serve the Lord with gladness and joy. They are motivated by love and thankfulness, rather than fear.

Furthermore, at Mount Sinai the people asked Moses to be their go-between. They weren't allowed to touch the mountain. Moses became the intermediary between the people and God. This developed into the model for their religion, as it continued through the priests. The people did not enjoy direct access to God, but rather had to approach Him through a representative. However, all born again believers may come to the LORD confidently and directly. They may approach Mount Zion through their divine mediator, Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

Isaac Watts was an English pastor and hymn writer who lived from 1674 to 1748. During his lifetime he wrote over 750 hymns, some of which Christians still sing today. One of his most enduring hymns applies to our message this morning. It is called, "Marching To Zion". I want us to close our discussion by examining a few lines from this marvelous song.

The first verse invites those who love God to joyfully come and join together in a sweet song surrounding His throne. The second verse forbids those who do not know Him from coming, but encourages the children of the heavenly King to speak their joys abroad. The third verse explains that Zion is sweet presently even as it will be eternally when we "walk the golden streets". The last verse bids us to dry our tears and march onward to "fairer worlds on high".

You can come to Zion today by accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Immediately you will be adopted into His family and become a citizen of His kingdom. Then, one day, you and all of the redeemed throughout the ages will see Zion, the city of God, beautifully restored and together we will dwell with Him on "a better mountain" for all eternity.

Sixth Warning: Don't Deny

Originally Preached 11/17/2019

"Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken from its place at the fury of the Lord of hosts in the day of His burning anger." - Isaiah 13:13

If you were wandering down a forest pathway and came across a sign that warned of danger ahead, what would you do? Would you ignore it and keep going? What if a few minutes later you encountered a second warning sign? Then a third, a fourth, and so on... how many warnings would you need before you were convinced to turn back?

In his letter to the Hebrews, the writer included several "warning passages" to caution them against certain behaviors. As we have read through this book, we have come across these warnings again and again like signs on a trail. While many Bible scholars list 5 of these warnings, in this series I have pointed out 6 (including the one we'll discuss today). The exact number doesn't really matter, but that repeated emphasis is something to consider.

Today's message is titled, "Don't Deny". It is the last of the warning passages in Hebrews. It follows "Don't Drift", "Don't Doubt", "Don't Disobey", "Don't Depart", and "Don't Disregard". Clearly, the writer felt it necessary to issue several warnings. It is almost as if he is speaking to children, trying to make them understand the gravity of their choices...

I. HEED GOD'S WARNING (v25)

"See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking." This warning refers back to the previous passage, in which God spoke to the Israelites at Mount Sinai. They gathered at the base of the mountain, a safe distance away, and God came down upon it with fire. A thick, dark cloud settled upon Mount Sinai, and the LORD spoke thunderously from it. The whole congregation of people were terrified and trembled at the sound of His voice.

God warned the Hebrew Children to carefully obey the laws and follow the instructions He gave them at Sinai. They were to occupy the Promised Land and drive out its inhabitants. Once there, they were to live in obedience to the LORD as His chosen people and be a blessing to the entire earth. However, they refused to do this. Instead they complained, murmured, and longed to return to Egypt. Despite seeing the miraculous work of God again and again, this generation of Israelites failed to enter Canaan and instead died in the wilderness. They were unable to escape God's judgment "on earth".

In light of the fact that men can not escape the Lord's judgment in this life, how foolish is it to believe they will be able to in the next? God issues a clear and serious warning "from Heaven" - unrepentant sinners will be held accountable for their wickedness and rebellion. They will be eternally separated from God and condemned to Hell. There will be no escape for those who

refuse to heed His warning. Only those who respond to the Lord's warning, as the blood of Jesus speaks to His saving grace (v24), will be saved.

II. CREATION WILL SHAKE (v26-27)

At Sinai, when the LORD spoke the entire mountain shook "violently" (Exodus 19:18). The mountain wasn't shaking on its own initiative (it is an inanimate object), but rather God was causing it to. Centuries later King David reminisced about this remarkable event in the psalms. He wrote that "the earth quaked", rain fell from the sky, and Mount Sinai itself shook "at the presence of God" (Psalm 68:8).

Just as He shook the earth many years ago during the exodus, Almighty God will someday shake "the heaven" also. This citation comes from the writings of an Old Testament prophet. During the days of Zerubbabel and the rebuilding of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, Haggai prophesied of this coming event (Haggai 2:6). The heavens themselves and the powers thereof will be shaken in the end times.

This final shaking can be understood as both a judgment and a sifting. Through it, "created things" will be removed. As used here, "created things" refers to that which has been corrupted by sin and cursed by God. In other words, those things which have been tainted by sin will be separated out and discarded. This fallen heaven and earth will be transformed into a new, glorious, perfect, and incorruptible place. What remains will be unshakable.

III. A CONSUMING FIRE (v28-29)

The redeemed children of God will someday "receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken". They will dwell in it with the Lord for all of eternity. Jesus will reign over it in righteousness and truth. The saints of God from all generations will abide peacefully and joyfully together in this unshakable kingdom. In a sense, they possess this kingdom in their hearts even now, though it is not yet fully realized.

Knowing this, those who have received Christ should be extremely grateful for what He already has and what He promises to provide. They should be a thankful people. Furthermore, believers should willingly and humbly serve the Lord and do His will. They should demonstrate reverence and awe toward Him, by acknowledging His great power and authority. The God who shakes the heavens and the earth is worthy and fully deserving of our love and respect.

The writer of Hebrews closes this passage with a deliberate reminder that God is "a consuming fire". This solemn description of the LORD was originally used by Moses in Deuteronomy 4:24 and 9:3. The ancient prophet and leader depicted the Lord's wrath as fire that destroys those who practice idolatry and who align themselves as enemies against God. Again, this reinforces the seriousness of the warning given in the previous verse - do not refuse to hear and abide by God's voice!

CONCLUSION

Do you remember having fire drills during elementary school? The bells would ring to sound the alarm, and we would stop the lesson immediately. Our teacher would grab her gradebook, have us line up in an orderly fashion, turn off the lights, and lead us out of the building following a pre-designated escape route. The last kid out got to shut the door, which at the time seemed like a tremendous honor. All of the classes would meet outside at a certain spot and wait quietly until the bells rang again, signaling it was safe to return inside.

I didn't come up with the school's disaster plan, but I followed it. So did my classmates. Had there ever been a real fire - and fortunately there wasn't - we were all well prepared to evacuate quickly and calmly. When the warning sounded, everyone took it seriously. Can you imagine if our teachers would have ignored it or disregarded it? "Don't worry about those bells class - I'm sure it's nothing. Let's just finish this lesson." How foolish would that have been?

Sadly, many people today deny the truth - God will judge and punish sinners. Right now He is graciously sounding the alarm and offering us an opportunity to escape His divine wrath. He has set forth a plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. Are we listening? The gospel is blaring! Will we take it seriously? We will act upon it in faith? Or will we wait until the flames have engulfed us and there's no way out? Once we die, there is no second chance.

A Better City

Originally Preached 11/24/2019

“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city.” - Revelation 22:14

We are nearing the end of our journey together through Hebrews. This morning we will begin looking at the final chapter of this great book, and next week we will finish this series. By this point, the writer has convincingly proven that Jesus is far better than any other. He has shown again and again in this letter that Jesus' ways are much greater than any alternative. Those Hebrew Christians who were wavering in their faith and contemplating a return to Judaism should abandon such a foolish notion, and instead cling to Jesus no matter the cost.

Today's message is titled, "A Better City". It consists of several straightforward, easy to understand instructions that we as Christians should follow. Having realized the superiority of Christ over all else, we as His people should live in obedience to His commands. By following His directions, we as believers can live fuller and more meaningful lives.

I. PRACTICAL INSTRUCTIONS (v1-6)

Christians are called to love another as brothers and sisters - both those within the church and those without. The concept of "brotherly love" drives from the Greek word *phileo* or *philadelphia*. Christians should love others as though they were members of their own family and seek what is best for them. In addition, Christians should be hospitable toward others - especially strangers. Hospitality can be defined as "receiving and treating guests in a warm, friendly, and generous way". The Bible commends those who lovingly welcome visitors into their homes, churches, and so forth.

Christians are encouraged to remember the prisoners. They are told to imagine themselves and prison also, so as to empathize with those who are confined. Many believers have been prosecuted and jailed for their faith in Christ. Those who are free should be mindful of them, constantly lifting them up in prayer. Furthermore, Christians should honor their marriages and be faithful to their spouse. Adultery, fornication, and other variations of sexual immorality do significant damage to individuals, families, and the church. Couples should uphold their wedding vows toward one another, just as they keep their commitments to God.

Christians should not be consumed with the desire for more money. Such greed leads to all sorts of sin. Rather, they should learn to be content and satisfied with the things that they have. This doesn't mean they should lack ambition or any aspiration to be successful. Believers should strive to grow and excel in the things of God, not in earthly or temporal pursuits such as the accumulation of wealth. Also, Christians should not be afraid of man. They should rest in the

ever-abiding presence of God who is always with them and watching over them. The LORD will never leave us nor forsake us (Joshua 1:5).

II. MORE PRACTICAL INSTRUCTIONS (v7-14)

Christians should remember those who led them and taught them the things of God. They should consider the conduct of their ancestors and try to imitate their faith. These righteous saints set an example to be followed, from which present-day believers can learn and become stronger. Jesus never changes - He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His character is consistent from one generation to the next and His love never wanes. Believers can be confident that His plans will not deviate, nor will His promises be abandoned.

Christians should guard themselves, so as not to be led astray by strange and false doctrines. The truth of God does not change or evolve over time. It is absolute and timeless. What was sin centuries ago is still sin today! Believers should be careful not to entertain teachings and practices that are contrary to the clear declaration of Scripture. In addition, Christians should recognize that true strength comes from God's grace. While food (in this case taken from the altar) may benefit those who hunger physically, it has no spiritual benefit. The redeemed children of God find strength and sustenance in Jesus Christ, who is an altar from which the lost "have no right to eat".

According to the Law of Moses, whenever a sin offering was made the priest would take some of the blood of a bull into the Holy Place and sprinkle it on the altar. The body of the slain bull was to be taken outside of the camp and burned. In like manner, Jesus' blood was shed as an offering for man's sin and He was crucified beyond the city's gates at nearby Golgotha. Christians should go outside the camp, where the lost and rejected people are, in order to tell them about the love of Jesus. They should gladly endure the ridicule and reproach that often comes with leaving the city in order to serve poor and wretched outcasts. They should separate themselves from their former Jewish orthodoxy in the city and pursue Christ outside of it. Believers should not be charmed by the enticements of an earthly city, but instead seek longingly the heavenly city which is to come.

III. EVEN MORE PRACTICAL INSTRUCTIONS (v15-17)

Christians should continuously offer up praise to God. Praise can be described or defined as commending, admiring, and extolling the LORD. This can be done through spoken declarations, prayers of adoration, or in jubilant songs of joy. Those who have trusted in Christ should be thankful for the blessings they have received and those yet to come.

Christians should spend their time doing good deeds - not as a means of earning God's favor, but rather in gratitude for having already received it. They should be generous and share with others. God is pleased by those who sacrificially give of themselves in order to bless others. Finally, Christians should obey and submit to their leaders. They should realize that leaders

bear an additional accountability before God for those under their watch. As such, they should seek to be joyful followers who do not needlessly grieve or agitate their leaders. Such rebellion is not beneficial to anyone.

CONCLUSION

Over the course of this message, we've listed and discussed several practical behaviors that we as Christians should practice - things such as brotherly love, hospitality, fidelity, courage, discernment, contentment, gratitude, and good citizenship. But I want to close today's sermon by considering "the city which is to come" mentioned in verse 14.

I recently read an article on the US News and World Report website titled "The 25 Best Places To Live In the United States in 2019". It detailed the results of a survey that was taken among their subscribers. Apparently they do this every year. The respondents rank cities based upon many factors including job availability, crime rates, the quality of education, cost of living, recreation and entertainment, beauty and cleanliness, and so on. According to their research, the top 5 cities to live in for 2019 are Des Moines (IA), Fayetteville (AK), Colorado Springs (CO), Denver (CO), and Austin (TX). Well, if you say so... I have no desire to live in Austin!

Nevertheless, no matter how wonderful these earthly cities may be, Christians should expectantly look forward to a better city. In the last days, an eternal city - the New Jerusalem - will descend from Heaven to the earth. It will be adorned as a bride for her husband. The city will be glorious and brilliant, made from gold and precious stones. God Himself will illuminate the city and nothing unclean will ever enter into it. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will live there. Does that include you?

A Better Greeting

Originally Preached 12/1/2019

“So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.” - Luke 15:20

Over the past several months, we have systematically worked our way through the book of Hebrews. We have read many insightful passages and learned many important truths. As we have seen, the recurring and overarching theme of this letter is the superiority of Christ and His work. This morning we will finish our study of Hebrews with the 28th and final message of the series. It is titled, “A Better Greeting”.

I. PRAY FOR US (v18-19)

Before saying his goodbyes, the writer made a serious request. He asked the Hebrews to, “Pray for us.” Though he and his colleagues felt generally good about their conduct and morality, still he sought prayer that they might continue to act righteously. Good behavior today doesn’t guarantee that one won’t slip tomorrow... Living above reproach and resisting temptation is a constant and never-ending struggle. Those who think they can avoid the snares of sin without the Lord’s help and without the prayers of others are destined to fall.

Furthermore, the writer urged his Hebrew readers to pray that he might be restored to them sooner. This suggests that he knew them personally, as he deeply longed to see them again. Obviously, certain unknown circumstances were hindering and delaying him (and those with him) from returning to see these beloved Hebrews. Though he had written and sent them this instructive and encouraging letter, his true desire was to come and visit personally.

I have good intentions, but a bad memory. If I don’t write something down within a few minutes, there is a good chance that I will forget it. That said, I have learned that if someone asks you to pray for them it’s best to do it right then. When somebody opens their heart, shares the difficulties that they are facing, and then urges you to keep them in your prayers take a moment and pray with them immediately. Don’t just say, “I’ll pray for you” and walk away - actually take a minute and pray right there.

II. BE BLESSED (v20-21)

As he concludes this letter, the author pronounces a blessing on his Hebrew audience. This is also referred to as a benediction. It begins with an appeal to “the God of peace”. Remember that this letter was written during a time of great persecution and suffering among Christians. Still, even in the midst of such strife, He remains the God of peace - a safe, strong refuge in time of trouble.

This great God of peace raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus is described here as the “great Shepherd of the sheep”. He leads His father’s sheep, lovingly protecting them and providing for their every need (Psalm 23). Jesus called Himself “the Good Shepherd... who lays His life down for His sheep” (John 10:11).

May the God of peace who raised Jesus from the dead “equip you in every good thing to do His will”. The writer asked God to bless the Hebrews by providing for and also enabling them to accomplish His will in every way. He further requested the LORD to continue working in them to do “that which is pleasing in His sight.” This equipping and working is done through Jesus Christ, to whom all the glory is given now and forever.

Benedictions are commonly found at the end of the epistles. Such texts are often read or recited at or near the end of worship services. They are typically comforting and assuring passages of Scripture that lift the soul. Perhaps the most well known benediction in the Bible is Numbers 6:24-26 which says, “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”

III. HEED THIS WORD (v22-25)

The book of Hebrews is rich with theological teaching and practical instruction. The writer closes this letter by urging his readers to heed what’s been written. He stresses that they should take this message seriously, reread it as necessary, and apply it to their lives. He didn’t just write it for fun, or as an academic exercise, or even for their entertainment - No! The truths contained in this letter were to be followed closely and incorporated into their daily living.

In these final statements, the author mentions that Timothy has been recently released (likely from prison). He also states his intention to come see them in person sometime soon, and that possibly Timothy will be with him at that point. It is clear that Timothy did not write Hebrews - but he was well known by whoever did. He then sends final greetings to the leaders and saints of those to whom he is writing, and sends the greetings of those “from Italy” (this doesn’t necessarily mean they were in Italy at the time). Again, this does not conclusively reveal who either party was.

The last line of the letter says, “Grace be with you all.” This was a common expression of farewell during New Testament times. Others include, “The Lord be with you”, “Peace be with you”, or simply “Amen”. These can be seen in various forms at the end of the epistles by Paul, Peter, and John.

CONCLUSION

In the closing paragraphs of his letter to the Hebrews, the writer did 3 things. He asked for their prayers, he pronounced a blessing over them, and he urged them to heed his message. He also informed them of his plans to come visit shortly.

When I think about this, I can't help but remember that Jesus is returning for us soon as well. We would be wise to read His words, which are contained on the pages of the Bible, and to take them seriously. By carefully applying them to our lives, we can be found faithful and obedient at His coming. Then we will receive "A Better Greeting".

I want to conclude this study by sharing a brief and creative summary of the book Hebrews. I crafted it by using the unique titles of all 26 messages preached in this series (a few sermons had 2 parts). It seeks to emphasize the main point of the book - the greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ! I hope it is a blessing to you...

Jesus came to earth as a better messenger to proclaim a better promise of a better rest. As the divine Son of God He was and is exceedingly better than angels. As the Word made flesh He was and is far better than men - even better than Moses the prophet and better than Aaron the priest. Jesus set a better example for those seeking a better understanding of the truth. He taught that faith is better than works - that it is a better way unto salvation. Jesus ultimately offered Himself as a better sacrifice for sin, thereby establishing a better covenant in His blood. Jesus now performs a better ministry, mediating between God and man as a better High Priest. He represents a better priesthood and serves in a better sanctuary at the right hand of God. Those who accept Him as Lord and Savior will one day receive a better greeting as they enter into a better city to dwell with Christ on a better mountain for all of eternity. Therefore don't drift away from Him, don't doubt His teachings, don't disobey His commands, don't depart from His presence, don't disregard His warnings, and don't deny this unchanging and irrefutable truth - JESUS IS BETTER!