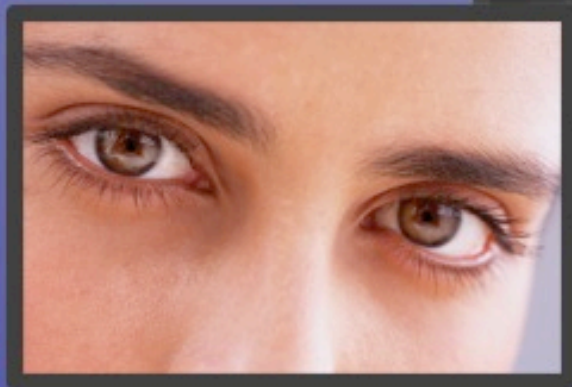
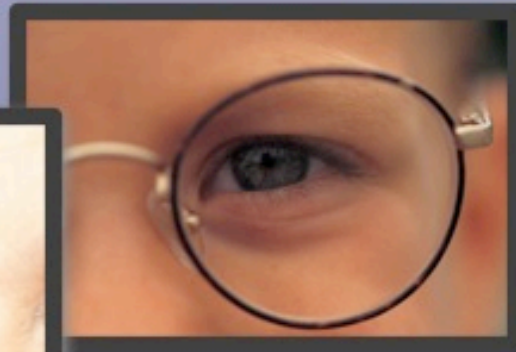
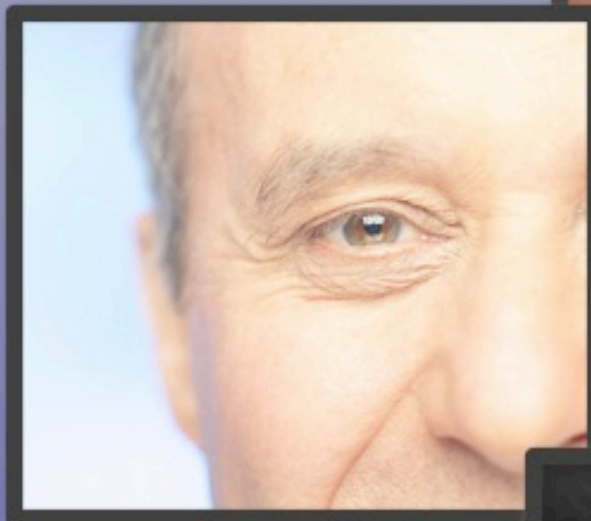


# Hebrews

*Fix Your Eyes On Jesus*

**A Digital Commentary on  
the Book of Hebrews**

by Dr. Kurt Trucksess



**Pure Joy!** That is what it felt like to preach these messages to the Faith Evangelical Free Church community. The themes of the superiority of Christ, the New Covenant, the importance of perseverance, the purpose of trials and the hope of heaven encouraged all of us to take large steps of spiritual growth. I am thankful to offer the compilation of these messages in a digital form as a resource for future study and reflection.

I stood on the shoulders of great theologians and pastors who inspired my thoughts and shaped my heart. Some of these great men are: F.F. Bruce, Steve DeWitt, Kent Hughes, Simon Kistemaker, John MacArthur, John Piper, James MacDonald, and John Owen. To them I am forever grateful.

I would like to offer special thanks to Sheryl Fastenow for her editorial work.

I also want to sincerely thank our church family for their attentive ears and teachable hearts. It was a joy to wrestle through the complicated and challenging sections of this book together.

Thank you, Faith Evangelical Free Church, for desiring God's Word. I would like to dedicate this digital commentary to you.

Because of God's Mercy,

*Kurt*

---

Dr. Kurt Trucksess - Sr. Pastor  
**Faith Evangelical Free Church**  
2805 Erie Ave.  
Spirit Lake, IA 51360  
712-336-3537 (office)

<http://www.faithefree.com>

<http://www.Christ2rCulture.com>

# Table of Contents

<i>Hebrews – An Introduction and Overview .....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Hebrews 1:1-2 – Jesus, the Ultimate Word.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Hebrews 1:1-3 – Every year you grow, the bigger he becomes .....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Hebrews 1:5-14 – Superior to the Angels .....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Hebrews 2:1-4 – The Danger of Drifting.....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Hebrews 2:5-9 – Destiny.....</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Hebrews 2:10-17 – The Perfect Fit.....</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>Hebrews 2:14-18 – Empathy, Not Sympathy .....</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>Hebrews 3:1-6 – Fix Your Thoughts on Jesus.....</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>Hebrews 3:7-19 – Don’t Harden Your Heart .....</i>	<i>62</i>
<i>Hebrews 3:12-14 – Finishing Well .....</i>	<i>68</i>
<i>Hebrews 3:15-4:2 – Beware of Dog .....</i>	<i>74</i>
<i>Hebrews 4:1-11 – The Rest of the Story .....</i>	<i>79</i>
<i>Hebrews 4:12-13 – It’s Alive .....</i>	<i>86</i>
<i>Hebrews 4:14-16 – One Great High Priest .....</i>	<i>92</i>
<i>Hebrews 5:1-10 – Priest Supreme .....</i>	<i>98</i>
<i>Hebrews 5:11-6:1 – Measure Up.....</i>	<i>106</i>
<i>Hebrews 6:4-9 – Don’t Fall Away From Jesus .....</i>	<i>112</i>
<i>Hebrews 6:9-12 – Keep It Up.....</i>	<i>119</i>
<i>Hebrews 6:13-20 – I’ve Got You .....</i>	<i>125</i>
<i>Hebrews 7:1-19 – Jesus is Greater.....</i>	<i>131</i>
<i>Hebrews 7:18-28 – Jesus, the Priest I Need.....</i>	<i>137</i>
<i>Hebrews 8:1-6 – The New Normal - Part 1 .....</i>	<i>145</i>
<i>Hebrews 8:7-13 – The New Normal - Part 2 .....</i>	<i>152</i>

<i>Hebrews 9:1-15 – What to do when life stinks .....</i>	<i>159</i>
<i>Hebrews 9:16-28– Once.....</i>	<i>168</i>
<i>Hebrews 10:1-18 – It’s All About Jesus.....</i>	<i>174</i>
<i>Hebrews 10:19-22 – Draw Near to God .....</i>	<i>181</i>
<i>Hebrews 10:24-25 – We Need Each Other .....</i>	<i>187</i>
<i>Hebrews 10:26-31 – Apostasy.....</i>	<i>192</i>
<i>Hebrews 10:26-31 – One Breath Away .....</i>	<i>198</i>
<i>Hebrews 10:26-31 – The Joy of Losing .....</i>	<i>205</i>
<i>Hebrews 11:1-3 – Faith Is.....</i>	<i>210</i>
<i>Hebrews 11:4-6 – What Does Faith Look Like? .....</i>	<i>216</i>
<i>Hebrews 11:6 – Why Is It All About Faith? .....</i>	<i>223</i>
<i>Hebrews 11:7-12 – Faith works in the dark.....</i>	<i>230</i>
<i>Hebrews 11:13-22 – Transforming Faith.....</i>	<i>237</i>
<i>Hebrews 11:23-27 – Choosing Something Better .....</i>	<i>244</i>
<i>Hebrews 12:1 - Don’t Give Up!.....</i>	<i>256</i>
<i>Hebrews 12:2-3 - The Joy of Jesus .....</i>	<i>263</i>
<i>Hebrews 12:4-11 - Understanding God’s Discipline .....</i>	<i>269</i>
<i>Hebrews 12:12-17 - Failing God’s Discipline.....</i>	<i>278</i>
<i>Hebrews 12:18-24 - Mt. Zion, a Climb Worth the View .....</i>	<i>287</i>
<i>Hebrews 12:25-29 - The Message You Don’t Want To Miss! .....</i>	<i>294</i>
<i>Hebrews 13:1-3 - Feels Like Family.....</i>	<i>300</i>
<i>Hebrews 13:4 - Marriage: Hold It High, Keep It Holy.....</i>	<i>307</i>
<i>Hebrews 13:5-6 – It Is Not What I Have, It Is Who I Have.....</i>	<i>315</i>
<i>Hebrews 13:8-14 - The Breakfast of Champions.....</i>	<i>321</i>
<i>Hebrews 13:7,17-18 – Why I don’t like Democracy .....</i>	<i>327</i>

***Hebrews 13:15-25 – Time for Sacrifice and Prayer .....335***  
***Hebrews – The Lessons to Remember .....341***  
***Works Cited.....348***

## Hebrews – An Introduction and Overview

September 7, 2008

This morning, we are beginning an exciting journey. We are beginning a study of a book in the Bible. It is the book of Hebrews. While this book is exciting and practical, I want to prepare you; it is also a book challenging. If you think you have God figured out and all your theology buttoned down; be prepared, this book will rattle your cage.

You are probably wondering; if this book is difficult, why are we studying it? Why not something easier for everyone?

There is no other book in the Bible that plumbs the depths of who Jesus Christ is and what he did for us, than the book of Hebrews. No other book will expand our field of vision and fire us up about the greatness of Christ than the book of Hebrews. When we are done with this series, Jesus will be much bigger in your life and in mine than he is now. That is my desire for us as a church, that we would become more passionate for Jesus. So how should we begin?

The book of Hebrews is a virtual feast on Jesus Christ. This morning, rather than serving our first meal, I just want to spend some time setting the table.

We need to begin by knowing some background for the book. Why was it written? Who wrote it? What was life like for the people the book was written to? The better we can answer those questions, the better prepared we will be for our first real meal.

### Background of the Letter

#### Who Wrote It?

Let's begin with the most notorious question of all, who wrote the book of Hebrews? It is a notorious question because the answer is... we don't know. Many New Testament authors identify themselves. Paul says in the beginning of his letters, *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ* or James says at the beginning of his letters, *James, a servant of God*. But with the letter of Hebrews, the author doesn't sign his name or leave behind many clues to help us discover his identity. This has led to a lot of guessing over the years.

Some Bible scholars think Paul wrote it, others think Barnabbas, still others think it was written by Priscilla, which would make her the only author of a New Testament book that was female, still others think it was written by Apollos.

Who would you vote for? Let's take a few minutes to analyze these guesses and see which one you think is most likely. How about Paul? Most scholars don't think he is the author for a number of reasons. First, we have many of Paul's letters and he writes in a very consistent style that shows he was trained in Roman oratory. The book of Hebrews is written in a completely different style, it is written according to Hebrew oratory, a style we have no

evidence Paul ever used. Another reason it isn't likely that Paul wrote the book is that Paul always signed his name. Why all of a sudden would he go anonymous?

How about Barnabbas? Hebrews has a lot of information on Judaism and Barnabbas, Paul's traveling companion, was a Levite. He would know a lot about the Jewish sacrificial systems talked about in this letter. But most scholars don't think he wrote it. Whoever wrote this letter was highly educated, they were brilliant. Barnabbas doesn't fit that profile.

How about Priscilla? Did she write the book? I know a few of you were rooting for her. I am sorry to tell you, scholars have crossed her out too. Why? In the few times the author refers to himself, he uses a masculine pronoun, not a feminine, so the author is male.

That leaves our final candidate, Apollos. He was a Christian Bible teacher and preacher talked about in Acts and 1 Corinthians who lived during the time of Paul. Martin Luther believed Apollos was the author and most Bible scholars line up behind him for a number of reasons. Why? Apollos was from the city of Alexandria. It was a university town that was one of the most scholastic environments in the ancient world. The author of Hebrews was highly educated. In Acts 18:24 we learn that Apollos was a highly educated man. We have a good fit.

If you have read Hebrews before, you know that the book of Hebrews contains many quotes from the Old Testament. If you have ever tried to look those quotes up in the Old Testament of your Bible, you find they don't match exactly. Why is that?

The Old Testament in our Bibles is based on the original Hebrew text but in the ancient world, many Jews were getting rusty with their Hebrew, since very few people spoke it. Greek was the language of the day. So Jews who were rusty in their Hebrew could still read their Bible, there was a translation of the Hebrew Bible into the Greek language. It was called the Septuagint. The Old Testament quotations in the book of Hebrews are all from the Greek Septuagint, not the original Hebrew. That is why they don't match exactly.

What city was the Septuagint written in? Alexandria, where Apollos came from. So if I was forced to put my money on somebody, it would be Apollos. But even with that evidence, the bottom line is that we really don't know for sure who wrote the book of Hebrews.

I like the way a Christian named Origen said it in 225 A.D., "Who wrote the epistle, to be sure, only God knows."

Before you become too depressed, let's think about this from a different angle. Did you ever think there might be a reason the author did not sign his name?

There is no more Christ-exalting book in the Bible than the book of Hebrews. I think the author didn't sign his name for a reason. He didn't want

anyone talking about how incredibly smart he was, what a great writer he was or how highly educated he was. I think he wanted people who read this letter to walk away thinking about one person. He wanted us thinking only about Jesus.

There is a story told of two great preachers over 100 years ago who preached in London. A man went to hear both of the preachers. When he came home, a friend asked what he thought about the two men. He said, "When I left the one church I thought about how fortunate they were to have such a great preacher; when I left the other church, I thought about how fortunate we are to have such a great Savior." Charles Spurgeon said it this way, "You can not show how clever you are and how great Christ is at the same time." I think the writer of Hebrews knew that.

That is an important thought. When we teach Sunday School or lead a small group or teach children on Wednesday, each of us wants to hear, "Great Job". Let's face it, every teacher likes to feel appreciated and know they are doing a good job. But *the more of the spotlight we take, the less of the spotlight Christ gets*. This is a challenge for everyone of us who present Christ. Like the author of Hebrews, stay out of the spotlight and let Jesus have center stage. We want people to remember Jesus, not us.

### Who was it written to?

The title of this book in our Bible is "Hebrews". If we were reading from the original letter to the Hebrews this morning, that would NOT be bold faced and centered across the top of the page. "Hebrews" is a nickname given to the book by the early church. The book explains how Jesus ties into Jewish life and customs. So the early Christians read the book and said, this is for the Hebrews. Hence the nickname, which became the official name.

Lets probe a little deeper. Which Jewish Christians was this written to? Judaism was present around the ancient world. Almost every major city had a synagogue. Was this a letter for the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem or for the Jews in another part of the world? Here is where we are going to do a little more CSI detective work. Earlier I mentioned that all the quotes of the Old Testament in this book are from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. The Jews in Jerusalem were pretty traditional; they prided themselves on knowing their Hebrew. The Jews in other cities of the world were rusty with it. It isn't likely that this letter was written to Jewish Christians of Jerusalem.

A little more CSI detective work gives us another clue. In Hebrews 13:24 we find this phrase, "*Those from Italy send you their greetings*". Whoever this letter was written to had some special interest in hearing from their friends who used to live in Italy. Dusting off another clue. The first place Hebrews was recognized as Scripture and quoted as such is from the city of Rome. In 96 A.D., a Roman church leader named Clement quoted extensively from Hebrews in a letter he wrote to the leaders of the church in Corinth. So where does our



detective work leave us? This letter was written to Jews who became Christians and who lived in the city of Rome.

### What was their life like?

#### They were in trouble.

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. Hebrews 10:32-34

What is this “great contest in the face of suffering” he is talking about? If Rome is the right guess for this letter, we know in 64 A.D., a fire broke out in Rome and it destroyed much of the city. Popular opinion was that Nero; the wicked Rome ruler, set the fire himself to clear out a portion of the city where the poor lived. He wanted to build a new entertainment center. To divert blame away from himself; Nero convicted three Christians for the crime and soon he began to arrest others. In 100 A.D., the Roman historian, Tacitus, wrote describing what happened. Let me read it to you.

In May A.D. 64, a terrible conflagration broke out in Rome, which raged for six days and seven nights, and totally destroyed a great part of the city. The guilt of this fire was attached to him (Nero) at the time, and the general verdict of history accuses him of the crime. “Hence, to suppress the rumor,” says Tacitus (Annals, xv. 44), “he falsely charged with the guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who are hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of that name, was put to death as a criminal by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea, in the reign of Tiberius; but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again, not only throughout Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also,... Accordingly, first three were seized, who confessed they were Christians. Next, on their information, a vast multitude were convicted, not so much on the charge of burning the city as of hating the human race. And in their deaths they were also made the subjects of sport; for they were covered with the hides of wild beasts and worried (torn) to death by dogs, or nailed to crosses, or set fire to, and, when day declined, burned to serve for nocturnal lights. Nero offered his own gardens for that spectacle, and exhibited a Circensian game, indiscriminately mingling with the common people in the habit of a charioteer, or else standing in his chariot; whence a feeling of compassion arose toward the sufferers, though guilty and deserving to be made examples of by capital punishment, because they seemed not to be cut off for the public good, but victims to the ferocity of one man.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>M.G. Easton, *Easton's Bible Dictionary* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996, c1897).

The Roman Christians had already been through tough times. They were turned into human torches to light Nero's gardens. Their families were destroyed; they experienced the most exquisite forms of torture known in the ancient world. And now, it looked like it was going to start all over again. Can you imagine the sense of panic they were experiencing? Talk about sleepless nights! This pales in comparison to what most of us have experienced.

I can't help but think about our teenagers and young adults and the challenges they face as another school year begins. It isn't hard to claim to be a Christian, it is hard to live as a Christian. There are a lot of opportunities to compromise our love for Christ. A lot of Christian teenagers go into stealth mode in school. I mean they try to fit in, rather than stand out because it isn't fun to be picked on. Christian teenagers, I don't want to minimize the pressure you are under, but if you think you have it bad, take an afternoon at the library and read about the Neronian persecution. If you think you can't make it, read Foxes Book of Martyrs or the DC Talk version called "Jesus Freaks" and you will get some perspective and a heart of thankfulness for the freedom we have in our country. Living for Christ in public school is easier than what these people went through, and they went through it joyfully. How can we go through tough times and do it joyfully? In the weeks ahead, Hebrews will have some answers.

### **They were considering quitting.**

Given what had already happened to them, it shouldn't come as a surprise they were considering throwing in the towel. Many of them lost their homes and saw their loved ones killed. Think of how easily we reconsider our commitment to Christ when we are spiritually weak or discouraged.

But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast. Hebrews 3:6

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. Hebrews 4:14

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:25

He reminds me of a cross-country coach. He cheers his athletes during a race, he gives them a reason to strive for the finish. The prize that awaits you at the finish line is worth the pain of the run. In the book of Hebrews, that is what we will learn. Some times following Christ is hard, sometimes your church and other Christians will disappoint you. No matter how hard it is, staying faithful to Christ and connected to his church all the way to the end of your life is worth it. Becoming a stealth Christian, a casual Christian isn't worth it. The prize Christ will give us in eternity is worth the pain of staying connected and committed to him, even when it is hard.

This past week, I went to the Hy-Vee for lunch. It was good meal for the price. When I sat down to eat, a sweet elderly lady asked if she could join me. I told her what I did and over lunch she started into her story. She wasn't a regular attendee at a church anymore. Thru the years, too many Christians hurt her, there were too many disappointments from people, and I think it would be safe to say that she also felt disappointed with God. She gave up on staying connected and committed. Now she stays home and listens to Robert Schuller.

She is not the only one who feels that way. Have you ever been disappointed with people in the church? I think about the three guys that Nero arrested who shared the names of the rest of the church members. I am sure they disappointed everyone. Has life turned in a way you didn't bargain for? Are you disappointed with God? Do you sometimes wonder if following Christ publicly and being part of His church is really worth it? It is so much easier to become a stealth Christian.

The writer of Hebrews has a word for us. No matter how hard it is, nothing now compares with the prize of staying connected to His church and following Jesus all the way to the end. **The pain is worth the prize.** Do whatever you must to stay connected, pay whatever cost you must be committed to him. It is worth it.

**You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.** Hebrews 10:34-36

### **What should I do from here?**

Here is my challenge. To get the most out of this book I would like you to finish setting the table for our meal together. Here is how.

#### **Scan Hebrews**

Nothing will prepare your heart more for our time in Hebrews than personally spending time reading the book. Read it once a week for the next month or as families, begin reading it for your family Bible reading time.

#### **Read and pray over the upcoming passage**

One of the beauties of preaching consecutively through a book of the Bible is you know where I will be next week. Read the text and ask God to prepare your heart.

#### **Pray for me and for the worship planning team**

Preaching the Word clearly is the most important thing I can do for you. Pray that God will help me do it clearly and successfully. The better I do, the more blessed the church will be.

## Hebrews 1:1-2 – Jesus, the Ultimate Word

Seeker Sign Title: The Ultimate Word

September 14, 2008

A lot of people use the word ultimate. Did you know that almost every time you see it used, it is used inappropriately? For instance, the game *Ultimate Frisbee* is technically not possible. It can't be called *ultimate Frisbee* if they play it again and again; to complicate the matter more, Frisbee golf is probably more popular than *Ultimate Frisbee*. Coca Cola calls themselves the *ultimate drink*. Technically that is wrong because about an hour later, I am thirsty again.

A Super Bowl MVP once corrected a reporter on his misuse of this word. The reporter put a microphone in front of the players face and asked, "What's it like to be the MVP in the ultimate game?" The player replied, "If this is the ultimate game, why are they playing it next year?" We use the word *ultimate* relatively freely but according to the dictionary, there are few things that are ultimate.

For something to be *ultimate* it must be so great there is no need for another to follow. Ultimate Frisbee would be such a great game no other type of Frisbee would ever be played, the ultimate drink would be so satisfying we would never thirst again; and the ultimate game of football *would not* be played next year because it *could not*, it was the ultimate. This morning, we will discover something in this world that is truly ultimate.

Last week we prepared to study the book of Hebrews. We learned nobody knows who wrote Hebrews; that is OK. The author most likely masked his identity to allow greater emphasis on Christ's identity. We discovered this letter was written to Jewish Christians in Rome who experienced extreme levels of persecution for Christ. It looked like a tough time of persecution was about to begin again. Many of these Christians were considering quitting on Christ or at least playing hooky from their faith and their church. They are asking questions like, "Is following Jesus worth it if those we love may die because of their faith?" "Is it worth following Jesus when it costs you everything financially?" Many of them were saying, "Why can't we compromise?" Let's not give up on God; lets just give up on Jesus. We can go back to being traditional Jews. At the time, Judaism was an accepted and protected religion in Rome. It was safe.

The writer of Hebrews doesn't waste any words. Jesus is not an accessory; or one of the available options that God fearing people add to their lives.

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...  
Hebrews 1:1-2

God spoke. He was under no obligation to do so. After the Fall, God could have remained hidden behind the curtain of creation. We would look at the Sun, the Moon, the stars and the beauty of the planet and know God exists but not know much more than the evidence his creative fingers left behind. If God was silent, we could know he exists but we would not and could not know him. *There is enough in creation to condemn us, but not enough to save us.* If God stayed silent, all hope would be lost.

But God didn't stay silent. He spoke. What the writer of Hebrews talks about is not so much *that* God spoke, but *how* he spoke. The book of Hebrews is a book of comparisons. In this brief verse, the writer of Hebrews compares how God spoke in the past and how he is speaking to us now through Jesus.

### **In the past, God spoke through the prophets.**

**In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets...**

"The prophets" is a reference to the gallery of Old Testament men through whom God delivered his Word. These words came in different forms but in all of them God chose to deliver his message through a human being.

### **Whose ideas are behind Scripture?**

**Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:20-21**

This verse pulls back the veil a little on the mystery of how God had the prophets write exactly what he wanted them to. First, Peter says that the origin of Scripture is not the prophet's own interpretation. In other words, prophecy did not come from the prophets ideas or will. Isaiah did not sit on his back porch and out of boredom decide to write Scripture. The originator of the thoughts behind the words he wrote was God. We have never experienced this. All of our thoughts are self-generated and self-interpreted. This wasn't true for the prophets. The words they spoke and wrote were words from God.

It was false prophets who spoke their own ideas and words.

**This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord." Jeremiah 23:16**

In ancient Israel, it was a dangerous thing to speak as a prophet. Why? If you gave a prophetic word that didn't come true, the people were to immediately stone you outside the city gate. Why? Every word that comes from God is reliable and true. So if a prophecy is untrue, it means it was spoken by a false prophet.

**He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind. 1 Samuel 15:29**

## How did God speak through the prophets?

The last part of 2 Peter describes it. Men spoke from God as *they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*. The word for “carried along” is a nautical term. It’s used in Acts 27:15 for a ship being directed and empowered by the wind. In a way only God could do, He originated the thoughts and words in the prophets mind so that the prophet wrote and said what God wanted him to say. The Scriptures are precisely God’s will written down to the letter and tense of the verbs. Did you know that Jesus believed this? Jesus based His argument for the resurrection on the tense of the verb “to be”.

**I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Matthew 22:32**

This is fascinating. The prophets are men inspired by God to say exactly what God wants them to say, yet God does this in a way that their personality and communication skills are not overruled. God carried David, the musical artist, to write words of poetry that we call the Psalms. God carried Daniel along to write detailed prophecy but they did it sounding like who God created them to be. So everything in our Bibles is exactly what God wanted written, even the tense of the verbs. Yet the diversity of style and personality of the human authors is maintained.

If these are God’s words, they can be trusted as truth. If these are God’s words they are authoritative about how we should live. When we read this book, we are reading God’s very words to us.

As amazing as the words of the Old Testament prophets are, there is a piece missing. It is like a missing piece of a puzzle. Part of the picture isn’t there.

**Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things. 1 Peter 1:10-12**

While time will not allow us to examine this verse in depth, I want us to understand that as great as the Old Testament is, even those who were writing it knew there were pieces missing in their words. As they were writing, they stopped and contemplated what it ultimately meant.

**But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. Isaiah 53:5**

He stopped and thought... I wonder who this is?

David, while composing a lyric to a song wrote,



The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone. Psalm 118:22

Who is that? As great as the prophets were and as great as their prophecies were, they knew there were missing pieces. Something greater was coming. They studied their own writings and the other prophetic writings to try to discover this mysterious missing piece of God's plan.

Christ is greater than anything God spoke before? He is the fulfillment of their words. He is the missing piece that all the Old Testament prophets were looking for.

Think about this. Because we are on the other side of Jesus' incarnation, we see the complete picture. The prophets were looking for Jesus, the missing piece that we have. They searched and searched. They had shadows they saw in their writings; we have the complete picture they wanted. Do you realize that our children, who learn about Jesus in Sunday School and Awana, have a greater understanding of what God was up to than Moses, Abraham, David, Daniel and all the other Old Testament giants.

It wasn't just prophets who were trying to discover the missing piece. Peter says that even angels longed to look into these things. Great angels, like Gabriel and Michael were also searching to discover this missing piece. The prophets and angels didn't know about the missing piece, but we do. Christ is God's ultimate word because he is the fulfillment of everything that was written before. He is the missing piece everything in the Old Testament points to. Not only is Christ the missing piece, he is a different kind of word.

### Christ is the Incarnational Word

What does the word *incarnation* mean? Incarnation means a physical expression of a non-physical reality. In a wedding, a ring is the incarnation of the commitment made in the ceremony. A statue is the incarnation of the mind of the artist. Our words are the incarnation of our thoughts because we think before we speak. (At least we are supposed to.) At Christmas we often hear the word incarnation spoken about Jesus and his birth. What does it mean? At Jesus' birth, our spiritual God took on a physical reality. Listen to how Jesus describes this fusion of Godhood and manhood to his disciples.

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. John 14:7-10

My words are not my own. My words are from the Father. There is such a close connection between Jesus and the Father that if you see Jesus, you have seen the Father. *This does not mean there is no difference between the Father and the Son, as the Unitarians teach.* It means that in the mystery of the Trinity, the Son and the Father are so close that to see the Son is to see the Father.

Nobody has seen God the father. He is unapproachable. What could we have seen? What could we have heard? Who could be touched? Jesus. The word became flesh. God accommodated himself to our human limitations so that we could hear him in a way we could understand. Every word Jesus spoke was the words of God. Every action Jesus took was God in action. Jesus is God the Father's Word's with flesh.

How many of you watch Extreme Makeover Home Edition? I like to watch it because it is touching and kind. In the show, the home makeover team finds a family that fell on hard times; cancer; widows; job loses and the like and because of that, they are living in a dangerous dump. The Extreme makeover team shows up at their home and sends them away for a week. The makeover team tears down their deteriorating inadequate home and in one week build a beautiful new one. Most of the show is watching the makeover team and a mob of construction workers attack the one week building project. The climax of the program is when the family comes home. They unveil the house and everyone starts crying. What used to be a dump could now be featured on the cover of Better Homes and Gardens. The family goes from room to room screaming in joy. The family is crying, the construction workers are crying and I am crying.

In one episode they built a home for a family where the husband was serving in Iraq. The family came home from their vacation to an incredible house. The camera followed the wife going from room to room as she was saying, "I just wish my husband could be here for this". When they were in the back yard. They said to this woman, "I know your husband can't be here, but we arranged to call him in Iraq. He is on the line now, here is the phone." She was bursting with joy telling her husband about their new home. While she was talking with him she kept saying, "I just wish you could be here". Words were great, but there was one thing that would have been better. There was only one way for the ultimate experience of that husband and wife relationship. (pause) Dad wasn't in Iraq, they flew him home, he was hiding in the backyard. After a few moments on the phone he sprung from behind a bush and his wife went crazy. He wasn't just there in words, he was there in the flesh. That is the ultimate experience.

Guys, the Old Testament was great. God's words are wonderful; they are perfect. But there is nothing better than having God with us not just in words, but *in the flesh*. Jesus is the ultimate word. Do you realize, God could not express himself more fully to us than Jesus. **Jesus is the ultimate word of God.**

The prophets longed to see this day. When the fullness of Godhood poured himself into a body so he could fuse with Godhood and manhood forever through a baby in a manger; the baby Jesus.

**Jesus is the *ultimate word***, God can not speak to us in a more full or complete way than he did through Jesus.



In your mind travel back with me to the church in Rome. They are considering giving up on Jesus and returning to the safety of the protected religion of Judaism because it cost too much to follow Jesus.

If they gave up Jesus, they weren't giving up a little thing, or an optional thing, they would give up on everything the Old Testament prophets wanted.

If they gave up on Jesus, they were turning their back on the greatest word God ever spoke or could speak to us. They would be turning their back on the only way for us to know God or put the sins of our past behind us.

### How should I respond?

This morning, I want you understand what it means to say **Jesus is the Ultimate word**. I have one thing I want you to do with that this week. Be excited. Did you feel the lump in your throat when I told the story of the husband who came home from Iraq to be with his wife? When she had his words they were great but having him in the flesh made her want to explode with excitement. Have you ever felt that "there nothing better than having you in the flesh feeling"? Feel those same emotions this week about Jesus. Folks, that is exactly what God did for us through Jesus. It can't get any better.



## Hebrews 1:1-3 – Every year you grow, the bigger he becomes

Seeker Sign Title: What gets bigger but doesn't change?

September 21, 2008

Is anyone a C.S. Lewis fan? Have you seen the Prince Caspian movie? (*If you haven't, it is coming out on DVD December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2008*) There is a famous scene in the Prince Caspian novel that many of Lewis fans' wished was better captured in the movie.

In the novel, Lucy sees the lion, Aslan. Aslan represents Christ in his novels. Aslan is shining white and huge against the moonlight. In a burst of emotion Lucy rushes to him and buries her face in the rich silkiness of his mane. Aslan rolls to his side and Lucy fell between his front paws. Aslan bent forward and gently touched her nose with his tongue. His breath warmed her face as she gazed into his eye. Lewis then details their conversation.

"Welcome child," he said. "Aslan," said Lucy, "You're bigger." "That is because you are older, little one," answered he. "Not because you are?" Lucy asked. "I am not," he said. "But every year you grow, you will find me bigger."

Every year you grow, you will find me bigger. Lewis was teaching his readers that the more they matured spiritually, the bigger Christ would become in their lives. This morning we will learn that the more spiritually mature we become, the bigger Christ will become in our lives.

If you are new to Faith EFC I would like to welcome you. We are in the early weeks of a new series on the book of Hebrews. This morning we are looking at one of the grandest passages on Jesus in the entire Bible. Please stand and read it with me.

### Hebrews 1:1-3

Last week we looked at verse 1. We learned God spoke to us in the past through the prophets. While God spoke to us through the prophets perfectly, he spoke to us incompletely. The prophets were looking for a missing piece. That missing piece was Christ. Through Christ, God spoke to us in the most powerful and personal way he could. He spoke to us, in person through Jesus. In verses 2 and 3, the writer of Hebrews is painting the edges on the canvas to give us a picture of Jesus how big Jesus Christ actually is. He does it with seven clauses giving us six descriptions of his greatness. Let's look at them together.

### Jesus is the heir of all things

He has spoken to us by His Son, whom he appointed heir of all things...

### Hebrews 1:2

An heir is someone designated to receive assets. This typically occurs at someone's death. For example, Prince Charles will inherit the throne of England. He is the heir. At some time in the future, the assets, rights and privileges of kingship will be bestowed upon him.

In what way is Christ the heir of all things? As the Son of God, God the Father designated him to receive all that exists.

**For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. Colossians 1:16**

**Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. Psalm 2:8**

We will get to Christ's creative work in a moment. I want us to keep our focus on the point that Christ will ultimately possess everything he made, When do you think Christ will receive his inheritance? I believe that after Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead, he wrested control of this earth away from Satan who stole it from Adam in the Garden of Eden. The reason I believe this is because after Jesus rose from the dead, he said to his disciples.

**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Matthew 28:19**

Satan knew Christ wanted to re-attain the rights to inherit the world that were taken from Adam. In the beginning of Christ's ministry Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Listen to how Satan tempted Jesus.

**Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Matthew 2:8-9**

As the creator of this world, Christ wanted the rights to rule that Satan took away. Satan offered Jesus a suffering free short-cut. *You want the right to rule over creation again. I will give it up, simply bow to me.* Isn't that the same strategy Satan uses today? We want something and Satan tempts us to get it by an illegitimate shortcut. Young adult, are you tired of loneliness because God has not brought the right man or woman into your life? Satan will bring people into your life people who are interested in you but not interested in Christ. Satan will in essence say, "You are tired of loneliness, here is a shortcut, you know they aren't the right person for you because they don't have a heart for Jesus. Why wait for God to provide. Take my shortcut. The problem is that it will derail you in the end. Friends, God's way often involves bearing our cross before God gives us a crown. It was that way with Jesus; and inheriting the earth, it will often be that way in our lives.

One of Satan's favorite temptations is to say, bend the rules a bit, bow to me and I will give you what you want. Remember, the cross before the crown.

**For from him and through him and to him are all things. Romans 11:36**

I mentioned a moment ago that I believe Christ has re-attained his right to inheritance of the universe because he took it back from Satan by destroying Satan's power of sin through the cross. While Christ has re-attained his authority for inheriting this universe, Christ has not yet chosen to fully exercise that authority and the final destruction of his enemies. The Bible tells us there is a day coming when Christ will return, the full application of Christ's victory over

satan will be applied and Christ will apply his full victory over his enemies. We will talk more about that later in this series but for now lets just remember that Christ has re-attained the full rights to inherit everything. I mean even everything. *The more we understand Christ, the bigger he becomes.*

## **Jesus is the creator of the universe**

**And through whom he made the universe... Hebrews 1:2**

When God created the universe, it was a team effort. Genesis 1:2 tells us the Spirit was involved hovering over the water. The Father purposed the creation of the universe and spoke the words but the Son is the one who carried it out. He is the one who made everything.

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. John 1:3

Jesus is the source of everything in the universe. He fashioned it carrying out his Father's purpose. This boggles the mind.

Stephen Hawking, the brilliant Cambridge physicist, spent his life examining the universe. In his best selling book A Brief History of Time he describes our galaxy as...

an average-sized spiral galaxy that looks like a swirl in a pastry roll, but it is 100,000 light years in diameter (600 trillion miles). Our galaxy is only one of some hundred thousand million that can be seen with modern telescopes. Each of those galaxies contains some hundred thousand million stars. The average distance between each galaxy is 3 million light years.

Jesus created it all.

He also created every speck of dust in the 100 thousand million galaxies. He also created the quarks, leptons, electrons and neutrinos – all of which are so small that we struggle to measure them. The more we understand Jesus, the bigger he becomes.

## **Jesus sustains everything by His power**

**Sustaining all things by his powerful word Hebrews 1:3**

Sustaining is different from creating. Parents will agree that sustaining a child is different than creating a child. Sustaining the universe is different from sustaining it.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries a belief developed called deism. Deists believed God created the universe but that he had walked away from it. They believed the universe was like a watch that was slowly unwinding with God keeping his hands off. That was a popular belief, but it wasn't and isn't an option the Bible gives us. Right now, Jesus is actively involved in the moment-by-moment runnings of our universe and everything that happens in our lives. He knew everything about Lehman Brothers and AIG and he had full control of those financial institutions. Not only is he involved in controlling the big pieces of the

universe but he is actively involved in sustaining each one of our lives with exactly what we need every day, just as he provided just enough manna for the Israelites in the wilderness.

Sometimes people read the Bible and they dismiss the miracles. How could they happen? They violate the laws of the universe. Let me give you a secret. The reason Jesus did miracles was to demonstrate that he sustained the laws of the universe and could bend them at will, because he created them. *The more we understand Jesus, the bigger he becomes.*

### **Jesus is the Radiance of God's Glory**

**The son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being... Hebrews 1:3**

This is the heart and soul of these verses. The writer of Hebrews uses two parallel clauses to teach us about Jesus' identity. The first clause says, "the son is the radiance of God's glory". What does this mean?

While the writer is talking about light, he is not focusing on the visual appearance of Jesus. He is contrasting radiated light with reflected light. When light radiates from a source, it contains part of the source, that is not true when light is reflected. Let me explain it to you another way.

Think of the light of the sun. Light that radiates from the sun contains essence of the sun in it. The sun is burning at 15,000 degrees. The light of the sun leaves the sun, travels thousands upon thousands of miles and lands upon the beautiful Iowa countryside. When it lands on our skin, we feel it, and we warm up from the sun's fire. If we don't watch it the sun burning gets to us and we end up with sun burn.

Moonlight is different. It doesn't come from the moon, it is just reflected off the moon. It doesn't contain any essence of the moon in it. This is why nobody has moonburn this morning.

The writer of Hebrews says that Christ is the radiance of God's glory. Just as sun beams contain the essence of the sun in them. Jesus contains the essence of God in him. Jesus doesn't show us what God is like by reflecting God, he shows us what God is like by his essence being God.

The parallel clause tells us that Jesus is *the exact representation of God's being*. The wording used here was used to describe a seal placed onto hot wax. If you have pressed a stamp into wax you understand what a perfect counterpart of the stamp will create. There are two distinctly different things, the stamp and the seal, yet they are totally identical to one another. Jesus is distinctly different from God the father, yet he is in essence the same as God the father. This tension is found all over the Bible. For example:

**In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. John 1:1**

John begins his gospel echoing the words of the creation account in Genesis. Jesus as the ultimate word of God was distinct from God, that is why he could be termed *with God* yet his essence *was God*. This is part of the mystery of God. Jesus and the Father are different persons but the same God.

Let me teach you something very important... be comfortable with this tension. It is all throughout the Bible. The writers of Scripture knew it, yet they wrote what God wanted them to. The cults are not comfortable with this tension. To solve it they will always reduce Jesus. Jehovah's Witnesses will tell you that Jesus is not God but just the first of God's creative works. Islam will tell you Jesus is not God, he is just a good teacher.

Every time we shrink Jesus down to a comfortable size, we end up with a distorted picture of who he is. *The more we understand Jesus, the bigger he becomes.*

**Jesus is the purifier of our sins who is ruling at the Father's right hand.**

**After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. Hebrews 1:3**

Christ made purification for our sins on the cross. The verb here is a simple past action meaning it was completed in the past. Christ is not still paying for your sin or mine. He is not still suffering for our sins. This is why Christ's last three words on the cross were *It is finished*. The purification for our sin is complete. After we have accepted Christ as our savior, when God the Father looks at us he sees the purity of his sons life, not the sinful mess of our lives.

Purification is not just something God completed in the past, it is something he does to us in the present.

Do you have stains in your carpet? Do you remember how they got there? Before we moved we parted ways with an old chair. It had a stain between the cushion and the chair. I remember where the stain came from. At one time we had mice in our house. Apparently one mouse decided to hide under the chair cushion. Someone sat in the chair. That stain never came out. Every time we saw it, we couldn't help but remember it.

When it comes to our moral lives, the same is true. You might say, "Things are going well with God right now" but the stain of my past sins are still in my heart and mind. The stain from some of our sins has the potential to stain our earthly lives forever. We all wish there was some way to remove the indelible stains of our past. There is.

Christ made purification for our sins on the cross. The cleansing power of Christ doesn't just apply to us judicially before God, but God also applies it to us experientially.

**If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come. 2 Corinthians 5:17**

Christ polishes our heart to take away the stains and turn them into a mirror that reflects the image of his son.

Finally, because of all Christ accomplished, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. This is the highest place of honor that God can give. Purifier of sins? Seated at the highest place of honor, God's right hand? *The more you know Jesus, the bigger he becomes.*

## Conclusion

This is a pretty powerful beginning to a group of battle weary Christians who are thinking about giving up. Did you ever wonder why the writer of Hebrews began this way? Why not begin with something more gentle than a theology lesson?

They needed to catch a vision of how amazing it was for them to be the focus of Christ's affection and tender mercies.

A grand and glorious vision of Christ is not just something they needed; it is something we need. What do we need when we struggling with temptation? What do those who are physically weak and sick need to remember? What do senior saints struggling with the decay of their body need to hear? What do joyless Christians need? What do we all need?

We need to catch a vision of how huge Christ is and grasp what a big deal it is that he loves us and cares for us every day. When problems seem to overwhelm, don't forget the identity of the one seated at the right hand of God, who knows your name, who loves us so much he put skin on to tell us. Nothing can be greater or more important than to be loved by Jesus the Christ. *The more you know him, the bigger he becomes.*



## Hebrews 1:5-14 – Superior to the Angels

Seeker Sign Title: Jesus vs. The Angels

September 28, 2008

If you are new to Faith EFC, I want to welcome you. We are studying the book of Hebrews. It took 3 weeks for us to get through the first three verses. Today, we are picking up the pace; we will finish the rest of chapter one, all 11 verses! Do you think we can do it? If we are going to make it, we need to dive right in.

In the first three verses of Hebrews, the author taught us that Jesus is the greatest Word God ever spoke and that Jesus is incredibly big. The more we know about him, the bigger he becomes.

A really big Jesus was hard for first century Jewish Christians to believe. A really big Jesus is hard for most people to believe. How could Jesus be so great? How could Jesus be greater than any other hero of history and greater than all other spiritual beings? They said the same thing we would say; “Prove it to me.” “Prove Jesus is really greater.” To prove it to them, the writer of Hebrews sets up a series of title bouts to see if Jesus can defend his claim to be the greatest of all time.

The rest of chapter 1 is Jesus’ first title defense to defend his claim as, “The Greatest of All Time”. It is Jesus vs. the Angels. I realize some of us are saying, “Duh”, “Of course Jesus is greater than angels.” The reason we don’t see angels as serious contenders for greatness is because our 21<sup>st</sup> century view of angels is warped. We picture angels as little Cherub figurines from the gift shop or Roma Downey from “Touched by an Angel”. If that is how we think of angels, we may have a comforting mental picture but we have a bad theological picture.

Before we even look at the title fight in Chapter 1, we need to take time to develop a proper respect for Jesus’ contenders; the angels. This morning we are doing two things. 1) The truth about angels. 2) A ringside seat for the title match of Jesus vs. the angels to watch Jesus defend his title.

### The Truth About Angels

#### Where did angels come from?

I used to think there were always angels in heaven. That isn’t true. Angels are created spiritual beings. We do not know exactly when God created them, but the Bible tells us God created them.

Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts. Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. Psalm 148:2-5



This Psalm is giving us a partial list of what God created and it tells us what he created will worship him. One of the things he created is the heavenly hosts, the angels.

### How many angels are there?

The Bible doesn't give us an exact number but it does give us an idea.

A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. Daniel 7:10

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. Revelation 5:11

The apostle John in Revelation and Daniel in the Old Testament both used the same numeric description of angels, "thousands upon thousands and ten thousands upon ten thousands". Before some of the number crunchers among us start multiplying, realize this phrase is an expression used in the Bible for an uncountable number. There may be gigabytes or terabytes of angels. We don't know the number; there may even be as many angels as there are dollars for our economic bailout. All we know is there are a lot.

### How are angels like us?

Angels are not robotic. They are similar to us in many ways. For example, angels have *intelligence*. They were trying to figure out God's plan of salvation just like the Old Testament prophets.

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things. 1 Peter 1:12

Angels, like us, have *feelings*. They cheer and celebrate in heaven every time someone repents of their sin and turns to Christ. They are party goers.

I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. Luke 15:7

Angels, like us, have a *will*. Some angels chose to rebel and follow Satan and become part of his demonic horde.

And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. Jude 6

So when we think about angels, don't think of them as mindless robots or impersonal beings. They are like us in many ways, except they don't have a physical body, and incidentally, they can't reproduce. God created them all at once. We have the joy of children, they don't.

Up to this point, angels don't sound impressive. But the Bible tells us more about angels that is impressive. They are very powerful beings. It only took one angel that went before the army of Israel to drive away their enemies.

I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Exodus 33:2

One angel destroyed the entire Assyrian army.

That night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! 2 Kings 19:35

When Jesus rose from the dead, it was one angel that rolled away the stone from the tomb.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. Matthew 28:2

Now that might not sound impressive but the stone rolled in front of the tomb was quite large. Scholars estimate the stone to be 8 feet in diameter and 1 foot thick. It weighed over 8,000 lbs. This angel tossed it aside.

If you aren't impressed with that; Matthew 28:4 tells us the trained and battle ready guards who stood in front of Jesus' tomb were quite impressed. The Bible says when they saw the angel, they shook and became like dead men. These sturdy men shook in their boots and fainted. Angels are powerful beings.

### **Angels were the mediators of the Old Covenant**

The Jews also understood angels to be the way God communicated with humanity. The Jews viewed angels as the vehicle through which God gave them the Old Covenant

And now you have betrayed and murdered him – you who have received that law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it. Acts 7:52-53

What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise had come. The law was put into effect through angels. Galatians 3:19

This is the background of the Jewish Christians in Rome. Angels are frighteningly powerful and they are the way God worked in the past. Surely Christ wasn't better than angels.

This reverence for angels was so high that in the city of Colossae, some people were worshipping them. The thinking of the Jews who worshipped angels was not crazy. They reasoned that if God used angels to communicate his will to them; maybe they should use angels to communicate their will back to God. To make Christ more reasonable, in Colosse, just like in the city of Rome, they viewed Christ as just a high-ranking angel.

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible *and invisible*, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities;... Do not let anyone

who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Colossians 2:16-18

They were struggling with this same thing in Colossae. They found it hard to believe that Jesus was anything more than a high order angel. Thrones, powers, rulers and authorities are titles used by 1<sup>st</sup> century rabbi's to describe different angelic ranks. Paul describes Christ as better than these ranks because he created the angels in these ranks.

There is only one way to settle this. Is Jesus more powerful than God's mighty angels? Let's put them in the ring and let them fight it out. The writer of Hebrews gives us a three round fight. The winner is determined by the Old Testament Scriptures that describe Jesus and angels.

Incidentally, if you remember from the first week of this study, all the Old Testament quotations in Hebrews are from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament that people in that day could read. So when we read the Scriptures in Hebrews 1 in our Bible, they are not perfect quotes from our Old Testament because they are translated from Hebrew, to Greek, to English.

### **A Ringside Seat for Christ vs. the Angels**

#### **Round 1 – Jesus was given a better name, the name “Son”**

So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father”? Or again, “I will be his Father, and he will be my Son”? Hebrews 1:4-5

Jesus was called “Son”. A title no angel was given. To establish this, the writer of Hebrews gives us two Old Testament quotes.

The first quote is from Psalm 2:7. Psalm 2 is a famous Psalm the first century Jews understood would be fulfilled by a descendent of David who would be crowned king and known as the Son of God. At Jesus' baptism, *the very words of Psalm 2 were used by God to identify Jesus as the long awaited Son of Psalm 2.*

And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” Mark 1:11

The apostle Paul also saw Psalm 2 fulfilled in Jesus.

“We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: “ ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father.’ Acts 13:32-33

Now the second quote the writer of Hebrews uses comes from 2 Samuel 7:14. This was also is a well-known passage that 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews believed would be fulfilled by God's Son. This passage is commonly called the Davidic covenant. This is when the prophet Nathan told David that after his death his son would build a house for God and establish a royal throne that would endure

forever. David's son, Solomon built a house for God, but he didn't complete the prophecy. He didn't establish a throne that lasted forever. Neither did any of David's descendants. They all failed to establish a throne that endured forever. In the first century, people were hoping for a new King of David that would establish a throne that would endure forever. Jesus fulfills this prophecy.

Look at the announcement to Mary by the angel Gabriel at Jesus' conception.

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." Luke 1:32-33

What was announced to Mary was that Jesus is the long awaited Son of David who would establish the never-ending kingdom. So we see that Jesus is given the name "Son".

To which of the angels did God give that title? To Michael, No... to Gabriel, No... they are just servants of God. Only Jesus was given the title "Son". Round 1, Christ wins.

### **Round 2 – Jesus holds a higher place, a place of "Honor".**

And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire." But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy." Hebrews 1:6-9

How is Christ greater? He has greater honor because *he is the object of the angels' worship*. You don't worship someone equal to you; you worship someone greater than you. To prove this, the writer of Hebrews quotes from the song of Moses.

Let all God's angels worship him. Deuteronomy 32:43

He then quotes from Psalm 97:7

He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire. Psalm 104:4

His point is that Christ is the receiver of worship while the angels are just "winds" and "servants". Angels just carrying out the purposes of God while the Son is worshiped as God.

He then goes to Psalm 45. This is a Psalm about a wedding. It is a description of a wedding that took place between a King in Israel and his bride. If you read the Psalm you will see it gives a beautiful and detailed description of this wedding. Part of the Psalm describes the character of the king of Israel. The problem is, this king of Israel could never be everything the Psalm describes him to be. His earthly throne could not last forever. The only complete fulfillment of this Psalm could be Christ. Only his throne can last forever. This Psalm's point is

that this ultimate king in Israel has a place of honor that is higher than everyone else.

### **Round 3 – Jesus does a greater work; he creates and rules**

He also says, “In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.” To which of the angels did God ever say, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”? Hebrews 1:10-13

Here the author of Hebrews is quoting from Psalm 102 that describes the creative work of Christ laying the foundations of the world.

We live in a new sub-division and I am watching them build a new home behind us. That home, like every other, begins with a foundation. Jesus is the one who laid the foundation of everything that is created including angelic beings.

Not only is Christ the creator of the earth from the beginning of everything, but he will be around at the end. Psalm 102 also describes the universe becoming like an old pair of clothes. When the universe wears out, it will be rolled up and thrown away; just like we take our clothes and throw them in the hamper. Christ will roll up the entire universe like our dirty clothes and at the end of the day will discard them, but He will remain.

Finally he quotes from Psalm 110. The most quoted Psalm from the OT in the NT. Christ is described as seated at the right hand of God. The right hand is the place of highest honor with God. No angel even comes close; that is where Christ is.

Is Christ superior or what? I score Christ vs. the angels a complete knockout in just 3 rounds.

### **How Does This Apply To Me?**

#### **Don't Have to High a View of Angels**

Well-intentioned people have fallen into the trap of giving angels more authority than they deserve. The word of an angel is not on par with the words of Christ. For example, Joseph Smith claimed he received the Book of Mormon from an angel so we should read it and consider it authoritative like the Bible. He might be right. I believe he did receive the Book of Mormon from an angel;... a fallen angel. Christ is superior to *all* angels. I trust Christ's words over a fallen angels words.

The same was true with the prophet Mohammed. He claimed an angel named Gabriel visited him and gave him revelations that he wrote down and were compiled into the Quran. Interestingly, in Mohammed's writings he admits he wasn't sure if it was the angel Gabriel speaking to him or a demon. I am convinced the angel was a demon. The true Gabriel appears 4 times in Scripture, twice to Daniel in the OT, once to Mary and once to Zechariah. All of

Gabriel's visitations were fearful but positive experiences in the lives of those he visited. After Mohammed's angelic visitations he began robbing traveling caravans to build his base of power and murdering those who disagreed with him. None of Gabriel's Biblical visitations resulted in that kind of behavior. Mohammed was visited by a Gabriel impostor.

In 2 Corinthians 11:4 we learn that Satan likes to masquerade as an angel of light. Angels should point people to the one place they should be looking, Jesus. An angel that leads us any place else is a fallen angel, a demon.

### **Don't have too low of a view of angels**

I don't want you to leave with a low of a view of angels, but a proper view.

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? Hebrews 1:14

The Greek word "sent" means... continually sent, one right after the other. What are powerful angels being continually sent to do? They are continually sent from God to serve and protect us, those who will inherit salvation. So without idolizing angels, we should be thankful for them and realize God sends them to protect us. Many times, he sends them in response to our prayers.

Billy Graham wrote a book on angels. In his book he describes numerous accounts of angelic protection of God's people. One I found especially interesting was in East Africa, at the Rift Valley Academy, a school for the children of missionaries; a school I visited.

In 1956 during the Mau Mau uprising, a band of roving Mau Maus came to the village of Lauri. They killed every man, woman and child. Not more than 3 miles away stood Rift Valley Academy with hundreds of missionary children. With their clubs, spears, and torches the Mau Mau's surrounded the school cutting off all avenues of escape. The children and teachers were on their knees calling for protection from God. When the Mau Mau's were close enough to throw their spears; they suddenly stopped and ran to the jungle. In the morning the army arrived and captured many of the rebels. They were asked why they hadn't finished the job, why had they left Rift Valley Academy standing after they decimated the village of Lauri?

The leader of the Mau Mau said, "As we came closer, suddenly, between us and the school were many huge men dressed in white with flaming swords. We were afraid and ran to hide!

On the one hand, don't give angels more respect than they deserve. Only Christ should be the object of our affections. He is in a completely different and greater category than they are. He is the Son of God.

On the other hand, don't miss the encouragement of this passage. Angels are nothing compared to Christ but they are incredibly powerful beings continually sent from God to help us. They are deputized spiritual authorities from God to serve and protect those who will inherit salvation.

## Hebrews 2:1-4 – The Danger of Drifting

Seeker Sign Title: ---

October 5, 2008

This morning is our fifth message from the book of Hebrews. We have learned this book was written to Jewish Christians in Rome who had already experienced tough persecution. It looked like persecution was about to begin again.

Understandably, these Christians are wondering if it is worth risking their lives to follow Christ. Many of them were considering going back to traditional Judaism. Why not? Is Christ worth all this? Before they walk away, the writer of Hebrews wants them to know the Jesus they are walking away from. So the author of Hebrews has been teaching us about Jesus. He is the ultimate Word of God. In the past, God spoke through prophets, in Jesus; he spoke to us directly through his own son. He is also the creator and sustainer of everything that exists. Christ is greater than even the most powerful angels in the universe; he created the angels. That brings us to chapter 2, where we are this morning.

### Hebrews 2:1-4

This book has a number of strong warnings about walking away from Christ. Some of us may find these warnings uncomfortable toward our theological predispositions. Rather than letting our theology tell us what this passage should mean, I want to simply let the text speak for itself.

### What must I do?

**I must pay careful attention to Christ.**

We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. Hebrews 2:1

Those of you who enjoy boating will like this passage because the author uses nautical terms. The phrase *pay careful attention* in the ancient world was a term used to describe the attention a captain of a ship would give when docking his boat. There is a whole different level of attention the captain gives to his ship when he is *driving* the boat compared to when he is *docking* the boat. When the captain drives the boat he gives the boat glancing attention, when the captain is docking the boat he scrutinizes every detail of his maneuver.

This is what the writer of Hebrews is saying to us. If you were impressed with Jesus in chapter 1, let me explain the implications of this. *We must pay careful attention to this*. Jesus is not a meaningless spiritual news bulletin in our information saturated world. Jesus is worth our careful attention. In the Greek, the tense the writer is using is emphatic. He is grabbing them by the shirt collar and pinning them to the wall saying. Because of who Jesus is, let's pay careful attention to him.



The danger they faced, and the danger we face, is the very real danger of not thinking *enough* of Jesus. It is the danger of treating him as a sub-plot in the Bible rather than the main-plot of everything. It is the danger of treating Jesus as a commercial rather than the main event. Jesus is the hinge upon which all of creation and all of our redemption turns. Be careful not to think too little of him and give him glancing attention.

This isn't just a 1<sup>st</sup> century danger. It is also a 21<sup>st</sup> century one. This week listen to Christian radio and keep a little mental counter. How much do you hear about the greatness of Jesus? Run through your mental catalog of the sermons you remember. How big of a piece is Jesus? That is because glancing attention, not careful attention is paid to him.

The reason the writer of Hebrews tells us to pay very focused and careful attention to Jesus is because if we fail to do this, something will happen in our lives. It is something we must NOT do.

**I must NOT drift away.**

**We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. Hebrews 2:1**

This is nautical language. This phrase *drift away* is a term used in the ancient world of a ship captain who didn't tie his ropes or secure his ropes adequately to handle the winds and currents. So when the winds picked up and the pull of the current begins to drag on the boat, because he hasn't rechecked his ropes or added extra ropes, the boat breaks away and drifts out to sea.

Think with me of the photos we saw last week of the boats around Galveston Texas. There is great danger in drifting. Drifters end up with disasters. Just as boats can drift if there isn't careful attention paid to the ropes to keep them tied down, the writer of Hebrews is saying the same is true for us spiritually if we do not pay careful attention to stay roped to Christ, the currents and winds of this world will drift us away.

**Who is in danger of drifting?**

Spiritual drifters are not Aborigines living in Africa who have never heard of Christ. They are not people living under a false religion. Spiritual drifters are the people sitting in that church in Rome who already know the gospel, but are not taking the implications of Christ's identity seriously. Maybe this morning, you sit here drifting to disaster, just as they were. Are we giving Christ the casual attention of a boat driver not the careful attention of a boat docker.

**How can I recognize a drifter?**

Sitting in church on a Sunday morning, from outward appearances, a drifter looks no different. Spiritual drifters may even appear to be safe in the harbor and tied to Christ but here is where the difference is found. They are hearing about Christ but they aren't listening to Christ. They know the truth about Christ but they aren't believing it.



Let me clear up a misunderstanding many people have. Many think spiritual drifting is not a big deal. As long as you have professed Christ at one time in your life; you are OK. We think of a drifting Christian as someone who will simply miss out on some heavenly rewards. This is a misunderstanding. Is it true that when someone is saved they are secure in their salvation? Absolutely. When someone fails to remain in Christ it may mean they were not saved to begin with. For sure they will become the object of God's fatherly discipline rather than his fatherly delight. God is much better at discipline than most of us realize.

This morning, the writer of Hebrews is calling us to recheck our ropes. Since Christ is such a big deal, is he our big deal? Maybe you have come to this church for years, maybe you have all the God talk down but if Christ is not the burning center of our lives, maybe we have begun to drift away because we pay him casual rather than careful attention.

### Heed the warnings of history.

For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? Hebrews 2:2-3

When we read and want to remember something important, we highlight it, we circle it, and we underline it. If it is really important, we do all three. The author of Hebrews highlights his point with something called the *Qal Wa Homer* line of argumentation. Don't stress out on these words. It isn't sophisticated because we do the same thing every day. All it means is if something is true in a small way, it will be more true in a big way.

What the author wants us to do is reflect upon how serious it was to ignore God's words in the Old Testament times. If there were serious consequences for ignoring God's words in the Old Testament times, how much more serious will it be for us if we fail to pay careful attention to Christ, God's ultimate revelation in our time.

There are two important words the writer of Hebrews uses in this warning. They are the words *violation* and *disobedience*. There is a subtle but important difference in the original language that doesn't jump out. Let me explain. A violation is an *intentionally rebellious act*.

Then the Lord said to Moses: "Take the blasphemer outside the camp. All those who heard him are to lay their hands on his head, and the entire assembly is to stone him. Say to the Israelites: 'If anyone curses his God, he will be held responsible; Leviticus 24:13-15

In Leviticus 24 we learn that anyone who curses the name of God will be put to death. This is someone who *deliberately* rebels against God by cursing against him. This is not somebody who made a verbal slip but was sorry for it.

The word disobedience is different than violation; violation is not *pure rebellion* but *imperfect hearing*. It is knowing but not caring enough to apply.

While the Israelites were in the desert, a man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath day. Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and the whole assembly, and they kept him in custody, because it was not clear what should be done to him. Then the Lord said to Moses, "The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp." So the assembly took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the Lord commanded Moses. Numbers 15:32-36

In this passage we find a man who was caught gathering firewood on the Sabbath, a day God commanded as a day of rest. Was this man cursing against God? Of course not! He knew working on the Sabbath was against God's Word but he didn't care enough about God's Words to apply those words to his life. This was not *active* rebellion; it was *passive* rebellion.

So the writer of Hebrews says, if the message given through the prophets in the Old Testament was serious enough that not just active rebellion but passive rebellion, merited the death penalty; how much more serious will it be for us? We don't have the words of the prophets; we have the very words of God's own son.

The message this morning is simply this. Spiritual drifting is dangerous business. To know who Christ is, to know the depth of humiliation he endured to save us from our sin, to know Christ but not make much of him or to allow ourselves to drift away from him *is to put ourselves in an incredibly dangerous place. Just as the very Israelites who were freed from Egypt never reached the promised land but died in the wilderness because they failed to listen to the words of God. We too are in danger of receiving God's fatherly discipline if we fail to hear and apply what we know of God's ultimate words to us through his Son.*

I don't believe Christians plan to drift. It is usually the busyness of lives or the familiarity of having grown up in the church that numbs us to Jesus.

You know what a spiritual drifter sounds like? A conversation goes something like this.

Tell me about your faith in Christ.

What do you want to know?

What brought you to trusting in Christ?

I grew up in church; went to Sunday School, summer camp, kind of the things my family does.

What do you believe

About what?

About salvation

Ummm...

Do you believe Christ died for your sins?

Oh, that, sure

Have you read anything in the Bible lately?

I already know the stories, I learned them in Sunday School as a kid

How does Christ make you different?

I'm not sure

To help us understand how incredibly dangerous this is, the writer of Hebrews tells us three things that drifters ignore.

**If I drift, I ignore the evidence.**

**The Lord Jesus Christ**

This salvation, which was announced by the Lord...

Drifters are ignoring the very words of Christ. Jesus is real in history, the resurrection is real, not a fairy tale. It must be reckoned with.

**The Apostle's Testimony**

...was confirmed to us by those who heard.

The apostles were eyewitnesses of Christ. 1 John 1, John says

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. 1 John 1:1

**God's Authenticating Miracles**

God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

The reason Jesus and the apostles performed miracles and the reason there were supernatural manifestations of Spiritual Gifts surrounding Christ was to endorse the truth of who Christ is and the words he spoke. Faith in Christ is not dumb faith or blind faith. It is reasonable faith. Sometimes we think the miracles are what make the Bible *hard to believe*. The writer of Hebrews says it is because of the miracles the Bible *has to be believed*. Spiritual drifters ignore all this stuff that tells us to take Christ seriously.

**What should I do if I have warning signs in my heart?**

Before I go any farther, I want to clarify something. Spiritual drifting is not a season of sin in your past that you repented of. Drifting is not a battle with a besetting sin that you are engaged with today. Spiritual drifters are not concerned about those things.

If this morning you are checking the ropes of your faith and want to make Christ an even bigger part of your life, that's a sign you are anchored. The person that I am most concerned about this morning is the person who is religious but is only moderately *Christian*. Christ is not the burning center of

everything. If that is you, please, carefully listen to the warnings in this passage. Have you drifted from Christ?

What do you do with the other warning signs in your life? Men, what do you do when you experience chest pains? Ladies, what do you do when you find a lump in your breast? My friends, the stakes are high. When we drift away from Christ being the burning center of our lives, God will discipline us in this life and we will suffer severe spiritual consequences in the next life. The consequences last for a long time in eternity.

Many of you know Ray Bolz. He is a famous Christian musician who wrote "I pledge allegiance to the lamb" and "Thank you for giving to the Lord". Recently, to the shock of the Christian community, he left his wife and children and announced he is gay. What happened to take a man of such influence and gifting to such a tragic end? *Pay careful attention to Christ or we will drift away.*

## Hebrews 2:5-9 – Destiny

Seeker Sign Title: Destiny

October 12, 2008

This morning we are continuing to study the book of Hebrews. In the first chapter of the book we learned about the greatness of Christ. He is the Ultimate Word from God, He is the Creator and sustainer of everything and He is even greater than the mightiest angels because he created the angels.

Because it was very difficult to follow Christ, the Christians in the city of Rome were considering downplaying Jesus. The writer of Hebrews is teaching his ancient audience that Jesus isn't an option. He is the burning center of everything and deserves to be the burning center of our lives. Last week in verses 1 – 4 of chapter 2 we were introduced to the consequences of allowing Christ to become insignificant. We called that drifting away. We learned that since the consequences for drifting away from God in the Old Testament were bad, it's even worse for us in the New Testament if we allow ourselves to drift away from the greatest words God ever spoke or could speak, the words of his own son.

Last Sunday night, as I put my boys to bed, David asked me about the sermon. He said, "Dad, its really scary to drift away from God. I thought God loved us." I said, "David, when we coach you for wrestling, there are two ways we motivate you. One is a negative motivation; in other words, train your best because you don't want to lose. The other way we motivate is positive. Train your best because you can win a state title. This is the same thing that happens in chapter 2 of Hebrews. Last week was the negative motivation, we don't want to drift away and find ourselves punished for it, (let's face it, nobody likes that, but it is reality). This week is the fun stuff, the positive motivation. Stick with Christ because there is a real prize waiting at the end for those who succeed.

### Hebrews 2:5-9

Before we begin, I want you to turn to your neighbor and say *this is a really hard piece of Scripture*. If we weren't working our way through Hebrews piece by piece, you probably wouldn't hear a sermon on this passage because it isn't easy. The good news is that while it is a very hard passage, it has a great message that we need to hear; so let's begin. Today I want to keep our fingers in the text because the best way to understand this passage is to simply explain it piece by piece.

Here is how it starts. *It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come....* What is this about? It sounds like it comes from left field. Let me give you some background. Right now, according to the Bible, this world is ruled by angelic beings.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:12

Who is in charge? Angelic beings are ruling this world. If you have read Piercing the Darkness or This Present Darkness by Frank Peretti, you read a fictional account of what angelic might look like. That is not the way it was to be!

### **Man was intended to Rule**

The writer of Hebrews will prove God's ultimate intention for us by demonstrating God's original intention. He turns to the Old Testament to make his point. He says *There is a place where someone has testified*. Incidentally, why do you think he says this? Did he have a mental lapse? I don't think so. He is about to quote from Psalm 8 with pristine accuracy. If he knows Psalm 8 that well, I don't think he has no idea of the reference. I think he is doing the same thing he did earlier. He is not mentioning names on purpose. Jesus is the only name he wants you to think about or remember. The phrase *there is a place where someone has testified* is a little like me saying to you, *the Bible says...* It is a way they reference their source of authority.

Now the author gives us a quote from Psalm 8. In Psalm 8, the Psalmist is explaining why his heart is filled with praise. It begins with the words *O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!* We sometimes sing those words. It is because of the vastness of God's creation and the wonder of the thought that mankind would be put in charge of it that the Psalmist sings

*When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*  
Psalm 8:3-9

Did you hear it? When I consider the heaven, the moon and stars, what is man that you are mindful of him? More than that, what is man that you would put him in charge of this incredible planet? We are puny nobodies.

This may strike you as funny. We are in charge of the world? Yes, this is what the Bible tells us. From the beginning God intended mankind to rule over his creation.

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Genesis 1:26-28*

We often talk about man being made in God's image but we skip God's original intent for man in creation. We were to rule over the earth. The trees, the plants, the animals and the sunsets were not just intended to be a theater of God's glory *but to meet our needs*. We were to be in charge of this creation and it was to serve our needs.

In Hebrews 2:7 and in Psalm 8 it says that man was *made a little lower than the angels?* What does that mean? It only means that man is less powerful. A few weeks ago we looked at the similarities between mankind and angelkind. The main difference is that man is material and angels are not. They have access to this world and to heaven. They can appear and disappear. They are very powerful. However, we are bound by time and space and physical bodies. The only places we can go are places our physical bodies can take us.

Yet Hebrews 2:7 also tells us that even though we are a little lower than the angels, we are *crowned with glory and honor* because of *what we are called to be*. We are rulers in the world *with everything under our feet*. This is an ancient phrase that means you have authority over something. Man was created to be in charge of this world. So even though we are just puny nothings in earthly bodies, God made us a little lower than the angels and gave us glory and honor because we were intended to rule everything on this planet.

### **Man lost the right to rule.**

There is a problem with all this. If we to rule over the earth, why is the earth ruling over us? Why are there hurricanes like Katrina and Ike that devastate us? If we are to rule over the animals, why do they try to eat us unless we put them in cages? We are trying to rule but nothing seems to want to follow our leadership. This is what the writer of Hebrews points out.

***Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. Hebrews 2:8***

Many times when we read this passage, we misread it. I misread it for years. I always understood the *him* in this passage to be referring to Christ. I thought it meant that while Christ had all authority, everything was not yet subjecting itself to his authority. The *him* in this passage is not talking about Christ, it is talking about us. Man was intended to rule but we do not see everything subject to us. Everything was to be subject to us but we don't see it working out that way.

Why isn't it working the way it was supposed to? When Satan tempted Adam and Eve and they gave in to the temptation, not only did sin enter the world, they lost their right to rule over creation. Satan obtained the right to rule. Look at the title given to him

***Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. John 12:31***

Satan is the prince of this world. God's angels and Satan's angels battle for rulership on a daily basis. This is why Paul said



For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:12

The right to rule is now out of our hands and into Satan's.

Part of the consequence of Satan's new right to rule is that this planet now fights against us rather than for us.

Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. Romans 8:20-21 (New Living Translation)

This is why the ground readily produces thorn and thistles rather than corn. This is why farmers have to work so hard spraying their corn with pesticides and herbicides. This planet was to serve us, but now we are serving it. Rather than this planet meeting our needs, we have to struggle to survive.

This is why there are plagues like the bird flu and the black plague. Because of our sinfulness we can't rule over ourselves without corruption and exploiting the helpless. It is why greedy executives bleed their companies financially dry. No matter how much we exercise no matter how much Botox you inject, we will all die. We lost our right to rule, Satan is now the prince of this world and this world fights against us, not for us.

### **Mans right to rule will be restored**

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. Hebrews 2:9

Here is where things get exciting. Here is where everything turns around. The bad news becomes good news. We don't see us ruling... *but we see Jesus ruling*. We don't see Psalm 8 fulfilled in us... *we see it fulfilled in Jesus*. What did Psalm 8 say about us? *We were made a little lower than the angels and we were crowned with glory and honor*. What does Hebrews 2:9 say about Jesus? *He was made a little lower than the angels and is now crowned with glory and honor*. This is no coincidence!

The exact repetition of Psalm 8 in verse 9 is intended to show that Jesus did what Adam failed to do in Psalm 8. In Jesus' incarnation, the Bible says he was made exactly like us. He took on a human body, he understands humanity because he took on full humanity. Jesus knows what it is like to grow up, he knows what it is like to sweat, to thirst, to be hungry, he knows what it is like to have real emotional and physical pain. Jesus never knew limitations before but all of divinity was fused together with full humanity. That made him just like us and he became *a little lower than the angels*. Incidentally, the Septuagint makes it clear that the phrase *a little lower than the angels* means for a period of time not a permanent time. That period of time was 33 years.



Jesus was *crowned with glory and honor*. Why? Because he suffered death. Of course, this speaks of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. The Scripture says he *tasted death for everyone*. Tasted here doesn't mean that he sampled a little piece but it means he completely experienced death. He died the complete experience of death so that we don't have to. His death conquers the stranglehold our impending death has on us. This doesn't mean that nobody dies. What this means is that for those who put their faith in Him as Lord and Savior, the punishment of *eternal death* is broken. Our condemnation is gone. That is why it says in 1 Corinthians 15 *Where O death is your victory, where O grave is your sting, but thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*. What this means is that when sin and death has it's most glorious moment, when it has broken us down so deeply that it tears our very life away from us as we die, it is at that moment when God hands us our greatest victory. The victory of not facing an eternity apart from God paying the eternal consequences of our sin but instead we are ushered into Christ's presence at death because he paid all the consequences of our sin and he loves us enough that he adopts us into his family.

Now as if this isn't exciting enough, it gets even better. This is the main point of this passage. The reason the Psalm 8 language from verses 6-8 is directly applied to Jesus in verse 9 is to show that Jesus is the first fulfillment of Psalm 8. Our destiny to rule the earth, which was lost in the Fall; will be restored through Christ. *But we see Jesus!* This is the whole point. We're not ruling, but Christ is. He is the fulfillment of the Genesis 1:26 and Psalm 8 destiny to rule passages. BUT CHRIST DOESN'T ENTER THAT GLORY ALONE. *He is bringing many sons to glory*. In other words, we will experience that glory too unless we are so foolish as to ignore this great salvation.

So Christ is now reigning and all believers will reign with him in the world to come. Angels won't be ruling because they lost their right to rule. Through Christ we have re-obtained our right to rule. The whole angelic power structure over God's creation is currently in a lame duck position. It is just a matter of time until they are done away with and God's redeemed children are in charge again.

When will this happen? When Christ returns, we will reign with him. This reigning begins in a time called the millennium, the thousand year reign described in Revelation 20:4

*I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. Revelation 20:4*

Incidentally, this is the reason Paul gives the Christians in Corinth to remind them not to sue one another but rather to judge disagreements in the church.

If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? 1 Corinthians 6:1-2

We will judge, we will have authority. We will be in charge *with* Christ. We don't hear much preaching about this truth today, yet this role of ruling is what will dominate our eternity. Look at the person next to you and say, "I will rule with Christ". I know this sounds sort of funny. It feels pretty weird. Why is this? Because we don't see anything subject to us right now.

But Christ has blazed the trail. He is bringing the rest of us to glory and that glory will include reigning and ruling in the millennium and in the new heavens and new earth.

Why is the writer of Hebrews bringing this up? Remember whom he is writing to. They are people who already went through tough times and are about to go through more. They feel insignificant and their future looks pretty dark. Why persevere? Why stick with Christ when it costs so much? Those who are faithful to Christ look forward to a future of reigning with Christ. **That is our destiny.**

## Hebrews 2:10-17 – The Perfect Fit

Sign Title: -----

October 19, 2008

### Hebrews 2:10-17

If we are going to understand this passage, we need to begin by remembering what we learned last week when we were studying v.5-9. Mankind was created to rule this world, but as a result of the fall, sin entered this world and man lost his right to rule this world to Satan. This is why we die, this is why there are natural disasters, this is why people fail to rule others correctly and through addictions and temptations we can't even rule ourselves.

Last weekend's sermon would have closed on a dour note if it was not for the little phrase *but we see Jesus*. He is now crowned with glory and honor. He succeeded when faced with Satan's temptations where Adam failed. The great news we learned last week is that Jesus is now victoriously seated at the right hand of God. He will soon exercise the full right to rule he re-obtained. Amazingly, he will not rule alone but he is *bringing many sons to glory*. All who are faithful to the end will some day rule with him.

This is exciting news. No matter how dark our earthly future, our future with Christ is as bright as the noon-day sun. There is only one problem that will keep us from realizing our future. It is a very serious obstacle. It is death. It is hard to rule with Christ when you are dead. There is not much of anything dead people do. Watch the graveyards and you won't see much activity.

Where did death come from? The Bible says death is a consequence of sin. So for us to reign with Christ, sin and the consequence of sin, death; are obstacles that must be overcome.

No matter what you believe about God this morning, we all agree about one thing. Overcoming the obstacle of death is something beyond human ability. We can fight diseases and live longer but there is a consistent ratio of one death to every birth. Everyone instinctively knows that if death is to be conquered only God can do it. This is why every culture that anthropologists have discovered has a God concept in it. Their God is the one they hope will help them beat death.

This was happening in the first century world and it is happening in the 21<sup>st</sup>. Everyone then and now, has a God that they hope will rescue them from their fear of death. One of the accusations leveled against Christians in the ancient world and in the modern is, "How can Jesus help you overcome death?" First of all, he was pretty ordinary. Secondly, he died. How can he take away your fear of death if he died? Other Gods are big and powerful superheroes of the cosmos who never die. Wouldn't that make them better?

The author of Hebrews knows this is a natural objection to Jesus. What he does is take this whole argument and turns it on its head. He says, rather

than Jesus being a lousy God to trust in to overcome death, he is the perfect one to trust in. He is the perfect fit to save us from death.

In v.10 Jesus is described as the *author of their salvation*. This is a little phrase that packs a punch. The word *author* is perhaps better translated leader, pioneer. It means someone who goes ahead and blazes the trail for everyone else to follow.

Think back to the last time you were cutting watermelon. If you had a really dull knife, it would be difficult to break through the skin of the melon. But with a nice sharp knife, the cutting edge makes the difference. The cutting edge slices through the outer skin so the rest of the knife can follow. This is the kind of savior Jesus is. He is the cutting edge, the leading edge, he blazes a trail so the rest of us can follow. He is not a distant superhero God standing off in the distance disconnected from us in real life who is telling us to try harder. Rather, picture Jesus as the cutting edge of the knife, he became one of us so he could blaze a trail through death to glory for us to follow. As we step through this, we will learn how Jesus became that perfect fit.

**To be a perfect fit, Jesus needed to experience real suffering.**

**In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Hebrews 2:10**

Does something make you uneasy about this verse? Who is the author of our salvation? Jesus. Who is Jesus? God. Yet, it says that God the Father made Jesus perfect through suffering. Why would Jesus need to be made perfect? I thought he already was perfect?

When we think of perfect, we think of fixing something that was imperfect. We work on our homework until it is perfect, before that, it is imperfect because it has mistakes. That is not the idea here. The idea is Jesus became the perfect fit to do the job of overcoming death. He became the perfect fit to be the cutting edge of our salvation. In other words, when the son of God poured himself into a fleshly body at the incarnation, he was not yet ready to save us, there were some things that were lacking in his life. He was lacking the full experience of humanity. As a child in the womb, he had not yet fully experienced human suffering. It was as an adult that he fully experienced the suffering we experience, even to death on a cross. To be the perfect fit for us, he has to be like us in every way. That meant he needed to experience real suffering.

**Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. Hebrews 5:8-9**

Jesus also learned how tough it is to have perfect obedience to God in the midst of suffering. Now it wasn't a lack of knowledge he had, it was a lack of human experience. To be the perfect fit for us, Jesus needed to suffer as we suffer, Jesus doesn't just have the knowledge of pain and loss, but he has the

experience of it, when all the disciples turned away from him and Peter, one of his closest denied even knowing him three times in his toughest hour he learned the experience of having friends abandon you. Jesus even learned obedience in suffering. Suffering is what strengthens obedience to the Father in our lives, it is what strengthened obedience in his.

By the way, isn't this how God works? Isn't it in the difficulties that our Christian character is formed? Think about it. The most significant moments of our spiritual lives are the hardest times of our earthly lives. Why is that? Some lessons are only learned on the anvil of trouble.

When we drift from Christ, God returns us to obedience by allowing us to suffer. Now before you get depressed over this, realize that for a Christian, tough times are tough but they are also joyous.

**Consider it pure joy... whenever you face trials of many kinds. James 1:2**

Why would God say that? Trials are the times when God shapes us and grows us. We may not like going through them but when *we are going through them we will be growing through them*. We learn how to depend more on God, we learn how reliable our faith is. Since God loves us; he will put periods of suffering in our life. Why? He loves us too much to not give us the joy that only suffering can bring.

**To be the perfect fit – Jesus had to fully identify with our humanity**

**Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. Hebrews 2:11**

Jesus was not bummed out to be human. He isn't whining for eternity that he now has a perfected human body. He isn't embarrassed to call us his brother. Jesus looks at us like family. This phrase *not ashamed to call them brothers* is a phrase typically used at that time to describe the feeling that an older brother might have for younger siblings. If you have children, you know how this works. The older brother is usually not too happy about having their younger brothers or sisters tagging along. Younger brothers or sisters can be sort of embarrassing.

Our children usually get along well and I hope it stays that way. I am proud of them because there are times when they stick up for one another, because they are family.

One time when David and Daniel were in a wrestling practice the team was playing a game called, "King of the Mat". That simply means that all the wrestlers line up smallest to largest. The smallest two wrestle and the winner stays to wrestle the next larger challenger. Daniel did a great job and beat a few opponents. He was beating boys bigger and older than him. Finally he came to a boy who was much bigger. Everyone told the older boy to be careful. Beat Daniel, but don't hurt Daniel, he is little. He didn't listen. He throttled Daniel. Daniel let out the kind of scream that makes every parent panic. He hurt Daniel's neck and we took Daniel off the mat crying. The boy who hurt Daniel apparently wasn't thinking about the future because the next person he had to wrestle for

king of the mat was Daniel's older brother, David. David went out with fire in his eyes. He turned to me and he said, "He hurt my brother, he hurt me." He was not ashamed to call him a brother. There was that family bond.

That is the same way Jesus is toward us. He has that same kind of love and closeness to us. He is not ashamed to call us brothers, even when we fail him. We are family. This boggles the mind that Jesus has this kind of emotional identity with us. To prove this, the writer of Hebrews begins quoting from the Old Testament to prove his point. He starts in Psalm 22. This Psalm is all about Christ. Almost all of the first twenty one verses are prophetic of Christ.

**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Psalm 22:1**

**A band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing. Psalm 22:16-18**

**I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises. Psalm 22:22**

I love this picture. Right in the middle of Old Testament prophecy about Christ where all of the first 21 verses are about Christ, Jesus calls us his brothers.

The second quote comes from Isaiah 8:17. Isaiah 8 is sandwich between 7 and 9. Both of those chapters are also filled with prophecies about Christ.

**Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14**

**For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6**

Then in chapter 8, we have words the early Christians were prophetically spoken through Isaiah by Jesus.

**"I will put my trust in him" Hebrews 2:13 (Isaiah 8:17)**

Originally the context of this verse is when Isaiah realized his message was not listened to by the people, he declared, "I will put my trust in him". He would need to depend on God. If these words were also messianic prophecy, it means that Jesus had the experience of needing to place his trust in his heavenly father. Jesus was the perfect fit for our humanity because even Jesus had to exercise faith. When did he do that? One passage that came to mind were his final words. What were Jesus' final words?

**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. Luke 23:46**

The third quote comes from Isaiah 8:18

**Here am I and the children God has given me. Isaiah 8:18**

This is another quote from Isaiah. Isaiah had two boys who were given prophetic names. The picture is of Isaiah putting his arms around his children, but since this is in a portion of Scripture that the early church believed was prophetic about Christ, what we have is a picture of Christ putting his arms around us saying, "Here I am and the children God has given me". Jesus is not ashamed to call us family. We have some strong family identification.

### **To be the perfect fit – He had to die to conquer death**

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. Hebrews 2:14-15 (ESV)

The one experience of humanity Jesus has not had is the experience of death. He would need to experience it to fully identify with us.

This is why I used the ESV for this verse. It has the word *partook* in it. Partake means to take on something that is not naturally yours. Jesus partook of a real body with the full and real gamut of human experiences like suffering and faith so that he could die. The reason he came to die was so that he could destroy death and Satan couldn't say that his life was any easier or different than our own.

But Jesus' death was different. Unlike us, he never sinned so death had no rightful claim on him because death is a consequence of sin. So to enable Jesus to die, he would have to take upon himself sin from someplace else to make death possible. Like a sponge, he soaked up the guilt of our sin into himself and died for us.

Now if Jesus died with the guilt of our sin, our sin is paid for. The next problem to beat is death. Jesus comes along and dies for our sin, then he pulls out a more powerful weapon than death. The weapon called resurrection! So while Satan has everyone running around scared because they are afraid of dying. Jesus pulls out an even bigger weapon. The weapon of resurrection. We know the bigger weapon wins. Picture Satan running around scaring everyone. Jesus enters the room with a fully automatic machine gun. Who now has control? Jesus, the bigger weapon wins! This is why Jesus says.

I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. Revelation 1:18

This is why the church has incredible stories of people throughout history who are killed for their faith in Christ and as they are dying they are singing praises to God. Why are they doing this? They aren't afraid of death. Jesus has the bigger weapon, resurrection. As Paul says, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Which is better by far. Jesus came to free us from our fear of death! If you know Jesus, don't be afraid to die. Remember, Jesus blazed the trail right through death and out the other side with resurrection.



This doesn't mean that we will never physically die. This means Jesus beat the *consequences of death*. Rather than death producing eternal separation from God and becoming the worst moment of our life. For those who have trusted in Christ, it is the best moment. It is a homecoming to be with Jesus. It is because Jesus has a bigger weapon than death, the weapon of resurrection. There is no more guilt for us to pay, Jesus soaked it up to pay for it for us. Otherwise he couldn't have died.

Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?... But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:55-57

Last week I told you the story of my daughter who is incredibly scared of bees. She is scared of bee stings. If I covered the bee with my hand and let it sting me, when I let the bee go and fly around her, she has nothing to be scared of. I took the sting for her. That is what Jesus did for us. The sting of death is gone.

## Conclusion

Freedom from the fear of death changes everything. Almost every fear we have today is related to our fear of death. Are you afraid of heights? It is because you are afraid of falling to death. Are you afraid of snakes? It is because you are afraid of death.

As Christians, we don't have to fear death. After this life, we will reign and rule with Christ.

Most people are trying to get every last drop of pleasure out of this world. They figure that after this life is over, that is it. Someone once said that this life is like a grain of sand. Eternity is like all the rest of the sand in the world. As Christians, we don't live to squeeze every last drop of pleasure out of this life, we have an eternity of reigning and ruling with Christ to look forward to. Rather than living for pleasure now, we are looking forward to the pleasure of reigning and ruling with Christ with all the grains of sand on the shores of time.

How do we know we will be there? Because Death died because Jesus killed. How did he do it? He became the perfect fit to substitute his life for ours, then after dying he pulled out a God sized weapon bigger than death, the weapon of resurrection.

If this morning, you have known Christ for years, my hope is that this morning helped clarify what Christ did for you. Others of us have been wondering deep down inside, "How can this Jesus be God? What makes him different from Mohammed or Buddha or a host of cosmic super heros that claim to be bigger and better because they are nothing like us?" I hope this morning, you now have some answers. Rather than Jesus' humanity being what doesn't make him fit; since he was fully human, it is what makes him the perfect fit to be our savior. This morning, my question to you is, "If you were to die tonight, is he your savior? If you were to die tonight would it be the best or the worst moment

of your life?” Are you trusting in a God with a weapon bigger than death, the weapon of resurrection? As I close, will you place your trust in him? If that is your desire. Pray with me as I close this service and let me know as you leave. I would like to celebrate with you the new hope you have for eternity.

## Hebrews 2:14-18 – Empathy, Not Sympathy

Sign Title: -----

November 2, 2008

Two weeks ago we learned how Jesus Christ is the *perfect fit* to save us from the scariest moment in our life, the moment of our death. Like a sponge, Christ soaked up the guilt of our sin and fully experienced God's wrath intended for us. He died in our place for our sin. After dying the death we deserved, after experiencing the penalty of God's wrath that we deserved to experience, he beat death using a weapon bigger than death, the weapon of the resurrection.

Two weeks ago, we left excited. The biggest and most fearsome adversary of our life is gone. Death, no longer has a sting.

But let's be practical; while death is on the list of our concerns, how many of us spend time thinking about it? Probably not most of us. Are we concerned about death? Yes, it is something we will think about in the future. We have plenty of practical problems to keep us occupied. What about the mortgage payment, what about my job, I need to spend more time with the kids. Christ takes away the biggest concern of our life, the concern of death; but speaking practically, "What does Christ do for us now, while we are still living?" Friends, today we will learn how Christ helps us in a practical ways.

### Hebrews 2:14-18

We looked at verses 14-15 two weeks ago. We pick up in verse 16.

**For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. Hebrews 2:16**

In chapter 1 of Hebrews, we learned Christ is greater than the angels because he created them. But angels are not the focus of Christ's redemptive mission. Christ came to die for angels. He came to help the descendants of Abraham. At first you might think that since Abraham is the father of the Jewish people; Jesus came to help the Jews. That is not what this verse is teaching. We are talking about a different kind of descendant of Abraham, not a physical descendant but a spiritual descendant.

**For not all who are descended of Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children... In other word, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. Romans 9:6-8**

Jesus didn't come to help angels; he came to help those who, just like Abraham, turn to God in faith. But how does he help us? There are 4 ways

**Jesus was made *fully* like us to *completely* understand us.**

**For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest... Hebrews 2:17**

In order to help us, Jesus had to be made like us. This is why it says in Hebrews 2:14 that Jesus took on real flesh and blood because we have real flesh and blood. But it is more than just flesh and blood that Christ took on to identify with us. It says that Christ was made like us *in every way*. Listen to this carefully. Christ did not just resemble humanity in *some* qualities. He identified with us in *all* qualities, except for sin.

Most Christians do not understand what this means. They think they do, but they don't. Nestled in our understanding of Christ is the mistaken belief that while he had a fully human body, he did not have a fully human mind. We imagine Jesus was intellectually faking infancy. Imagine Jesus having his diaper changed while he said to himself, "You think I am a helpless baby, but actually I created the universe! So be careful where you put that diaper pin!" That seems reasonable, but according to Hebrews 2:17, it can not be true.

Let me explain. While it is true that the Jesus in the womb, at birth, and throughout his entire life always retained all of his divine qualities and was fully God. According to Philippians 2:5-11, he placed the exercise of those qualities at the discretion of his heavenly Father. This is mind stretching. As Christ grew, his awareness that he was God came when the Father chose to reveal it to him. In a similar way, when Christ healed people or he demonstrated supernatural knowledge of a situation, that only happened when the Father chose to allow him to exercise those qualities. Otherwise, Jesus was fully like you and me... even in his mind! This is really big, you are wondering if I can prove this scripturally, I am glad you asked. You should always look for the support of Scripture at Faith EFC.

**I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.**  
**John 5:19**

Leon Morris said it well, "It is not simply that he does not act in independence of the Father. He cannot act in independence of the Father".

This means Christ fully identifies with our intellectual, emotional and spiritual struggles, not just our physical ones. As Christ grew from infancy, to toddlerhood, to adolescence and into adulthood, he experienced the intellectual and emotional limitations of humanity of those stages. Christ thought like a child before he thought like a man. Christ knows the full power of sexual temptations of the teenage world. If you are 10 and sad because your favorite toy is broken, Christ knows what it is like to be 10, not just physically but emotionally and intellectually and he went through the same thing. So when the Bible says that Jesus was made like us in every way, it means *every way*. There is no shortage of Christ understanding us.

**Jesus was made *fully* like us to *represent* us to the Father.**

**For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God...**

Later chapters of Hebrews will more fully develop this high priest theme. Since what a high priest is and what they do is foreign to most of us, let me briefly explain.

The high priest was the chief representative of the people to God. His number one responsibility occurred once a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. On that day, he would enter the temple and go into the Holy of Holies. There he would offer sacrifices for his own sin and for the sins of the people. Only the high priest could do this. It was the highest and most solemn moment of the entire year. When the high priest walked into the temple, he was representing the people to God.

Since Christ shared our humanity *in every way*, his complete identification with us produced in him a special kind of representation for us. A representation that is merciful and faithful because he so fully understands our life and how hard life is.

He is merciful because he was where we are. His mercy toward us is not a sympathetic mercy, I feel bad but I can't relate; but an empathetic mercy, I feel bad and I can relate because I went through the same thing.

Good husbands try to be compassionate and merciful toward their wives when they give birth, they are sympathetic. But husbands would be much more merciful if they had the first hand experience of giving birth. If husbands were made like their wives *in every way* (in body, hormones and birth pains) they would be much more merciful toward their wives because they would have a whole different understanding. They would be empathetic, not just sympathetic.

This is Jesus. He intercedes for us before God the father when we pour out the pain and struggles of our life asking for his help and Jesus says to the Father. He's right, it is really tough, I was there, I know what it is like.

Jesus was made like us, not just so he would be merciful but so that there would also be a new hue of his faithfulness for us. Imagine if we couldn't trust Jesus to faithfully represent us to the Father. We prayed to him but sometimes he was listening and caring but other times he was out playing golf. When Jesus was made fully like us, that produced not just identification with us but it produced a unique steadfastness to the task of interceding for us to the father.

We can understand this. When we have experienced something, traumatic, it changes the way we relate to other people. It makes us more merciful toward others and more faithful to care for them.

Today we saw some of the pictures from Galveston TX. We feel bad for them, who wouldn't? But we have never been through something like that. It is only if you went through something like that where you lose everything that you can understand it in a different way. It is only then that you can't but help feel their pain and want to extend mercy. It is those who have experienced that kind of loss who will be faithful to the task of asking the rest of the nation for help.

This is Jesus for us.

## **Jesus was made *fully* like us to *propitiate* for us.**

For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

As we move deeper into Hebrews we will broaden our understanding of the word *atonement*. Atonement comes from Anglo-Saxon and literally means at-one-ment. It means the bringing back together of God and man. In the original language, there is only one word here that the NIV translates into the phrase *make atonement for the sins of the people*. Instead of using a phrase, the best English word to translate the Greek word is the word *propitiation*. The NIV doesn't use the word propitiation because it is a big word and most people don't know what it means so the NIV avoided it. This morning, we are going to use propitiation because it will help us understand what Jesus did for us. Propitiation literally means *to take away anger*. God is angry. Where does his anger come from? His anger comes from his holiness. Since God created everything and there can be no rivals to his authority, for anything to rebel against God's authority deserves to be punished and must be punished. Because God is holy, he must have anger against rebellion, so God, by definition must be angry with sin and must punish sin. Propitiation means to take away anger. This is what Jesus did for us, he propitiated God's just and necessary anger toward us for our sin.

We try to propitiate anger on small levels. When a husband forgets his anniversary, he is in big trouble. What does he do? He runs to the flower store and comes home holding a bouquet in his hand. His hope is that the flowers will propitiate his wife's justifiable anger.

So how does Christ propitiate the Father's justifiable anger against us for our sin? Did Jesus give flowers to the Father? No. He did it by his death. The death of Christ takes away God's anger because Christ's death for our sin means that God's necessary punishment for our sins is now satisfied. Christ took the punishment that should be ours to satisfy God's justifiable anger over our sin.

So Christ, who is the high priest *for our sins*, was also the propitiation of *our sins*. In the Old Testament picture, the high priest who offered the lamb for sin, set the lamb aside and became the perfect offering. So Christ is both the priest and the propitiation.

All this is leading somewhere. 1. He was made exactly like us. 2. He mercifully and faithfully represents us. 3. He atoned for our sins by becoming the propitiation of the Father's wrath. So what difference does this make for us today?

## **Jesus is the perfect help for us.**

Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Hebrews 2:18

This is what the struggling Christians in Rome need to know. Christ knows what real life is like, he knows what real temptation is like. He knows what it takes to beat temptations and he is ready and willing to help us. He is the most qualified to do it.

Isn't this also what we need to know? Christ knows all about the real life temptations we face every day. He doesn't just have sympathy toward us, he has empathy. He is so much like us that he knows real temptation.

When it comes to beating temptation, we have this backwards. Remember when Magic Johnson announced when he was HIV positive? It wasn't long until he was the national spokesman on how not to get AIDS. If you want to know how not to get AIDS, listen to somebody who was tempted but *didn't give in*, not somebody who was tempted and failed. We have the wrong kind of heroes.

In Christ's case, he knows the full force of temptation we face but to a magnitude that none of us have ever experienced. Why? None of us has ever fully overcome temptation. We don't know how tough temptation can become because, let's just be honest, we give in before temptation gets cranked up to full power in our life. There is only one person who has ever felt temptations full fury and beaten it. Jesus Christ.

So when it comes to someone who knows *what* help we will need to beat the temptations we face and *when* we will need that help, it is Jesus.

**For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Hebrews 4:15**

Now some of us are saying... Christ's temptation was different. After all, he is the Son of God. He can't relate to my life. His temptations were not like mine.

Don't miss the whole point of this section of Hebrews. *His deity did not interfere with his humanity.* He was fully human even in his mind. Think about this. *If Satan didn't think Jesus was so fully human that he could get him to sin, would Satan have wasted his time trying to tempt Jesus knowing he couldn't succeed?*

The only difference between Christ's temptations and ours are that his were much more intense because Satan threw everything he had in his arsenal at Jesus. For Jesus, resisting temptation was much harder because we give in to temptation before it is cranked to full power.

## **Conclusion**

This past week our culture celebrated Halloween. The Orthodox church also celebrated a holiday on November 1<sup>st</sup> called all saints day. It is a time when certain branches of the Christian faith remember heroes of the faith.



They have a good point. We all need heroes; someone who has done what we want to do and done it successfully. Maybe a star athlete is your hero, an undefeated Cael Sanderson or a Brett Favre. Maybe a successful business executive is our hero, a Bill Gates or a Steve Jobs. Maybe your mother or father is your hero. The power of a hero comes from the example they give us to follow. "If they can make it, I can make it."

This morning I put before you the ultimate hero for real life, ... Jesus Christ. This week, when we feel backed into a corner with temptation and feel we should just give in because it is too hard to resist and nobody knows what we feel like, ... in those moments, look at a mental poster of Jesus. He understands, he faced it much worse than any of us, he made it through and he promises us that when we call on him, he will help us, nobody is better qualified to do so.

## Hebrews 3:1-6 – Fix Your Thoughts on Jesus

Sign Title: Do you have the right hero?

November 9, 2008

So who is the greatest athlete of all time? You hear those kinds of questions asked by television and radio commentators all the time. Is Tom Brady greater than Joe Montana? Could anyone be better than Michael Jordan? These discussions are about comparisons. We compare the achievements of one athlete to see if he is greater than another to find out who was the greatest.

So here is a question I want you to think about. If you are the writer of Hebrews and you are writing to Jewish Christians in the city of Rome; in their mind, who is the greatest man of God? Who do you need to unseat and prove Jesus is even greater?

In Hebrews 1 the author of Hebrews compared Jesus to powerful spiritual beings called angels. We learned Jesus is greater than angels because Jesus is the one who created the angels. But the focus of chapter 2 is no longer about Jesus being greater than any other spiritual being, it is about Jesus being the greatest human being. He was like us in every way for 33 years, not just taking on flesh and blood but even taking on a human mind. If angels were considered Christ's greatest spiritual rival, who would be considered a rival to Christ's humanity? Let's turn to the Scriptures and find out.

### Hebrews 3:1-6

So who is the great man we will compare Jesus to this morning? Moses. But before we get to that comparison, this section begins with a very important verse I want us to understand. In fact, this verse is so important, it is the title for the entire series.

**Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. Hebrews 3:1**

This verse begins with the word, *therefore*. When you read the Bible and you see the word *therefore* stop and ask a question. What is *therefore* there for? This word is a flag that tells us, something important happens right after it. Because of what just happened on the left side of the word *therefore* there is something we must do which is found on the right side of the word *therefore*.

Here is what we have in Hebrews 3:1. Because Jesus so completely identified with us in our humanity, because he became the propitiation for our sin and the perfect priest that bring our concerns to God; we must respond by *fixing our thoughts on Jesus*.

The phrase *fix your thoughts* is important. It comes from one Greek word that has a precise meaning. Fix your thoughts means to focus on something with intense scrutiny; it means to look with your brain, not just your eyes. It means to keep something always in front of you.

In one year the average American reads 3,000 notices, 100 newspapers, 36 magazines, we watch 2,463 hours of television, listen to 730 hours of radio, and that is just the beginning<sup>2</sup> of the information we are bombarded with. We have, by necessity, become masters of scanning and forgetting. This word means the exact opposite. Because of who Christ is,... because he is the model human being for us to become.... because there is no salvation outside of him and no way to God besides Jesus, let us fixate our thoughts on Jesus. Don't get tired of learning about him and modeling our life after him.

It also says that *Jesus is the high priest and apostle whom we confess*. This is the only place in the Bible that Jesus is called an apostle. We normally associate the word apostle with the twelve apostles that were Jesus' right hand men. The word apostle in its original sense simply means *one who is sent* who carries the authority of the sender. Jesus sent the twelve out under his authority to represent him. If Jesus is an apostle, who sent Jesus? God the father.

**As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. John 17;18**

The word sent here is the word *apostello*. So Jesus is God's apostle to us simply because he was sent from God. Last week we learned Jesus is also our *high priest*. Because Jesus is fully like us, yet without sin, he is the only one who is perfectly qualified to represent us to God the Father. So, fix our eyes on Jesus because he has twin titles. He is the one sent from God to help us, and he is the perfect high priest because he became fully like us, yet without sin so he can perfectly represent us back to God. So here is the conclusion. We must make a really big deal about Jesus. Is there any other way anyone can relate to God outside of Jesus? No. Let me be really radical and just preach the Scripture. Everyone outside of Christ will spend eternity in hell. There will not be a Muslim who hoped in Mohammed in heaven. There will not be a Hindu in heaven. Let me just be plain honest, there will be a number of church going people and even pastors who will not be with God for eternity. Do you know why? They fixed their thoughts on something other than Jesus.

That being said, let's get into the meat of this passage, a comparison between Christ and Moses. Why does the writer of Hebrews compare Christ with Moses? Why not Christ with David? Christ with Elijah? Christ with Joseph? Moses was the hero that they fixed their thoughts upon. In other words, if you want to see what a really great man of God looks like. If you want a posterchild to follow, look at Moses.

### **Why compare Christ with Moses?**

While these other major Bible figures are important, nobody really comes close to having a resume like Moses'. Let's look at his resume see if you think he is a contender for the title of *greatest man of God*.

### **Saved from Death as a Child (Exodus 2)**

---

<sup>2</sup> Gary McIntosh, Church That Works, pg. 33

When born, there was a sentence of death on all the Hebrew boys, his mother placed him in a basket and miraculously he was found by Pharaoh's daughter and saved from certain death.

### **Ivy League Education (Acts 7:22)**

He was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. As an adopted son of Pharaoh, he was given all the education needed to rule the nation of Egypt. Think of Moses as a man with a doctorate from Harvard School of business.

### **Uniquely chosen by God to deliver His people (Exodus 3-4)**

God spoke to Moses from the burning bush telling him that God had a plan to free his nation from slavery and God had a man who would lead it, Moses. How many of us can say God personally chose us to lead a nation.

### **Worker of Unprecedented Miracles**

Moses worked the greatest miracles of Israel's history. If anyone here was to pray in the service this morning and frogs were to cover the nation, locusts were to cover the nation, or turn the lakes and rivers of our nation to blood. I would be very impressed. Not to mention walking into the Big Spirit and holding up your hands and having the water stand up like a wall on both sides. That is only the beginning of the miracles God worked through his hand. If someone like that was around, I think his church would be growing.

### **Writer of the Pentateuch**

What is the Pentateuch? Penta means 5, it is the first 5 books of the Bible. Moses wrote them under God's direction. These first 5 books are the basis for man's relationship to God. Really the rest of the Old Testament is built off the foundation of these first five books. To give you an idea how important these books were, the Jews didn't call them the Pentateuch, they called them *the law of Moses*. It was God's law and they were God's books but Moses was so highly revered they called these books, *the law of Moses*.

### **Receiver of the 10 Commandments**

How many of us can say the finger of God carved the 10 commandments in stone for us while we were on a mountain climbing trip? I am impressed with his resume, how about you.

### **Set up the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle**

He is the one who made the Ark of the Covenant so Indiana Jones would be able to make a *Raiders of the Lost Ark* movie. He is the one who directed the assembly of the tabernacle where God's presence dwelled. The design of the tabernacle was not his own. Scripture tells us that God gave him the design. Nobody in this church can say God personally gave them the design of their house of worship.

### **Representative of Israel to God**

While Moses brother, Aaron, was the high priest, the way it worked was Moses did the interceding for the people to God. He is the one who pleaded repeatedly asking God not to destroy the people because of their sins.

Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel. Deuteronomy 34:10-12

So what do you think after examining Moses' resume? Is he the all time greatest man of God? I think he takes the title. If these Jews were going to be convinced that Jesus is the greatest *man* of all time, you have to convince them Jesus is greater than Moses.

### What Makes Christ Greater than Moses?

**Jesus made the house, Moses served in it.**

He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. Hebrews 3:2-3

When we see the term house, we think of a physical building. The word House means household. This is not talking about a physical building; it means the place where God dwells. We sometimes mistakenly convey this when you hear someone in front of the church say, "Isn't it great to be in the house of God". The house of God is not a building for God; it is the people of God. When the people of God gather, they can be called *the house of God* because God dwells in his people. So in that sense, we are the house of God.

Moses was faithful in God's household. He served God's people faithfully. He discharged all the duties God gave him. Christ was also faithful. He accomplished the task God the Father gave him, but Christ's task was greater. It was the task of dying for our sin. The point the writer of Hebrews makes is the glory of Christ is much greater than Moses' glory; as much more glory as the builder of a house is more glorious than the house he produced.

In our neighborhood there are a number of David Wells homes. Many people like his homes and I am told that if your house is a David Wells house, it has a good resale value. What is of greater value? David Wells, or David Wells homes? David Wells as a person. The home is only a expression of him. He is much greater than his homes.

Now as great as Moses was in God's house, even after all the great things he did serving in the house of God; he is nothing when compared to the builder and designer of the house. Without Christ, there would be no people of God. No household would exist. Not just in the New Testament but even in the Old Testament. Christ is the one who created the people of God in the first place. In other words, without Christ, Moses would be unemployed. There wouldn't be a people of God. How Christ did this in the Old Testament is something we will

look at in December when during a special series I will answer the question, “Where was Christ before the manger?” So stay tuned for a future episode. Here is the writer of Hebrews point. Compared to Moses, Christ is in a whole different category.

**Jesus is a Son over the house; Moses was a servant in the house.**

**Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house, testifying to what would be said in the future. But Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house. Hebrews 3:5-6**

Now don’t misunderstand. The writer of Hebrews is not trying to disrespect Moses, he is simply acting like a good umpire, he calls ‘em like he sees ‘em. Moses is the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. A prophet that the Old Testament says God spoke with face to face. But Moses was just a servant *in* God’s house. Jesus is the son *over* the house. This is a big deal. Moses was called by God to lead the people; Christ was sent by God to create a people for Moses to lead. If it weren’t for Christ, there would not be a people of God. The New Testament says this in several ways.

- Christ is the head, we are the body (Ephesians 1:22-23)
- Christ is the vine, we are the branches (John 15:5)
- Christ is the cornerstone, we are the building (1 Peter 2:4-5)

Here is the point. Even the most amazing Christian leaders are nothing more than a part of the body or branches off the vine. There is nothing wrong with having Christian heroes. Hebrews 11 is going to encourage us to learn from the Christian heroes. In fact if we were to line up the heroes of the faith, undoubtedly the greatest man of God ever would be Moses. But Moses is not the greatest man of God. He is the second greatest man of God. The greatest hero we want to fix our eyes on and follow is the man Jesus.

How does this apply to our life? We live in a Christian celebrity culture. I remember one night in a hotel at a youth convention when I was in the lobby of our hotel and DC Talk came out of the elevator. After standing in awe for a moment, I actually talked to them. Michael Tate signed my name badge. Isn’t that incredible? All the musicians are saying, if I could just be like Michael Tate. He is a great man of God. He is a Christian hero some of us may follow.

If I wanted to double the Sunday morning attendance the easiest way to do it would be to schedule Rick Warren to speak next week. How about Andy Stanley or Max Lucado? Dropping a few of those names would really pack the parking lot. They are modern day spiritual heroes. The problem is that the best of men are but men at best.

The writer of Hebrews is reminding us, don’t get tricked into fixing your eyes on the Moses figures in your life. We all have great men or woman of God we look up to. Yes, they are good to have; yes, they are an encouragement for us. Here is the danger, our spiritual heroes can become so big we fix our eyes on our hero rather than on Jesus because we think Jesus is too far from us, and

that he doesn't understand us. It happened in the first century with Moses, it happens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What is your favorite preacher's name? What is the latest book he wrote? It is OK to have them, but don't fix our eyes on them.

There are really two pieces to applying this to our lives. One is negative, it is what we should stay away from. We must stay away from having as our model anybody other than Christ, encouraged by others, yes, fixing our goal to be like them, no. But there is a positive side to this. Not what we *must not do* but what *we must do*. That is to explore the depth of Jesus, making him the burning center of our hope and our life. Everything in life will try to keep you from fixing your eyes upon Jesus. We fixate on winning athletic championships. We fixate on our grades. We fixate on finding the right spouse. We fixate on getting more money in our business. The Bible says, fixate on pleasing Christ with your choices, fixate on learning more about Christ and serving Christ in the church and you know what. Other things fall in line. When we trick ourselves into wandering away from Christ and letting something else become the focus of our life, we will drive our life into the ground. As I was thinking about this, in action I thought about the story of a friend of mine, Anthony Stecker. I would like him to come up and share some of his story with you about how he is learning to fixate on Jesus.

### **Anthony Stecker Testimony**

- **Tell us about growing up and your Christian home**
- **Sports used to play a big roll in your life. Tell us about it.**
- **There was a time when you came to the realization your hopes were fixed on the wrong things. What caused you to wander from Christ?**
- **What did you learn from that experience you can share with us?**
- **One of the things that I love about Anthony is his vision for his children and helping them avoid the mistake of making too little of Christ. What are your hopes and plans for their future?**



## Hebrews 3:7-19 – Don't Harden Your Heart

Sign Title: ----

November 16, 2008

For those of you who are new this morning, we are in a series of studies on the book of Hebrews. This book was written to Jewish Christians who lived in the city of Rome. Instead of the easy life things were tough. They had already gone through some persecution for their faith and it looked like it was going to happen all over again. Understandably, they are afraid. Going to church on Sunday morning is a dangerous thing to do because they would be hanging out with a marked crowd. It seemed like the easiest thing to do would be to ditch the Christian group and move back into the synagogue, Judaism was a protected religion in Rome. But to go back to the synagogue, they have to give up on Christ. Is Christ that big of a deal? The writer of Hebrews wants them and us to know that Christ isn't an accessory for our spiritual life, he is everything. The centrality of Christ for everything and in everything is what we are discovering.

Last week, in the beginning of chapter 3 we had a world's greatest man contest. Jesus vs. Moses. In their mind, Moses was the poster child of what it looks like to be a faithful man of God. We discovered that, Moses lost his title, Jesus is greater than Moses, Moses was faithful serving in God's house, Jesus made God's house. Without Jesus, Moses would be unemployed.

While Moses and Jesus were examples of faithfulness, this morning we will look at the exact opposite and learn from examples of unfaithfulness to God.

Hebrews 3:7-19

### Don't Let Your Hearts Be Hardened.

This is a quote from Psalm 95. This Psalm was read every Sabbath evening for worship in the temple. It is a brief summary of what happened to the nation of Israel.

Here is the background. Joseph and his brothers end up in the land of Egypt, there were 70 of them who went to Egypt. Over 400 years the family grew to about 2 million. The problem was that one of the Pharaoh's changed them from free men to slave men. Yet God, in his mercy raised Moses as their leader, Working through Moses God did incredible miracles just spanking the Egyptians, God brings them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea and God is taking them only 300 miles to get to the Promised Land. It took them 18 months to get there. Why did it take them so long? They spent about a year at Mt. Sinai and a lot of time fiddling around because they didn't know if they wanted to follow God and Moses. The Scriptures say they tested God 10 times. Finally, after 18 months, they arrived at the edge of the Promised Land. They send in a scouting party of 12.

### Two responses from Two different Hearts

10 come back and are afraid because they look at how things appear on the outside; we are too small, they are too big, their cities are fortified, our weapons stink etc., you know how it goes, there is always a problem, always a reason why we can not do it.

Only two look at things on the inside, Caleb and Joshua, they say, if God is for us, who can be against us, it doesn't matter what the odds look like. If God is taking us to the land, he will enable us to conquer the land. Just like he spanked on the Egyptians, just like he split the Red Sea, just like he is providing manna every day, just like he brought water out of the rock, just like he provided the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night to assure of his presence and to guide us. If that is what he is doing and has done, it doesn't matter how bad it looks, God will provide.

Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes and said to the entire Israelite assembly, "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them." Numbers 14:6-9

So 10 spies get hysterical when they see the opposition, two get historical. I love the faith these guys have. He literally says, "we will eat them alive." These two men understood a principle of what it means to walk with God.

*God puts us in positions where we need faith to grow our faith.*

We must remember, God will always provide what we need to accomplish the task he calls us to. When we are following God, expect to find yourself in places where it doesn't look comfy, expect to find yourself in a place where the odds look bad. Where the numbers don't work. Do you know why God puts us in those places? So we learn to live by faith.

**Why does God put us in a place where we need faith in him?**

Who would get all the credit if the spies came back and said, we have the military strength to destroy them? Would God be the hero or would they be the hero. God showed them his reliability in Egypt, in the Red Sea and again and again he was reliable. God expected ancient Israel's trust in him to grow with time. Joshua and Caleb's faith grew, everybody else's trust didn't. In spite of everything God did, in spite of how God had provided again and again through the previous 18 months of their lives, they became hardened in their hearts.

The more they doubted, the more they became fixed in the whining and complaining pattern instead of exercising faith, the more hardened their hearts.

Picture wet concrete. This past summer I watched them pour a new sidewalk around the corner from our house. After they were done pouring it and everyone went home there were two guys who parked next to it and watched the sidewalk until after dark. Why did they do that? Because when the sidewalk is

first poured it is moldable. They know there are a lot of kids in our neighborhood and what do kids do with wet concrete? Put their fingers in it. Once it hardens, it doesn't change. The only way to get the fingerprints out would be to tear up the sidewalk and start all over again.

With the passing of time, just as concrete sets, the wilderness generation developed a heart that was hardened against God and his work. They hadn't developed a heart of faith, they develop a heart of doubt.

### **What happens when our heart hardens?**

Something they could hardly believe would happen. God was fed up with it all and finally he said, forget it. You aren't going in. You are going to wander in the desert for the next forty years. Till everyone age 20 and up has died off and I can start again. The cement in their souls is still wet, not hardened against me. This is scary. Well some of us say, that was the God of the Old Testament, this is not the Jesus we know in the New Testament

Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. Jude 5

### **What happened to the wilderness generation?**

Now as a staff we had a lot of fun this week wrestling with the theological problems of what happened to these Israelites. Some theologians believe that since it says they didn't enter God's rest and God's rest in Scripture many times is analogous to heaven, this could mean the hardness of their heart kept them out of heaven. Since we are saved by faith and not our actions, this would mean that none of these Israelites were ever saved because their actions of disobedience kept them out of heaven.

What makes this even stickier is that if the promised land is the same as heaven then Moses never made it to heaven. From the transfiguration in Luke 9, it looks like Moses made it to heaven. But our actions are just a fruit of our heart.

Other theologians point out Numbers 14 says God forgave Israel for the sin of their evil rebellious actions in the wilderness. They point out that these Israelites, kept the Passover and sprinkled blood on the lintel of their door to avoid the angel of death (something very similar to trusting in Christ for salvation), they crossed the Red Sea by faith according to Hebrews 11 (something similar to baptism) so since we are saved by faith in Christ alone, they seem to have it, though they had very grievous sins that sprung from a heart hardened against trusting God. These theologians believe this Israelite generation will be in heaven, they won't have an honored place, they lose out on their eternal rewards at the judgment seat of Christ and they lost out on their earthly reward for obedience by never reaching the potential God desired for them, the possession of the promised land.

Will the approximately 1 million Israelites of the wilderness generation over 20 years of age be in heaven? I don't know. While that may not be clear, there are some things in this passage that are clear.

### Application

**God will discipline his children** – One of the things I have seen many Christians believe is that sin is not a big deal. Christ forgives my sin so I have this little *get out of jail free* card.

When we go to the movie store and there is nothing good to watch but that R rated movie and we read the back and it says it is rated R for nudity. We rationalize, I am bored, I want to watch something, I will cover my eyes, I will fast forward through it. That's no good, we see a bedroom scene in double time. Or we are surfing the net and we rationalize ourselves into a few peeks at things that aren't technically sinful, but they are tintilating. You know how it works..

James says that sin works by enticing us. We let that picture or scene into our mind and we play it again and again. Like an acid our mind becomes more and more interested in satisfying the desire for more. The more we think about it the easier it is to rationalize ourselves into something more. Then we sin in a bigger way, but only for a few minutes. Quick, ask for God's forgiveness. But the shame wears off and a few days or weeks later we stick our foot back in the mucky bucket. We tell ourselves that all we need to do is ask God to forgive us. We think there are no consequences to this Yo-Yo Christian life that plays with sin. After reading about the wilderness generation, what do you think?

Yes, God is gracious and will forgive us but persistent rebellion and a hardening of our heart where like concrete we are getting set in a sinful way is scary. Because God loves us, expect him to bring the hammer down in your life to break you from your sin. Expect that you may never reach the potential God intended for your life. The wilderness generation is a warning, to us. As I was thinking about this the words of Jesus came to mind.

**And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'**  
**Mark 9:43-48**

What is Jesus saying, does he want us to take this literally. Origen, an early church father in 200 AD took it quite seriously. He castrated himself so he wouldn't be so attracted to women. Jesus is using hyperbolic language to say, as Christians, take holiness serious, be willing to be radical to be holy. If you need to take the television out of your house, it is worth doing it. Be radical.

**God gives windows of opportunity for repentance** – This idea comes from the word "Today". Psalm 95 says, Today, if you hear his voice, do not

harden your hearts... The point of the Psalm is that now is the time. We are in a window of opportunity now. The window of opportunity for repentance of our sin will not always be open. For Israel that window of opportunity was only open 10 times until God slammed it shut because of all he had done for them.

In October 1871 DL Moody was preaching in Chicago and his style at that time is that he would tell them to consider Christ. Go home and think about it, not going to rush into anything. One of those nights in October he urged people to consider Christ. That was the night of the Chicago fire and a number of people he preached to died that night. He changed his style of preaching and this was his motto. "Today if you hear his voice, don't harden your heart" Now is the time to make a decision in the power of the Holy Spirit to repent of sin in our life. Now is the time to deal with the lingering sin that we tolerate before God says... NO MORE!

When we were first married we had a Golden Retriever named Sargon. He was just a little puppy and we took him for a walk in the woods along a walking path. We were walking and along comes two adult dogs running down the path off their leash. Sargon, our little puppy was so scared that he fell over on his side and wet himself. The point the writer of Hebrews is making is that this warning from history should really scare us enough that we take continuance seriously.

#### **An unbelieving heart is a sinful heart**

**See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. Hebrews 3:12**

I don't like the way the NIV translated it. Some other translations translate this with a little more edge. It is an evil unbelieving heart. Do you get this. Having a heart that doesn't trust God and move forward in faith is an evil heart. We don't call it that today, but that is what it is.

#### **We call our heart a realistic heart.**

That is a heart that refuses to make a choice until they have all the facts. Unless everything lines up from A to Z so no risk is involved, they won't believe. That is the guy who says, I would like to give to the offering but I ran the numbers and we just can't give right now, we don't make enough.

It doesn't work like that. That is an evil unbelieving heart. Put God first in your finances and watch how things fall into place. You ever had those months where you said, if I give, there will be more month than there is money? That is an exciting place to be. You are obeying God with your finances so God has to provide. Do you think he will? What is your heart, a heart of faith like Joshua and Caleb or the other 10 guys who were whining in the corner?

#### **Another kind of evil heart is an intellectual heart.**

What do you mean by that. Are you one of those people caught up in postmodernity where there is no such things as truth? Everybody has a right to their opinion and all opinions are equally right? All roads lead to Rome. So you

are here this morning listening and you have questions. It is OK to have questions, it is good to have questions. But the evil intellectual heart says I won't believe until I have all my questions answered. Let me tell you something, you won't every get all your questions answered, the question is, are you willing to trust God enough that you will take the first step to pursue faith.

**faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. Romans 10:17**

Get a Bible and read it. Ask God to prove himself wrong or right when you study this book.

### **Continue to the End**

Paul Bunyon wrote a book Pilgrim's Progress. In the book, a man named Christian set's out for the celestial city. Along the way he meets a number of interesting characters who try to sidetrack him. One of the first to walk with him for a season is a man named Pliable. At first their companionship seems bright but when they fall into the slough of despond and they find themselves covered in mud, pliable quickly responds, "Is this the happiness of the Christian life you talked about" he extricates himself from the slough, turns back and heads for home.

Next Christian met a man named Worldly Wiseman from the City of Carnal Policy. For a period of time Christian followed his advice and took another road in a different direction until he repented and came back.

Later Christian battled a hideous monster called Apollyon from the city of Destruction and they battled for half a day, later he is captured by the giant called despair and kept in the dungeon of doubting castle until he escapes. Pilgrim continues and battles Mr. Atheist, Mr. Ignorance and a number of other foes who seek to distract him from his journey to the Celestial city. Battle after battle, distraction after distraction, Pilgrim finally arrives safe at the city.

**We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. Hebrews 3:14**

That is the story of the book. Bunyon could have used it as a sub title. The book of Hebrews in chapter 12 tells us we are on a journey to the heavenly city. We are on a journey to Mt. Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God with thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly.

There is only one way we will get there my friends, faithfulness. Don't let your hearts be hardened, hold firmly to the end the confidence we had at first.



## Hebrews 3:12-14 – Finishing Well

Sign Title: Finishing Well

January 4, 2009

If you are new, I would like to welcome you. This fall we studied the book of Hebrews. In December, we took a break to study Angels. Now that the holiday is over, we are returning to Hebrews. It was over a month since we were in the book so I want to take a few minutes to regroup our thoughts.

We left off in chapter 3. We were talking about a very unsettling little word in this chapter. It is the word “if”.

We are His house if we hold on... Hebrews 3:6

We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly to the end. Hebrews 3:14

This little word reminds us of something we don't like to talk about. It is possible to begin our spiritual life well, but to end it poorly. The writer of Hebrews gave us an example of what that looks like; the wilderness wandering generation. The generation that left Egypt with Moses.

They left Egypt with high hopes. God worked in powerful and unprecedented ways with them as he battered the Egyptians with plague after plague. Reading the account in Genesis one gets the feeling they are watching an Evander Holyfield fight. God had the Egyptians on the ropes and he delivers plague after plague until the knockout punch of the plague of death. That generation of Israelites left Egypt with God parting the Red Sea and then using that same Red Sea to swallow the Egyptian army. For 40 years they saw God work in amazing ways again and again. Manna on the ground, quail in the air, water from a rock; what happened? Their hearts grew hard and went astray. Were there consequences to cold calloused hearts? God was angry with them and they never entered his rest. Exactly what it means to not enter God's rest is a topic we will cover in a few weeks but for now, lets keep our focus on the big picture.

There were consequences. The writer of Hebrews is warning us. It is a real possibility for us to begin our spiritual lives well but end them poorly. If our hearts grow cold and calloused toward God, we will provoke God's anger and suffer the consequences. We have an even greater demonstration of God's power than the wilderness generation did when they left Egypt, we know Jesus Christ. So the big warning is, don't go through a faith failure.

Now, I know there is a good question that opens up at this point. *I thought I was once saved always saved?* How can I go through faith failure? Can I lose my salvation?

Do I believe once saved always saved? Yes! BUT that doesn't take away my responsibility to persevere in my faith through the trials and temptations of life. God preserves our faith as we persevere in our faith. Persevering in faith is NOT easy. Temptation to sin is real, it is tough to beat, and following Christ will



cost us. What does Jesus say? “The one who seeks to save his life will lose it, and the one who loses his life for me will find it.” Following Christ is a constant battle with sin and during that battle God will test us at times by letting our world fall apart to see how we will respond and to grow our faith in him so we experience God’s reliability. It is through our struggle to persevere that God preserves us. So for the Calvinists amongst us, and I am one of them, understand that once saved always saved is true. But don’t make the mistake of thinking that there is not battle to be fought. Yes, God will preserve our faith, BUT he does it as we go through the battle to persevere in our faith. Persevering is HARD! Don’t pretend it isn’t.

Back to our text! This morning, we are in Hebrews 3:12-14. We are moving from the command to persevere with the example of the wilderness generation as our warning, to the beginning of some practical stuff. We will begin to answer the question, “How can we persevere successfully?” V.12-14 gives us the first two pieces of that answer.

### Hebrews 3:12-14

He begins by saying. *See to it*. In the Greek this is in the imperative. It means *Pay Attention!* Listen up! Because of what happened to the wilderness generation, you (we) better listen to this.

**See to it that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. Hebrews 3:12**

### Examine My Heart

I had my 41<sup>st</sup> birthday before Christmas. I am told this is the time when the doctors like to run stress tests to check the health of your heart. The writer of Hebrews instructs us to run some tests to check our spiritual heart. There are two tests, the test of sin and the test of unbelief. Those are the root causes of spiritual heart disease that leads to disobedience, punishment and death. These were the warning signs of heart disease in the wilderness generation. It began by tolerating sin in their hearts and by refusing to trust God in their challenges.

### Am I Tolerating Sin?

The heart of every matter is always a matter of the heart. Sometimes people say to me, “Can I do this or can I do that and still follow Christ?” The reason they ask these questions is because they know what they are doing is questionable, but as long as it didn’t take place in a full-blown way on the outside of their lives, they think they may be OK. In my generation we copied our friends computer software. We rationalized that it was acceptable because the software was too expensive and we were not using it too much. Even if we did not get caught, what was the real issue? The heart of the matter is always a matter of the heart.

It is the classic, “I smoked marijuana, but it is OK because I didn’t inhale”. A little known fact about your pastor is that I began ministry in a Mennonite church. I became familiar with the Mennonite and Amish cultures, cultures that

take themselves out of society because they are concerned with how movies, television, music and the internet influence them. What do you think? Do you have to take these forms of media out of our lives? I don't think so.

We need to be careful about how we entertain ourselves through the media. This morning, I have no idea how we entertained ourselves. In some ways, we may think it doesn't matter because nobody needs to know what is in our heart. But a disaster on the outside of our life always begins by entertaining ourselves with sin on the inside of our lives. The heart of every matter is always a matter of the heart. Guard our heart.

My rule of thumb is the lingering factor. If I find myself replaying in my mind something I shouldn't be thinking because I was watching it on TV or a movie, that means I shouldn't have watched it, I didn't wisely guard my heart because I now am dwelling on sin in my heart. That is where it all begins, with a sinful heart.

### **Am I Responding to Trials in Faith?**

The other heart test is to check for an unbelieving heart. Literally this means a heart that responds to adversity with faith. Many of us are out of work or have greatly reduced work with the economy. It is good and healthy to grieve when we face challenges. You have no heart if you don't grieve. But God wants us to take our grief to Him and trust Him to provide. Every time the wheels fell off in the lives of the wilderness generation, how did they respond? "God doesn't care about us, I want to go back to Egypt." They had no faith he would provide water in the desert. They didn't believe God would provide a victory when they faced overwhelming odds. They had a heart that lacked faith even after God provided for them again and again. When they came to the Promised Land all they could see were the giants, not their God who had taken care of them every step of the way to get them there.

How about us? What does our spiritual cardiogram reveal? Are we tolerating sin and replaying it the next day on the silver screen of our psyche? If we are, that is a warning sign. How does our heart face adversity?... Faith in God or anger at God. The heart of every matter is always a matter of the heart.

### **Exhort/Encourage One Another Daily**

**See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today. Hebrews 3:12-13**

The word encourage in the Greek has a bigger field of meaning than the word encourage does in the English. In the English, encouragement is all positive. In the Greek it is both positive and corrective. Literally, it means to come along side someone and to call out to them to help them.

It reminds me of this fall when David was in cross-country. I am one of those fathers who placed himself in the last quarter of the course and ran alongside his son for a few minutes so I could literally *call out* to him. *You can do*

*it! You can make it! Just a little farther! Reach down inside!* That is literally what is pictured, running alongside and calling out to people to help them make it.

The word here also means to come alongside someone and call out a warning about something they might not see. When I was 12, I was walking with my father on the New Jersey shore for vacation. He was staring in the distance as we walked the coast. A small school of jelly fish had washed up on shore. They were big gooey globs in the sand with their tentacles down. One washed up as a gooey glob with its tentacles up. As we walked along in our bathing suits and bare feet, I began to realize, my father, who was still staring in the distance, did not see the jellyfish. His cadence would place his foot right on the upside down jellyfish. About 2 steps before, I literally screamed, “Dad Stop!” and he just missed the jelly fish. This is what exhorting is. Seeing danger someone else doesn’t see and calling out a warning to them.

If we are going to persevere in our faith, the Bible says we need to be part of our church. *As long as it is called Today*, we need people who will come alongside us and encourage us in the tough times and warn us when they see us heading for a disaster, because often we are blind to it..

**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom. Colossians 3:16**

### **How do I “come alongside” someone?**

#### **Be a daily encourager**

One of the ways we can apply this sermon right away is commit to be an encourager. On your response card, you can check the box, I commit to encourage someone in the church this week. It may be a phone call, it may be a brief note, it may be watching their children so they can go on a date. Commit to come along side and encourage them. As I was studying this week, that is something I realized, I don’t do enough of. I don’t encourage and love you as much as I should. It is a really powerful and important thing all of us need to do for one another. It is one of the ways God helps us persevere in the tough times.

Probably the tougher part to apply is exhortation. How do we come alongside someone and warn someone about a danger we see in their life without hurting them. When we exhort, it is tempting to err by either cutting the truth in half when we tell it to someone or by cutting the person in half as we tell it to them. Both ways are wrong. Let me give a few tips.

#### **Exhort with Gentleness and Love**

**I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Eph 4:1-2.**

When we exhort, exhort with gentleness and love. Everyone has a hard time taking correction from someone who doesn’t love or care about them. Have you had people tell you about something you did wrong but you had no sense

they loved you or cared about you? I have. How effective was it? It is hard not to go on the defensive.

Parents, when you correct your children, do it with lots of love. Yes, children should obey their parents in all things and parents may need to use strong correction for their children but it is a lot easier for a child to obey his/her parents when they know they are loved and when they know the discipline is rooted in love.

### **Exhort with Humility; I Could Be Wrong**

Our exhortations should be done with the humility to know that our corrections might be wrong. When we come alongside someone to tell them of a danger we see, we may be wrong in our perceptions. I have seen this happen many time with adults, but for the sake of argument, let me use my failure as an example.

When our children were younger I asked Daniel to stop playing with a noisy toy. I asked him a number of times. I kept hearing the toy again and again in his bedroom. My anger began to brew. He was blatantly disrespecting his father. I went into his room and spanked him (*that will teach him to listen to his parents*). About a minute after the spanking, I discovered Daniel wasn't playing with the toy; David was. It was the wrong correction because my perspective was wrong. I didn't have all the facts. So I had to ask Daniel to forgive me.

When we exhort someone, be humble enough to say, *I think or I believe or I see*, not *I know*. Often we don't have all the facts. To this day, when Daniel gets in trouble he reminds, "Remember, I already had a spanking I didn't deserve." Why is exhortation and encouragement important?

### **I Need My Church Because I Need Others to Help Me Make It.**

**So that none of you may be hardened by sins deceitfulness. Hebrews 3:13**

Why do we need each other? Because sin is so deceitful. Sin sneaks up on us when we least expect it. Talk to people who have fallen to a significant sin and what will they tell you? *I never saw it coming. I wish someone had warned me or helped me.* We need other eyes looking out for us saying, "I think you are about to step on a Jelly Fish.

### **Conclusion**

How do I finish well? First, I must guard my heart. I can't tolerate sin and I must learn to respond to trials God sends my way by trusting him, not doubting him or his love. Second, I need to be a part of a church of people who encourage me and help me see my blind spots because they want to love me and don't want me to become hardened by sins deceitfulness.

I want to let you in on a little secret. Just attending this church won't bring the kind of people into your life that will encourage and exhort you like this Scripture teaches us we need. That doesn't take place through attendance, it takes place through relationships. Relationships are closer and deeper than

attendance. This kind of relationship can't happen with 400 people on Sunday morning.

This is why we take small groups very seriously. They are where we connect with people in a real way. If you are visiting this morning and you don't get in a small group, chances are, you won't be here 6 months from now. When times get tough, which they do for all of us, there won't be people to come alongside and encourage or exhort you. Relational encouragement is serious business. It is one of the ways God preserves our faith when we struggle to persevere.

If this morning, you aren't in a small group, today is the day to make that decision to get involved. If you check the box on the back of your response card letting me know you are interested in one, Pastor Greg will call you this week and try to find one for you as they re-launch for the winter.

If you are already in a small group, I want you to go home this morning with a new understanding of your role in the group. Your attendance and friendship in the group is important. It is the foundation for you to encourage and humbly exhort one another. That may mean the difference between spiritually making it or spiritual disaster.

## Hebrews 3:15-4:2 – Beware of Dog

Sign Title: Beware of Dog

January 11, 2009

If you are new, I want to welcome you. We are studying the book of Hebrews and are in the third chapter. It is a difficult chapter. This chapter teaches us it is possible to begin our faith well, but to end it poorly. The writer of Hebrews gave us the wilderness generation as an example. That was the generation that left Egypt with Moses. God miraculously intervened to set them free from slavery. While they began well, they became known as the grumblers, the whiners and the generation that didn't believe God would take care of them in the difficult times. Rather than arriving in the Promised Land, there were consequences. God refused to take them in.

Chapter 3 isn't all warning, it is also encouragement. It tells us practical ways God helps us persevere. Last week we learned that to persevere, we need one another. This morning we are looking at another way God helps us persevere. We are looking at how God uses fear of faith failure to keep us saved.

Hebrews 3:15-4:2

### Life works from the inside out.

Psalm 95 is God's commentary on what happened to the wilderness generation. The writer of Hebrews applies this Psalm to us. *Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.* He follows with 5 rhetorical questions. What is a rhetorical question? It is a question that doesn't expect an answer but it prompts your mind to stop listening and think. Look at these questions.

- Who were they who heard and rebelled? Weren't they all who left Egypt?
- And with whom was God angry the whole time? Was it not those who sinned?
- To whom did he swear they wouldn't enter his rest? Was it not those who disobeyed?

They were not able to enter because of their what? (*pause*). You would expect the answer to be *disobedience*. Yet, their disobedience wasn't the reason God kept them out of the Promised Land. It was their lack of faith. Literally the word here is *no faith*. Why does the writer of Hebrews say the problem was with their faith, yet the rhetorical questions all demonstrate not a faith problem but an disobedience problem? Because disobedience is the fruit of unbelief. Disobedience on the outside happens when there is no faith on the inside.

Many people get this confused. They ask questions like, *What sins can I commit and still go to heaven? What is the unpardonable sin? I don't want to commit that and God won't forgive me?* These are the wrong questions to ask.

The right questions don't deal with sin on the outside but what is the state of the heart on the inside. The outside of a life is just a gauge for our hearts.

There is no specific action that keeps a non-Christian from becoming saved. There is no action that takes away the salvation of a Christian. Neither is there any amount of good works, either a non-Christian or a Christian can do to change their eternity. The heart of the matter is always a matter of the heart. Our life is a gauge for our heart.

For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." Mark 7:21-23

When Israel was about to enter the Promised Land, what did their fear of the giants in the land reveal? What did their grumbling and rebellion against God in the wilderness reveal? It revealed that while they knew God in an intellectual way, in their hearts, they didn't combine it with faith.

### **The Danger of Faithless Christianity**

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. Hebrews 4:1-2

Let me briefly explain the concept of rest in Hebrews. It is achieving the goal of your journey. For Israel, that was the Promised Land, for us it is reigning and ruling with Christ, it is the goal of our salvation journey. Since we are not done with our journey, let *us* be careful not to fall short of our goal.

The NIV did something weird here. They translated the Greek as *be careful*. The Greek word is *phobia*. If you have a *phobia* of something, does that mean you are about it? No, it means you are afraid of it. In fact, most other translations use the word *fear*. There is a big difference. When it comes to snakes, do I tell my children to be careful when they find one or to be afraid of them? When a power line is knocked down in a storm and a live wire is on the ground, do we tell people to be careful around them, or to be afraid of them? One is much more serious than the other because the consequences of failure are much more serious.

The writer of Hebrews says, when it comes to following Christ, we need to take this very seriously. There is a real danger of Christians, having an intellectual Christianity that isn't combined with faith. It makes all the difference. That is what happened to the wilderness generation. They knew the truth about God, what he could do and what he had done, but when it came to how they handled their challenges, they didn't live by faith.

This can also happen to us. We can know about God from Sunday School and church. We may sing on the worship team and be involved in a small group and have everything intellectually settled in our mind, but if we don't



combine it with faith, when we hit the hurdles of life, we are in danger of not making it to the end.

Faith means, taking what we know to be true and actually living like it is true. Making decisions based on what God says, not what we see. *Faith is best seen in times of crisis.* No crisis, no faith; know crisis, know faith.

For example, the book of Romans talks about Abraham was saved by faith. When did Abraham display saving faith? When he obeyed God and went to sacrifice his son? That was the crisis of faith. That is when his faith on the inside was shown by the crisis he faced on the outside.

### **A Donut Example**

Let me paint this picture another way. I have donuts for everyone in the gymnasium after the service. There are three ways people will respond to that announcement. 1) Some will reject my message. Donuts! He wouldn't do that. I am not interested in donuts, I can make donuts myself, what does Kurt think he is doing interfering with my schedule and spoiling my lunch. 2) Some will embrace my message. Donuts, for us, that is great! I hope there are chocolate, I love them! I can't wait till Kurt finishes preaching because I am already hungry! These people absorb the message intellectually and after the service they go out the doors at the back of the sanctuary, make a hard left to head to the gymnasium and satisfy their appetite. 3) There is a third group. This is the group that will say, "Donuts, I love them, I can't wait till the message is over so I can eat some." But after the service is over with, rather than making a hard left, they see a friend in the hall and talk for a while, they might be distracted by other things, the final song of the service is so good they forget about the donuts and never get a donut. Did this third group achieve the goal? No. They never entered the Promised Land of the donut. They never entered *rest*, the completion of the journey. They began well but finished poorly. Why? They comprehended donuts intellectually but when it came to living in faith that the donuts would be in the gymnasium, they failed.

This is what this warning passage is about. It is not a warning to non-Christians; it is a warning to us who are believers. We need to be very fearful that our Christian walk isn't just cerebral knowledge but is coupled to faith so our lives act on what we know is true.

Many times the best way to find out if someone is living by faith is to see how they respond in a crisis. No crisis, no need for faith because everything is stable. Crisis will show on the outside the state of our faith on the inside. For the Israelites, crisis after crisis revealed they were not coupling faith to what they knew about God.

### **How does God use fear of failure to keep me saved?**

When I began, I told you we were learning another way that God helps us persevere in our faith to the end. God uses fear of failing in our faith to keep us saved. At first, this sounds really weird, so let me explain it this way.

I have a sign here, *Beware of Dog*. When you walk by a house that has this sign on a telephone pole by the road what happens? Your pulse quickens, your ears perk up, you start checking over your shoulder. Most importantly, you stay off the lawn of that house! What is the purpose of this sign? It is to keep you safe and it does it by making you fearful. The fear of the dog keeps us safe from the bite of the dog.

This is very similar to how it works with our salvation. Here we have a warning sign, don't be like the Israelites and live without faith in God when you hit a crisis. If we do, there is the very real possibility, we will never achieve our rest, the goal of our faith. How will you react to that warning sign? *I can't be bitten*. What happens?

The problem is when people read the sign but don't pay attention to the message. They say... *I know the sign warns me of the biting dog, but people like me, I can't get bitten. Or even worse, I am once safe, always safe so I don't need this sign. I can't get bitten*. Consequences can't happen to me. When that happens, there is a problem.

The warning is there to remind us that while we are secure in our salvation, we must make every effort to trust God in the crisis's of our life.

### **What happens if you eat at Hooters?**

You only need to glance at a Hooters bill board to know that restaurant chain is trying to gratify more than your physical appetite, the waitresses are dressed to entice a man's sexual appetite. What happens to a Christian man who has lunch at Hooters? Remember where we began. It would not be the action of eating at Hooters that is dangerous. The heart of the matter is a matter of the heart. The Christian guy who goes to Hooters for lunch needs to ask himself, why am I doing this? The problem is that there is a lack of faith in his heart. He knows what is right in his head but he isn't taking God's warnings about lust seriously enough to honor God with choices in his life. Knowledge is not impacting life. What is the danger at this point? He can say, *once saved always saved* I am on my way to rest, I will be in heaven and enjoy my promised land, but if that is what he thinks, he is not heeding the warning of the wilderness generation.

The danger is that his heart will become hardened toward sin, he will not think his lustful thoughts are that big of a deal and they won't influence his relationship with God. (He is now walking on the grass where the beware of the dog sign was.) As he continues to become hardened by sins deceitfulness, he may shipwreck his spiritual life and, he may never enter his rest, the goal of his salvation.

We should not just be careful this doesn't happen to us, but we should be afraid this doesn't happen to us. It is easier to become hardened to sin and shipwreck our faith than most of us think. Realizing how easy it is to fail + guarding against it helps keep us saved.

The first church I served in as a youth pastor had an especially charismatic man who was one of the founders of the church. He served on the elder board and taught Sunday School for a number of years. He was the kind of individual every church dreams of having in leadership. And now for the rest of the story. Somewhere before I came, he began conversations with a lady at work. I don't know all the steps but I do know where it ended up. He divorced his wife, for the other woman and left the church. When the elders confronted him and they opened the book and showed him from Scripture that what he did was wrong, I remember what he said, "Don't tell me what the Bible says about divorce, I know more about that than you do." He was right, but he was heading for faith failure, he wasn't combining what he knew in his head with faith so it changed the way he lived his life. He didn't heed the warning signs. An affair? It can never happen to me. I don't need warning signs to keep me away from failure.

I bet he wishes he had read the sign now. As we go, my prayer is that every one of us realize how easy it is to become hardened to sin. That we heed the warnings of Scripture. I also pray that we realize the importance of faith in our life with knowledge of God in our head. As we close, I want to give us a few minutes to examine our heart in silence.

## Hebrews 4:1-11 – The Rest of the Story

Sign Title: The Rest of the Story

February 1, 2009

Good morning! If you are new to Faith EFC, I would like to welcome you. We have been grappling with what the book of Hebrews says about salvation and how God keeps us saved. We learned there are a variety of ways God helps us persevere in our faith. Just in the book of Hebrews alone, we learned that God helps us persevere through: the encouragement of our church family, through the Word of God and through his discipline if when we stray.

Two weeks ago, we learned a way God helps us persevere in our faith that we didn't expect. He helps us persevere by giving us warnings about the consequences of giving up or giving in to unbelief. These warnings keep us from failing in our faith; just like the warning on a "Beware of Dog" is there to keep us safe from being bitten. Those who read and heed the warning stay safe. If we read the warnings in Scripture but have no interest in heeding them, we too may fail in our faith. Heeding the warning is what keeps us safe.

This morning as we dive into Hebrews 4, we will look at yet another way God helps us stay strong in our faith to the end. I will give you a hint on what it is about with my favorite Paul Harvey quote. And now,... it is time for the rest of the story.

### Hebrews 4:1-11

Verse 1 introduces a new concept: Rest. We are told to make sure that we don't fall short of it. I don't think any one of us wants to miss God's rest. But most of us don't know what it is? If we are to make sure we don't fall short of it, we need to begin by figuring out what *rest* is.

### Theological Background - The Bible talks about rest two ways.

One of the reasons *rest* appears fuzzy in this passage is because we don't have much of a Biblical background for it. Biblical rest is not nearly as central to our lives as it was to the Christian who received this letter. Remember, this letter was written to former Jews who were now following Christ but were considering going back to Judaism. They understood *rest* because Biblical *rest* was a big part of the Jewish culture. Even today, on the Sabbath in Israel the elevators automatically open on every floor, so people don't have to work by pressing the buttons.

Rest was a big component of Jewish life in the ancient world too. Rest made God's top ten list and is part of the ten commandments. It was so strong a part of the Jewish culture that Jesus ran into trouble with the Jewish authorities when he healed on the Sabbath. They accused Jesus of not observing a proper *rest* when he healed people on the Sabbath.

So the Jews this letter was written to understood the concept of *rest*, while we are a little sketchy on it. Let me explain the Biblical concept of *rest* so we can understand Hebrews 4 better.

Rest has two levels of meaning. There are historical rests and there is a theological sabbath or rest. The historical rests are not the main event, they only point us to and remind us of theological rest. The Jews and many through history misunderstood this. Let's look at these two types of rest in Scripture.

### **The Old Testament highlights Historical Rests.**

#### **Rest in Creation**

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. Genesis 2:2-3

God created for six days, but on the seventh day he rested. How did he rest? Did he eat some Doritos and watch the Super-bowl? No. It simply means he stopped His creative work.

#### **Sabbath Rest**

For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. Exodus 31:15

Just as God rested from his work, God's people are to set aside their normal activities for a day. On that day they are to have freedom from normal responsibilities to focus on enjoying and worshipping God

#### **Sabbatical Rests**

But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest, a sabbath to the Lord. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Leviticus 25:4

These are some examples of historical rests. As you read the Old Testament, you will find these and other types of Sabbaths, types of rests mentioned. Many people make the mistake of thinking these physical rests are God's primary focus. They aren't, they are just pointers to a greater rest called spiritual rest.

### **The New Testament Highlights Spiritual Rest.**

While the Old Testament clearly articulates historical rests, when we get to the New Testament, if we are looking for historical rests, we will walk away confused and empty handed.

The book of Hebrews reminds us that behind many practices of the Old Testament is something that is fuller and better. When it comes to physical rests in the Old Testament, there is something that is fuller and better behind them that is now being revealed. Better than the historical rests is a much greater spiritual rest that is now available to us.

Let me define spiritual rest.

**Spiritual Rest = Upon salvation, a sinner experiences rest from striving for salvation. Upon death, that rest is infinitely magnified and eternally enjoyed.**

God resting on the seventh day, Israel's Sabbath rest and the land's seventh year rest were all shadows of an eternal reality that all true Christians experience. *Eternity for Christians is a "resting" from the difficulties associated with persevering in our faith now.* Eternity is life without the debilitating affects of sin upon our character and in our world.

### **Explanation of a Tough Text**

#### **When does rest begin?**

**Now we who have believed enter that rest... Hebrews 4:3**

*Believed* is past tense. *Enter* is present tense. When we believed, we entered His rest. Some of God's *rest* is experienced now.

As a believer, I am presently experiencing part of God's rest. How am I experiencing part of it? My soul has peace with God. The guilt of my sin is taken away. My fear of judgment is removed. While everyone's experience of salvation is different, what should happen to our souls when we come to Christ is they experience rest because our sins are forgiven, our guilt before God is taken away.

**"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28**

What is Jesus saying? He is offering rest to the spiritually weary, the sinner burdened with the guilt of sin. When we believe, in that moment, we enter the beginning of God's rest. Our sins are forgiven, our guilt is taken away, our conscience is cleared. There is rest for our souls. But this is not all there is to rest. There is a much greater and fuller rest to come that this passage in Hebrews is talking about. Watch how the writer of Hebrews comes to the conclusion that there is a greater rest coming.

#### **There remains a rest greater than salvation.**

**Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'" And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work." And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest." It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Hebrews 4:3-6**

Did you hear the Old Testament historical rests? The first one described was God's creation. The second historical rest was from Israel's rebellion. He is quoting again from Psalm 95. Here we see the Israelites grumbling and rebellion

kept them out of the historical rest in the Promised Land, the reason they didn't experience the historical rest intended was because of their spiritual rebellion, their unwillingness to trust God in the midst of difficulty. The writer of Hebrews is saying they didn't just miss the historical rest of the Promised Land, they also missed what was behind it, the spiritual rest of being with God for eternity.

Now look at the third example.

Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Hebrews 4:7-9

This third illustration is when Joshua finally took them into the Promised Land. Did they find real rest there? No! If they had, God would not have spoken about another rest. So the conclusion is that God's rest in creation, the offer of rest to Israel in Canaan and God's later promise of rest to Joshua were all just Old Testament pointers to an eternal and much more meaningful rest that was available in David's day and is still available in our day. It is the spiritual rest that is behind and greater than the historical rests.

**I must strive to enter God's greater rest.**

Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. Hebrews 4:9-11

The spiritual rest of God that began spiritually when God rested from His creative work is still available today. To enter that rest, like God on the seventh day, we must cease from our spiritual struggle to save ourselves, trust in Christ's salvation for us. But it says, *make every effort to enter that rest.*

Wait a minute! If we enter God's rest through faith, why do we have to work to enter that rest? Is it by faith or by effort? It is by both. One is the root, the other is the fruit. The root is faith. When we believe, we enter the realm of salvation and experience true, but not the full installment of rest. From that faith there will be a desire for obedience in our lives. The Christian life is a struggle to follow God against the powerful currents of our sinful world and our depraved desires. Anybody who says the Christian life is easy is not telling you the truth. In the Christian life we rest from our striving for salvation, but it is hard work to follow Christ every day with the choices we face financially, with entertainment, with our words, and so on. It is a sacrifice to say, "What God wants is more important than what I want." Christ says, "Take up your cross and follow me" When Christ returns, then we will experience the ultimate rest.

This sounds confusing, I was confused for a while this week. It would be wise to reread your notes and this passage of Scripture again on your own today. But to the Jewish Christians this was written to, this concept of rest made good sense.



This passage of Hebrews is teaching us how God helps us persevere. In our last study we learned God helps us persevere by warning us of the danger of failing. Today, we see God helps us persevere by setting before us a great motivation to persevere; the prospect of entering God's rest.

### **Application - What does this mean for me?**

#### **The hope of rest keeps us saved.**

Let me illustrate it this way. Parents, when was the last time you took your children on a long trip? As you drive, what starts happening between the children in the back seat? *My brother is bothering me. Are we there yet? I'm cold. I'm hot. I'm bored.* The list never ends. So how do you help your children persevere in the trip? First you start to feed them crackers, next you pull out a hand-held video game or put on a movie. When nothing seems to work you warn them that if they don't stop annoying each other you are pulling over the car and nobody wants to know what will happen when dad does that!

On the trip, one of the ways we help our children persevere is by telling them what it is like where they are going. For us, our long trip is usually to my parents house in Philadelphia. On that three day drive we tell our children how grammy will be cooking a roast and making their favorite food. We tell them about eating lunch with Grandbob and how much fun we will have together. We tell them stories of what it was like when I was growing up and we really whet their appetite for what is coming.

After a while, rather than wanting us to pull over for another break, the kids want us to drive faster to get there. They can't wait to get there because their thoughts are fixed on how good it will be when they get there. Children need to know how great it will be when they finish the trip.

So why all this talk about there being a great rest of God that remains for us to still enter? Why are we *to make every effort to get there*? Because we need to know that our struggles with sins and frailties won't always be the way it is. We are on a journey not to just salvation rest but to the ultimate rest of being with Christ in a sin-free world. There is coming a place of rest from our struggles with sin and the brokenness that is totally worth it.

**For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 2 Corinthians 4:17**

While we have already had a taste of this rest through full forgiveness of our guilt and sin through Jesus, the full installment of God's rest will blow our minds away. We don't want to miss it!

#### **How does the greater rest unfold?**

For Christians, upon death, we depart to be with Christ. After death there is a much greater experience of God's rest

**Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord... They rest from their labors. Revelation 14:13**

But it isn't the full and final experience. The complete experience of God's rest in its fullness will take place when Christ returns. The Bible says that at that time, we will be *fully conformed* to Christ's likeness. At that time, we will receive our resurrection bodies that are like Christ's resurrection body is right now. These will be bodies without sickness, bodies that don't deteriorate. Ladies, there will be no need for Mary-Kay products. Your complexion will be flawless.

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and *what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.* 1 John 3:2

At that time, God will also give us a new heaven and a new earth to dwell upon.

But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to *a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.* 2 Peter 3:13

This will be the climactic moment of history. It will be the moment when God's people enter into the full and unending enjoyment of God's rest. What will it be like? In some ways, it will be similar to this life with one major difference.

*He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Revelation 21:4*

Incidentally, this rest is not unending inertia. It is not boredom, it is not staring into space or playing a harp in the clouds. It is being united with our resurrection body, that has all the affects of sin taken away. It is a new heaven and new earth that is free from decay and all the warping affects of sin our current creation experiences. God's rest is complete freedom from our struggle with sin and the freedom from the afflictions and wounds we experience in our life because of sin. Imagine this, life with God in eternity *will be much better* than life was in this world for Adam and Eve before they sinned. Think about this. When Adam and Eve were created, Jesus wasn't around. Of course Jesus was around in his pre-incarnate form as *the angel of the Lord* but with Jesus born in Bethlehem we have the permanent fusion God hood and manhood when the angel of the Lord took on a human body and became Jesus. Eternity is having Jesus, the God-man *as our brother*. Adam and Eve never had that. Isn't this incredible! That is something to look forward to.

**To get through the difficulties in the trip of life, remember the rest of the story.**

Anybody here had a tough week? How about a tough winter? Many of the conversations I had this week were with people who either lost their job or are having their livelihood pinched because of the economy. A number of people are struggling with a dark curtain of depression draping over their emotions. Some friends are struggling with the death of someone they love. Others are wrestling with painful debilitations of a deteriorating body. Worn out hips and knees that need replacement, heart surgeries, even babies are suffering from the affects of sin in the world. The list doesn't end. I was tempted to have the

ushers hand out anti-depressants so we could pop them like Tic-Tacs. While we may not have anti-depressants for everyone, *remember the rest of the story.*

You know what we need? A vacation. Doesn't that sound good? Some of you are thinking Florida sounds good at this time of year. I want to go to a much better place. The kind of vacation that would be more refreshing than a good night's sleep, more refreshing than an ice cold coke, more refreshing than even being with the wife I love. I want to go on a vacation where there is no more pain, no more loneliness, no more despair. I don't want to go on that vacation just for a weekend, but forever. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we have that kind of vacation coming. *Remember the rest of the story.*

Stop with me for a moment and think about some of the most refreshing moments you have experienced. Maybe it was an ice cold slushee after a hard sports practice, maybe it was a great family vacation. What was the most refreshing moment for you?

Now realize, that refreshing moment was a tiny sample of our eternity. Having that kind of hope to look forward to changes the way we look at our daily problems. It makes dealing with the person who is driving us nuts more bearable. It helps us shoulder the pain in our life a little longer. It makes the cold of winter pass when we fix our eyes on the warmth of an eternal summer.

My friends, when life gets tough, *remember the rest of the story.*

## Hebrews 4:12-13 – It's Alive

Sign Title: It's Alive

February 8, 2009

This morning we are discussing something near and dear to the heart of our Faith EFC community. What is it? The Word of God. In fact, preaching God's Word is so deeply engrained on our heart at Faith that it is part of our core values, it is our number one core value.

*Core Value #1: We value the relevant and practical teaching of the Word of God.*

This morning we will discover why the Bible is so important for our church.

Let's begin where we left off last week. We learned the book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who are considering giving up on Jesus. The author of Hebrews is encouraging them to keep up, not give up their faith. The writer of Hebrews tells us there are a variety of ways God helps us keep up our faith in hard time. One of the ways we learned a few weeks ago is that God gives us warnings, to keep us safe. Last week we learned another way God helps us keep up rather than give up our faith. We have a great incentive; the promise of not just spiritual *rest* now, but the promise of ultimate and complete *rest* from sin in eternity. Last week we left fired up because we knew the rest of the story, we had eternity in our eyes. This morning, we will learn another way God helps us keep our faith to the end; His Word.

### Hebrews 4:12-13

This passage is talking about the Word of God. Before we go to far with this, I want to clarify something. What *Word of God* is he talking about? Let's do a little multiple choice quiz. A) When God spoke to and through the Old Testament prophets, it was called the Word of God. B) In the book of John, Jesus is called the Word. C) The Bible is called the Word of God. Which answer is right in this context?

To help you with the answer, let me teach you about how to read the Bible. *A text only has meaning in its context.* In the context of the book of Hebrews, what kind of Word of God is he talking about? Let me give you a hint. He quotes from this word directly 35 times in Hebrews, he makes an additional 34 allusions to it, 19 times he summarizes it, 13 times he refers to a person in it. The written Word of God he is talking about is this book.

Today I want to help us understand what we hold in our hands with this book. There are three things he teaches us about God's Word

### God's Word is Alive

**The Word of God is living and active. Hebrews 4:12**

What does this mean? This is a little confusing because when we think of something being alive, we think of the opposite of dead. Inanimate objects like my shoe are dead objects. If my shoe started walking around on its own, that

would really catch our attention. Disney has fun with this concept. Remember the movie *Herbie the Love Bug*. We see objects moving around, having feelings and acting human, well, that is pretty fun to watch. When the Bible says God's Word is alive, that is NOT what it means. The Bible you hold in your hand is not breathing and having feelings. Though if it was true, some of our Bibles would feel lonely but that is another message.

In what way is God's Word alive? The Greek word here may help. The word is *energes*. What word do you hear in there? Energy. There is energy, there is vitality, there is life in these words. Rather than thinking of our Bible like a book that acts like *Herbie the Love Bug*, think of what happens to a power line when it is knocked down in a winter storm. What do we call it? *A live wire*. That isn't because the wire is alive but because the wire contains energy.

That is the same way God's Word is alive. It is not just information, it is power itself. It is energized and effective. It brings life. What does God intend his words to do? What is this energy that is being talked about? Let me give you a hint.

For you have been **born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.** 1 Peter 1:23

Do you see that? God's Word brings spiritual life it doesn't just bring information. Remember back in Genesis where God first spoke. It says, *God said, let there be light, and there was light*. God spoke and things were created. God said *let the land produce vegetation*, and vegetation happened. God spoke and physical life was created. Just as God's spoken words created physical life. God's written word is how God creates spiritual life.

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, **which is at work in you who believe.** 1 Thessalonians 2:13

Here again we have these same two pieces put together. This book is not man's words, but God's words. These words are not just information but like a live wire, they have energy in them and produce life transformation. These words work in us.

It is tempting to do a whole message on this one subject because there are many churches that don't believe in the power of this book. They say, less Bible preaching, this book is about too long ago and far away. The way to grow a church is downplay the Bible and up-play culture connection. Put on a great show and people will come back and the church will grow. I don't know about you, but to me that sounds like a great way to grow a crowd, it is not the way to grow a church. Do you believe this? Do you believe God's words in this book have power in and of themselves to create spiritual life?

Let's have some fun and skate into history with that question. Remember the Protestant Reformation? Listen to what Martin Luther had to say about how it happened.

I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word: Otherwise I did nothing. And when, I slept, or drank Wittenburg beer with my Philip and my Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a Prince or Emperor inflicted such damage upon it, I did nothing. The Word did it all. (Martin Luther)

Don't get hung up on the Wittenburg beer section and miss the point. The Reformation happened because Luther translated the Latin Bible into German so everyday folks could read it for themselves and they gathered in Protestant churches to hear it explained. What was the result? The world was turned upside down by God's Word.

Charles Spurgeon, a great preacher in England, was once asked to defend the authority of the Bible. I love his response. "Defend the Bible? You don't defend a lion, all you do is let it out of its cage." His point is that he doesn't need to defend the Bible, as long as he preaches it, since it is God's Word's, it is alive and God will use it to create spiritual life in people.

Think about this in your own life, how did your spiritual life begin? Did someone have to convince you the Bible was true before you found God's Word's birthing spiritual life in your heart? No. We found faith in our heart that God birthed by reading or hearing His Word. That is where faith begins.

This is one of the reasons we are doing the *Read through the Bible in a Year* program. Simply getting the Word in your hands and reading it, I know God will use it to birth spiritual life in the congregation. We can not go wrong.

How do we explain what is going on at Faith EFC right now? Why are we seeing such spiritual fruit? Is it the building? The cool office staff? The spiffy dress of your pastors? The location? The soft pews? I don't think so. This is what happens when God's Word is taken out of its cage. When I came I did exactly what some church growth experts tell pastors not to do. I started a long series in a tough book of the Bible called Hebrews. My strategy is to simply let loose the power of God's Word in a group of people by explaining and teaching it. Then watch the lion defend himself. God's Word is alive!

### **God's Word Cuts to the Heart**

**For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow... Hebrews 4:12**

The sword imagery in this section is pretty famous. Let me give you a little sword background. In the ancient world there were two kinds of swords. One was a chopping sword. It was heavier, and had an edge on one side. It was designed to create long open wounds. There was another kind of sword that was short, light and small. It was the double edged sword, a type of a dagger. The purpose was not to cut long but to go deep. The wounds it left were small on the outside but went right to the vital organs on the inside.



In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, this is the same word used to describe the type of sword that Ehud used when he killed Eglon. If you remember the story, Eglon was a very overweight man and wicked ruler. He was in the bathroom when Ehud took out his doubled edged sword and plunged it into Eglon's belly. The text says that Eglon's fat closed in around the handle and Ehud lost his weapon as Eglon died. A pretty powerful little weapon.

The word of God is likened to one of these short penetrating swords, in fact it is considered even sharper than this dagger sword. Why does the writer of Hebrews say that God's Word is like one of these double-edged swords? Look at the verb, because God's Word penetrates our lives. There is no defense we have against it. It cuts right to the heart of the matter in our lives. It slices through our facades, our pride and our hypocrisy and goes right after our heart.

You see, the world tells us to deal with our problems on a seen level. God's Word attacks our problems at the unseen level, a heart level.

- The world says that if you have a substance abuse problem you just need some detox help. The Bible says if you have a substance abuse problem it is because you have an empty life without God and your fix is your God. Only a relationship with God can fill the gap that you are stuffing with drugs or alcohol.
- Are you struggling with anger toward your kids? The Bible says the problem isn't your kids, the problem is the root issue is unforgiveness in your own life.
- Are you struggling with an overspending issue? The world says the issue is your credit card. The Bible says the issue is you think stuff will make you happy. The issue is covetousness.
- The world says that if you have marital breakdown you need to find love someplace else. The Bible says the root of marital breakdown is pride and selfishness. If a couple gets victory over pride and selfishness in their life they will have a hot and happen'in marriage in a hurray.

God's Word doesn't pull any punches. How many here have been reading the Bible and all of a sudden you go. WOW! Did God write that just for me? The Word smacks us up side the head, all our defenses are gone and we know God just spoke right by connecting His Word to our heart in a powerful way. That happen to anyone here? The word is sharper than one of those double-edged swords that cuts right to the heart of the matter.

### **God's Word Judges the Heart**

**It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:12-13**

Do you know what an angiogram is? It is a little camera on a wire that doctors stick into an artery and they thread it back up to your heart where the doctor can examine the heart to see if there are blockages. God's Word is like an angiogram. It has eyes to it. Not only does it penetrate to our heart like a



double-edged sword but it judges the condition of our heart. It evaluates why we do what we do. It judges our thoughts and our attitudes, the real us, the one nobody sees. God's knows our secrets and even our motives.

In the Greek they sometimes make up these huge compound words and this is what they did with the phrase *Everything is uncovered and laid bare*. It literally means to expose the throat for cutting. It is a description they used for what they did to an animal before they sacrificed it on the altar, they pulled back the head, exposing the throat, the animal was totally helpless and vulnerable.

It was also used to describe what hunters did to an animal after they killed it, they pull back the skin exposing the inner parts, nothing about the animal is hidden, it is totally vulnerable.

This is what we are like before God and his Word. It judges the inner thoughts and attitudes in our lives. Why is he bringing this up? Because there is no such thing as keeping secrets from God. There is no such thing as a secret sin God doesn't know about. There is no such thing as *getting away with something*. God knows it all. There are some of us here this morning that have a dark room in our life. A room we think only we know about. Nothing is hidden from God's eyes and the critical power of His Word.

Now some of us think that as long as we are Christians, we are forgiven of our sins. That is right, we will be. But doesn't that mean Christians *get away with things*. You and I have seen many Christians who use their forgiveness as a *get out of jail free* card, their forgiveness through Christ has become an excuse for bad behavior. Can Christians get away with things? Look what Paul says.

I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God. 1 Corinthians 4:3-5

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. 2 Corinthians 5:10

God's word cuts to the heart and judges us now, but as Christians, how we live now will have a bearing on our reward in eternity when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ. We are saved by grace but our eternal rewards are based on our works. Even the motives we serve Christ with now will be exposed before God when Christ returns. Are we saved by Christ? Yes, there is no salvation outside of Christ. But how we live now, what we do with our salvation and even the motives we live by will eventually be exposed before God and they will determine our eternal reward. Nothing is hidden from God's sight then and nothing is hidden from the piercing eyes of His Word now.

This morning, if you are have one of those secret rooms that you think nobody knows about, now is the time to repent. Talk to me after the service or talk with one of the other pastors or elders so we can pray with you. There is no such thing as *getting away with something*. Even as a Christian.

## Conclusion

This morning, I want us to leave with one main thing. We are people of the book. It is a powerful book, it is a live wire kind of book. It brings spiritual life, it pierces through hard exteriors, it strips away our facades. God's Word is his chosen source to bring us spiritual life just as his spoken word brought about physical life. God's Word softens a hard heart and heals the broken heart.

This is why we take the preaching of God's Word so seriously. It is how God unleashes his power for salvation. At Faith EFC, God's Word performs heart surgeries every Sunday, and you can even go home the same day!

As I close, let me tell you an amazing story about the power of this book. It is about a man named Julius Hickerson. He was a doctor who enjoyed a comfortable life in the United States but felt God's call to serve as a missionary in Columbia. People thought he was crazy for leaving and after two years in Columbia he thought he was crazy because there was little fruit for his work. His life ended in tragedy when he was killed in a plane crash attempting to take supplies to a remote village.

There is more to the story. In the wreckage some natives found a well marked Bible and they began to read it. They told others what they read and before long many of the natives came to Christ. Some time later, a mission organization, unaware of what happened sent a missionary deep into the jungle to share the gospel. He arrived to find the place already filled with Christians. When he asked how they heard about Jesus, they showed him a well marked Bible and on the front page was the name, Julius Hickerson.

Brothers and sisters, [the Word of God is alive](#).

## Hebrews 4:14-16 – One Great High Priest

Sign Title: One Great High Priest

February 15, 2009

Have you ever spent time with someone famous? How do you act around them? How should you feel around them? A few years ago friends took us to a golf course in Benton Harbor, MI. They had some extra tickets for a prestigious golfing event. I had never gone golfing before so I decided to join them. They told me that this was a great opportunity because I would be able to see some guy named Tiger Woods. After arriving and showing our passes, we followed Tiger and the other golfers around the course. Sometimes he was playing 20 to 30 feet away. Did I mention this was my first time on a golf course. One of the golfers was putting on the green when my cell phone rang,... so I did the natural thing, I answered it! *The entire crowd turned and gave me the look of death.* Apparently, answering a cell phone is NOT something you do when someone is putting on the green. I really messed up the rules of golf etiquette. Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever messed with the rules of etiquette? Have you ever approached someone completely wrong. This morning, we are looking at how to properly approach someone even more famous than Tiger Woods. How do we approach God?

### Hebrews 4:14-16

We begin a new section in Hebrews today. Jesus as the great high priest. This isn't the first time we read about his priesthood. We first heard of it hinted at in Hebrews 2:17 *Jesus is our merciful and faithful high priest*; then in Hebrews 3:1 we read that *he is the high priest whom we confess*. Then there was nothing more about Christ's priesthood until these verses. It won't stop with these verses but the writer of Hebrews unpacking the high priesthood of Jesus for the next six chapters. So this morning we are turning a corner in this book.

Many of us already have questions. *What is a high priest? Why should I even care about one? What makes Jesus such a great one?* This language about a high priest seems weird to us because we are not Jewish, but to these Jewish Christians, it wasn't weird. Remember, they grew up seeing and watching priests and the high priest. It was the world they lived in. If we are going to understand this world we need to take a few minutes to travel back in time, to explain the role of the high priest and learn what he did.

### What is a High Priest?

The high priest was the highest priest, he was the lead priest, the spiritual leader of Israel. Aaron was the first high priest in Israel and the role was reserved for his descendants (Exodus 29:9). In rank, the high priest was second only to the king and he was in charge of the spiritual life of the nation.

His most important role occurred once a year on what is known as *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. Leviticus 16 describes in detail what the high

priest was to do. Once a year, Israel would gather for this most sacred ceremony.

We will learn more about the tabernacle in the following weeks, but the most sacred spot of the tabernacle was the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant stayed and where God dwelled. If you touched the ark, you died; remember Uzzah in the Old Testament? The high priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies only once a year. If he went more, I assume he would die. Scripture prescribed that bells were to be sown into the hem of his robe. As long as you heard the bells ringing, you knew he was still alive. Rabbinic tradition tells us they also tied a rope around his ankle. If God struck him dead, they needed a way to get him out because nobody wanted to wait till next year to get his body. This once a year job of coming before God for the people was pretty stressful. Mess it up and God might strike you dead. Remember, it happened for Uzzah.

When the high priest would enter the tabernacle area he would enter with two goats and a bull. He would sacrifice the bull as atonement for his own sins. He would then enter the Holy of Holies and sprinkle blood from the bull on the Ark of the Covenant on what is known as the *mercy seat*. The mercy seat was on the top of the Ark between the sculpted wings of the Cherubim. Next he would kill one goat as an offering for the sins of the people. He sprinkled that blood on the mercy seat for the atonement of their sins.

After doing that, he would bring the remaining goat forward and place his hand on the goat's head and confess all the sins of the people. This goat was known as the *scapegoat*. If we say someone is a scapegoat, what do we mean? He took the blame for something he didn't do. That is what this goat did. The *scapegoat* was then led into the wilderness, taken away from the people, released and never seen again. Symbolically this meant that goat took away the sins of the people, never to be seen again.

Given this brief job description of the high priest, what do you think is the role he played for the people. The high priest's role was to represent the people to God. We can think of him like a spiritual lawyer or an ambassador or a congressman. But instead of representing one person to another person, he represents people to God. The point of these verses is simple. Jesus is the great high priest. The word *great* in Greek is literally the word *mega*. Jesus the mega high priest, he is the ultimate representative for us to God. There are four reasons he gives us to show how great Jesus' priesthood is.

### **Why is Jesus such a great high priest?**

#### **Jesus is a heavenly high priest**

**...who has gone through the heavens...**

Where did the earthly high priest go to minister? He passed through the outer courts of the tabernacle, through the Holy Place, and into the Holy of Holies. Did you ever wonder why the tabernacle was set up this way? Did Moses dream up the blueprints for the tabernacle? No. This is the way Moses

was told to set it up by God when he was on Mt. Sinai getting the Ten Commandments.

They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.”

Hebrews 8:5

The earthly tabernacle that the earthly Aaronic priesthood served in was just a copy of the heavenly reality. Jesus became the high priest and the sacrifice for sin at the actual altar in heaven. When was his blood sprinkled on the mercy seat? After his resurrection and ascension into heaven. So who is the greater priest? The earthly one who works in a copy or Christ who offered his sacrifice in the actual heavenly one? *Jesus is one great high priest.*

**Jesus is a God - Man's high priest.**

...Jesus the Son of God...

Earlier in our study, we looked at the humanity of Jesus.

he too shared in their humanity. Hebrews 2:14

He was made like his brothers in every way. Hebrews 2:17

Earlier we also learned that not only is Jesus fully man, but he is also fully God.

He has spoken to us by his Son... the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being. Hebrews 1:3

He is Jesus (man) the Son of God (God). He is human and divine. What other high priest could ever say that? How does this make Jesus' priesthood better than Aaron's? It is self-evident. Who better to represent us to God than one who shares the divine nature to connect with God and one who shares in the human nature to connect with us? Aaron was merely a man representing other men. Jesus is a God-man representing man to God. What do you think? Could there be a better high priest than Jesus? *Jesus is one great high priest.*

**Jesus is a Sympathetic High Priest**

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin. Hebrews 4:15

Now things are going to get really exciting. This verse begins with a double-negative. I never liked that in math class or grammar class. We do not have a high priest who is unable. What does a double-negative mean? It means a positive! We have a high priest who is able to sympathize with us. Why did the writer of Hebrews put this as a double-negative, I don't know, we will have to ask when we get to heaven. Jesus sympathizes with our weaknesses!

How can he sympathize with us? He went through temptation and suffered with weakness all his life. The verse says, *He was tempted in every way, just as*

*we are, yet was without sin.* What does this mean? Does it mean He experienced every possible temptation? Jesus was not tempted by internet pornography, he was not tempted with insider trading in the stock market. He didn't experience temptations that would be specific to a woman. He didn't experience temptations that would be peculiar to the elderly. What does this verse mean?

Jesus experienced the essence of the same temptations that we face. Jesus may not have experienced the temptation of internet pornography but Jesus did experience sexual temptation. He may not have experienced the temptation of insider trading in the stock market but he did experience the temptation of greed.

Here is where some people get derailed. They think that since Jesus didn't experience my modern day particular temptation, he doesn't understand the power of the temptation I am facing. Nothing could be further from the truth. This is the whole point of this passage. Jesus understands the struggles we face more than we realize.

If anything Jesus' experience of temptation was much tougher than anything we will ever face. I like the way C.S. Lewis wrote about this.

A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of the German army only by fighting against it, not by giving in. You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means - the only complete resist. (C.S. Lewis, [Mere Christianity](#), pg. 124-125.)

So Jesus may not have experienced my particular temptation but he experienced the root of that temptation and he has experienced the pain of the struggle against it to a much greater degree than I ever will because he never gave in!

Another mistake people make is they think Jesus was somehow insulated, like a wire, from the realness of temptation. They think that since Jesus is God that took away the realness of the temptation he faced. They reason, of course Jesus didn't sin, he was God, temptation was no big deal. After all, doesn't it say in James 1:13 that God can not be tempted? Recently, someone contacted me through my website who had questions about a sermon I delivered. They were struggling to believe in the realness of the temptations Jesus faced. This individual quoted William Barclay.



As he was incapable of sin, feeling things with men's feelings yet without sin as he was incapable of sin, thinking things with men's minds yet without sin as he was incapable of sin.

What do you think? How insulated was Jesus from the realness of temptation? The whole point of this passage is that Jesus *does* understand. Temptation wasn't fake for him

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Hebrews 5:7

The phrase prayers and supplications is interesting. It is the translation of a special word in the Greek that is used only once in the New Testament. It literally means begging. Jesus was begging His father for help like someone who is being led away to their death cries out for help. Jesus called to his father with loud cries and tears. Jesus was bawling uncontrollably. Real emotions. Why? He could see what lied ahead of him. He understood the incredible suffering he would go through and he was looking at it in absolute horror. Jesus' sufferings were real, his temptations were real. Jesus understands what we go through. He wasn't insulated from experiencing the things we experience. That is important!

In music there is something called sympathetic resonance. If you have a stringed instrument in a room and you play an open note on a string, if there is an identical instrument in the room the identical string on the same instrument will begin to resonate.

The Bible says, we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses. When we go through temptation and struggles, Jesus experiences sympathetic resonance with our sufferings and temptations because he was tuned to 100% manhood. His heart vibrates with the same feelings we are experiencing. That is the great high priest we want to represent us to the father, because he actually understands the struggles and temptations we are facing. Jesus understands s better than any Aaronic priest ever could have.

*Jesus is one great high priest.*

### **What does Jesus' Great High Priesthood mean for me today?**

Quite simply, everything! How should we approach God with our struggles and needs?

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4:16

Remember the earthly Aaronic high priest? How often could he approach God? Once a year and only for a few moments. When he approached God you know he was not confident, he was scared. He had hugged his wife, kissed his kids goodbye, made sure his will was up to date, everything was scary and uncertain. He had a rope on his ankle in case God struck him dead.



With Jesus, we have the exact opposite. It says, *approach the throne of grace with confidence*. The word confidence literally means *frankness of speech*. No fear, it means let it all hang out. We can do that because Jesus understands, we can tell God what is really on our mind and how we really feel *without fear!*

With Jesus we can come before God in the *real* holy of holies in heaven not a copy on earth. We can come before God *any time we want* not once a year. We can do it with no strings attached, literally. No fear of being struck dead. In fact Jesus, the ultimate high priest, experiences sympathetic resonance with the temptations and sufferings we experience when he pleads our case before the heavenly father. He experienced suffering and temptation to a much greater degree than any earthly high priest did so he can plead our case to God better than any earthly high priest could. *Jesus is one great high priest*. Because of Jesus we know when we pray to God, something will happen. We will receive Mercy and Grace in or time of need. What does that mean? Let me explain.

Mercy is what we need for our past failures. It means not getting what we deserve. It is saying, "Father, Kurt here, I blew it again. I can't change what I've done but I confess it to you. I need your help and your forgiveness." Because of Jesus, God the Father says, *I forgive you. Go and sin no more*.

If mercy is not getting what we deserve, what is grace? Grace is one step more, it is getting what we don't deserve. It is God showing kindness to us we don't deserve.

What does this look like? It may be kindness to us spiritually. It may be undeserved kindness physically, with food or shelter. It may be the strength to handle a tough marriage or recovery after a major defeat in our life. God will give us this grace *in our time of need*. God will give us what we need at the time we need it.

Let me be honest, sometimes I think God is running late with his grace and mercy delivery truck. It is only down the road we realize God's delivery of grace and mercy was right on time. It might not have been lots of grace and mercy but for sure, it was enough for the day. It was like manna. It is new every morning and just enough to get us through.

## Conclusion

Everywhere in this world, people are coming before God. Some try to do it on their own, others have chosen the Dali Lama, or another religious hero for their life. The Scriptures are clear, there is only *one great high priest*. He will never be surpassed because he can never be surpassed. As we close, everyone here is facing some kind of temptation, financial struggle or hurts. Rather than me praying for us as a congregation, let's put God's Word into practice. In silence, approach God's throne with confidence, pour out your heart to Jesus. We will receive grace and mercy in our time of need.

## Hebrews 5:1-10 – Priest Supreme

Sign Title: Priest Supreme

February 23, 2009

When I go shopping at Wal-Mart, every once in a while I glance at the magazines by the check out. The covers are designed to grab your attention with fancy photos and wild claims. *Lose ten pounds in two weeks. Grandmother wins baking contest, her secret recipe from aliens.* The claims are pretty far fetched. There is one magazine that leaves me not laughing, but actually feeling a little inferior. It is Muscle and Fitness magazine.

As a high school and college athlete, I spent a lot of time in the gym. I tried to get big muscles but I *never* looked *anything* like those super-human, freak-of-nature guys on the cover of that magazine. When you flip through the magazine, it is page after page of those super-human bodies which leaves you looking in the mirror and feeling,... pretty hopeless.

Comparing our bodies to others like that can be a very discouraging thing to do, but in the Bible, comparisons are very good thing to do. In the book of Hebrews, the writer is doing a lot of comparisons. He compared Jesus to the angels, Jesus is better; he compared Jesus to Moses, Jesus is better. This morning we are doing some more comparing. This time it is comparing Jesus to the Jewish High Priest.

Hebrews 5:1-10

### Why is a comparison to the High Priest Important?

I know what you are thinking. This is really weird comparison. Who cares about how Jesus compares to an ancient high priest? What makes the high priest so special anyway?

To understand what the Bible means to us, we must always begin by understanding what the Bible meant to those to whom it was written. We are not first century Jews so the high priest means nothing to us. Let's begin by learning how big a guy the high priest was in their world.

Last week we learned the high priest is the *only* person allowed into the Holy of Holies of the temple and only *once* a year. Josephus, who was a first century historian, wrote about how revered the high priest was in Jewish life

The high priest will sacrifice to God, safeguard the laws, adjudicate in cases of dispute and punish those who commit a crime. *Any who disobeyed the high priest will pay the penalty for impiety as toward God himself.*

It is hard for me to overstate how highly esteemed the high priest was in the Jewish mind. After the death of Herod and his sons, high priests were entrusted with the leadership of the nation. The high priest was the ultimate religious leader. He is the only one who can go before God. He is the leader of Jewish society. He had celebrity status. At times he was the leader of the

government. Roll all these qualities into one person and you get the idea of how important and powerful the high priest was. He is the number 1 man in Jewish religion, politics and society at the same time.

Let me give you an example of the respect this man garnered. In Acts 23, Paul was defending himself against accusations in front of the Sanhedrin and the high priest had someone strike Paul on the mouth. How did Paul handle this? Acts 23:3 Paul says

**God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck! Acts 23:3**

So Paul was hot! What happened to him was unlawful, it wasn't right. You can't slap Paul around just because you feel like it. Notice how Paul handles this.

**Those who were standing near Paul said, "You dare to insult God's high priest?" Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'" Acts 23:4-5**

So here is the situation, even though Paul is right, when he realizes the wrong action was commanded by the high priest, he backpedals in a hurry! That is how respected a high priest is. Paul wouldn't even take him on when the high priest was wrong! In the peoples eyes, the high priest has that freak-of-nature kind of status compared to everyone else. Super human spirituality and respect.

To claim that Jesus is greater than the high priest doesn't sound like much of a claim to us but it was earth shattering to them. Saying that the high priest looks like a pencil neck compared to Jesus is hard for them to imagine.

In this section, the writer of Hebrews establishes the Superiority of Jesus over the high priest by comparing three qualities the high priest possessed to Jesus. These qualities of the high priest are described in v.1-4 and the same qualities are described about Jesus in verses 5-10. Let's see how Jesus compares to the high priest.

### **Comparing the High Priest to Jesus.**

#### **Comparison 1 - The High Priest was just a man, Jesus became a man.**

**Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices. Hebrews 5:1**

This may seem obvious, but it is good to state it anyway because other religions get this wrong. The high priest, the one who was to come before God to help us deal with our sins, needed to be a man. He couldn't be an angel or an animal or anything else. The high priest needed to be a man to represent men before God. There was no other way to do it. Why is that? What is wrong with

having an animal or an angel as your intermediary to God? The answer is in the next verse. (*because he is a man...*)

**He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. Hebrews 1:2**

The phrase *deal gently* means to moderate feelings. In representing man to God the high priest was not to be too surprised or indignant by the sins of the people because he, as a man, understands how tough life is. He understands how easy it is to mess up and make a wrong choice. Because the high priest is human he understands the human condition and will deal gently with people. He won't ignore their sin and won't fly off the handle at them.

Some of you know I like to watch crime shows in the evenings. Shows like 48 Hours, Unsolved Mysteries and Forensic Files. I like to watch them because I want the guilty party to get caught and get what he deserves. Like every one of us, I want justice to be served.

But I have another feeling when I watch those shows. On the one hand, while I am amazed people are capable of such incredibly barbaric crimes. On the other hand, I stop and remember that I am capable of the same sins. Every one of us is. Robert McCheyne said it well, "*The seeds of the sin of all men lie within my heart.*" It just means that we say to ourselves, "There but for the grace of God, go I."

This is why the high priest had to be human, not an angel or an animal. He had to understand how easy it is to sin.

How about Christ? Did he understand our human condition? Yes, and like we began learning last week, he understands our condition better than we realize. The writer of Hebrews quotes from Psalm 2:7 which is talking about Jesus.

**You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Hebrews 5:5**

Now, let's read this carefully. This Psalm says that Jesus is God's Son. The Son of God is eternal. He never became God the Father's Son, he always was God the Father's son. But it says *today*, I have become your Father. How does the Son always be the Son but at a point in time the heavenly Father becomes his father? I don't like the way the NIV translated this. The notes in the margin of the NIV are a better way to translate the Hebrew. **Today I have begotten you.** Begetting is an old english word to describe what happens between a mother and father, they beget children. This has to do with the what we celebrate at Christmas when the Son became a man. Jesus always was the Son, but at the incarnation, God the Father became his father by begetting him. In fact, if we read the rest of Psalm 2 what we find is that Psalm 2 is about the Son of God becoming a man and ruling over all of God's creation, becoming the King of creation. This Psalm is about Jesus getting back his right to rule the creation he fashioned. Look just a little later in the Psalm

Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way. Psalm 2:10-12a

Rulers of this world, kiss the Son, he is in charge!

So how does the great high priest compare to Jesus? The high priest is a man in charge of Israel but Jesus is God-man who is in charge of EVERYTHING and before whom EVERYTHING and EVERYONE in the universe will bow. The almighty high priest is beginning to look pretty wimpy.

### **Comparison 2 - The high priest was tempted and failed, Christ was tempted and succeeded.**

One of the great characteristics of the high priest was that he understood people. He was a human being so he was subject to the same temptations and difficulties as human beings. He knew what it was like to forget, he knew what it was like to grow old. He understood pain in his back and pain in his knees. He understood what it was like to be hungry. He understood what it was like to get sick. He understood how hard it is to trust God when we feel like life is falling apart. The high priest could connect with real people. This is what it says about the high priest.

He could deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. Hebrews 5:2

It is great to have a high priest who understands real life. But there was a problem with even the greatest earthly high priest. He screwed up. He had issues. He not only understood real life but he messed up in real life. He sinned.

This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. Hebrews 5:3

Remember last week? The high priest had to offer a bull in sacrifice for his own sin before he could offer a goat for the peoples sin. No matter how great the high priest was or how well he connected he was with real life, he *failed* at life.

How does this compare to Jesus? Here we step into some stuff that sounds difficult but if you stick with me, you will make it through. In fact, I think you will start to get really ramped up about Jesus. We looked at this verse last week.

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Hebrews 5:7

We looked at this last week. Prayers with loud cries and tears are heart wrenching prayers. Last week we described this as sobbing. Jesus saw the horror of the cross and he cried out to his Father, *if there is any other way, I will take it, but not my will be done but yours.* No doubt Jesus' time with his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane was one of these times when he was in such

emotional anguish over the coming cross he was sweating drops of blood. Last week I described Jesus like a wire without insulation. There was nothing shielding him from the reality of the pain on the cross. He wasn't insulated from the difficulties of the humanity in any way. Nothing took the edge off the pain of real life. No Tylenol, no Oxy-Cotton, no morphine. Now it gets even more exciting

Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.  
Hebrews 5:8-9

What does this mean? How could Jesus learn obedience. We think of obedience in opposition to disobedience. That is not what is happening here. As God, Jesus intellectually knew what obedience was and he was always obedient as the Son of God. BUT to *fully identify* with the human condition, he would need to surrender the use of his divine attributes to the will of the Father and fully experience the difficulties of our life completely from our perspective so he can say that he knows what it is like to be obedient to God the Father as a human being, not just as a divine being. Jesus knows what it is like to walk by faith and obey the Father through suffering. This is the obedience he learned. Not obedience in contrast to disobedience but the experience of obedience to the Father as a man when it is hard and we suffer because of it. Why did he do this? He did it to fully identify with us!

Now comes another phrase that throws people off *once made perfect*. What does that mean? We think he must have been imperfect. No, that is not what is being said. Jesus was not imperfect. He was made perfect in that he became the perfect fit for our salvation because he now perfectly identified with us in EVERY WAY. He wrestled through real life and did it without sin. Jesus perfectly understands us.

So just as the high priest understood real life so he could deal gently with people. Jesus fully experienced real life so he can deal gently with us. There is one major difference between the high priest and Jesus. The earthly high priest needed to offer a sacrifice for his own sin because he failed at life. Jesus didn't. The high priest experienced real life and sinned. Jesus experienced real life and didn't sin.

Jesus' qualifications to serve as our heavenly high priest are making the earthly high priest look pretty wimpy.

**Comparison 3 - The earthly high priest was elevated temporarily, Jesus became a high priest forever.**

No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. Hebrew 5:4

There was no job application to be a high priest. Their motto was *don't call us, God will call you*. Remember how high priests were made. They were a hereditary line beginning with Aaron, Moses' brother. God appointed Aaron as



the high priest and his son became the next high priest when he died. Think of high priests a little like Supreme Court Justices. They served for life. In our economy, that is the kind of job you want.

Doing a bit of historical work here is helpful. In the first century, the Jews were having some trouble keeping high priests. From the time God began the High Priesthood in 1400 B.C. until 70 A.D., when the temple was destroyed by the Romans, there were 83 high priests. In the last 107 years there were 28 of them. Looking at it another way, over a span of 15 centuries, 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the high priests served in the final hundred years. What was happening? The Romans were changing the high priest like you and I change our... well you get the idea.

If the high priest didn't do what the Romans wanted, they yanked him out and put another one in. People could barely keep straight who was in charge. So when Hebrews was written the people had an acute sense of how incredibly temporary the high priesthood was. They didn't serve for a life-time; they served for a short-time. So the Aaronic high priesthood wasn't providing the sense of stability it was supposed to. Imagine what it would be like in a church where the pastor changed every 2 or 3 years. There was that feeling of disconnection, lack of progress, not depth of relationship. That is the same feeling the people have. People wanted a high priest they could count on to be there, to be the spiritual rock and the pillar in their society. They didn't have it.

How does Jesus compare? Is he stable? Will he always be there? The writer of Hebrews pulls out Psalm 110:4 and he explains a prophecy about Jesus that nobody else writing Scripture caught on to. Jesus was appointed by God to be a priest. He was appointed by God to be a priest of a different order, the order of Melchizedek.

**You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 5:6**

What is this all about? In Genesis 14 Abraham meets this guy named Melchizedek. The Bible tells us he was a king and a priest of God in Salem. Salem is the ancient name of Jerusalem. We are not going to discuss Melchizedek much this morning because we will study him later in Hebrews 7. But we should notice this much. Melchizedek was a priest of a different order. In other words, not recorded in Scripture is a story of God getting ahold of Melchizedek and anointing him to be a priest. The Bible doesn't tell us how his priesthood began, nor does it tell us how it ended. We don't know much about it other than this separate priestly line existed. According to Psalm 110:4, Jesus is of the line of Melchizedek. Like Melchizedek he is a priest *and* a king, Like Melchizedek he is without beginning of days and without end of days. So Jesus is not a priest that is going to get swapped around all day long by the Romans. He is here to stay. Jesus' priesthood is better because it will always be around. There is no "Best if used by" date stamped on the bottom of his priestly line. So compare the high priest who is a priest according to Aaron's line who dies or gets swapped out by the Romans, how does that compare to Jesus who is a priest *and a king* and who remains forever. So Jesus is looking like one of those freak-



of-nature super-human kind of priests when compared to even the great high priest who now looks like a real wimp.

Now, let's be frank. I know nobody came here this morning just ramped up about to learn about the Jewish high priest and how Jesus is better. You are wondering how this applies to real life. That is a good question. I was wondering csth that this week for a while too.

### **How does this apply to me?**

This passage is about where we place our affections and hopes. These Jews placed their affections and hopes on the high priest. He was the spiritual superhero who could pray to God for them and who could connect with them. He was the one they thought could fix their problems. Everybody wanted the high priest's autograph. Well, today, I am willing to bet nobody wants the high priest's autograph. But we treat some people like they are a high priest for us. We place our hopes and affections on them.

### **Don't place your hopes in a political leader.**

I had lunch with a friend of mine this week and we were talking about the economy. He told me that as a business leader he was forced to lay off more people this week. Most of us feel like our jobs are a little shaky. Maybe you are out of work right now. Turn on the news and what is everyone asking? Can Obama fix the economy? Will the democratic bailout plan work? News flash folks. Obama is *not* our man. Jesus is our man. That doesn't mean we don't pray for our President and honor our president, of course we do, but he is NOT our hero. He doesn't hold our future. Jesus holds our future. He is the one we find grace and mercy with in our time of need.

**Trust in the lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths. Proverbs 3:5-6**

**Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord. Jeremiah 17:5**

**The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases. Proverbs 21:1**

Don't place your hope of our uncertain future in the hands of a political man, put your hope in the hands of the God-man who is the king over not just the United States but is the king over all creation. **Jesus is supreme**. He promises to extend mercy and grace in our time of need.

### **Don't idolize Christian Celebrities.**

This is a major problem in the church today. Everybody has their high priest, their spiritual hero. For some it is John Piper, Ravi Zacharias, James Dobson, the list can go on and on. We even have ancient history celebrities. John Calvin, John Wesley, Spurgeon, Luther. What do we do? We divide up into camps who follow people. We even have Lutherans, Wesleyans, Calvinists, etc..

I have great respect for these Christian leaders that God has used and is using in great ways but let's be honest, sometimes it is out of hand. What does Paul say in 1 Corinthians 3. Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, only God who gives the growth. Apollos is nothing, Paul is nothing, Calvin is nothing, Piper is nothing, Dobson is nothing. They are the high priests in our culture. They are pencil necks compared to Jesus. He is the one whose name is to be on our lips. He is the one we worship and adore. He deserves all our affections because **Jesus is Supreme**. Focusing on any other human being does disservice to the greatness of the king of the universe, Jesus Christ.

This morning, make **Jesus supreme** in your life. You may be new to Christ and today as I close in prayer, now is the time, today is the day to ask the supreme one in the universe who died for your sin to be supreme in your life. For those of us who have known Christ for years, let's just admit that it is tough to keep Christ Supreme. We are trusting the government, we are following Christian celebrities. Today, let us make Jesus supreme

## Hebrews 5:11-6:1 – Measure Up

Sign Title: Measure Up

March 1, 2009

Lend me your imagination. Imagine a family invites you over for dinner. You are excited because you always admired this family and you are looking forward to knowing them personally by visiting together in their home. You arrive and are seated at the dining room table. You skipped lunch so you are anxiously awaiting the meal. The prayer is offered and the expectation of a thanksgiving-like feast is in the air. In walks your hostess serving piping hot, ... jars of baby food. *Who wants the smashed green peas?* The rest of the meal consists of animal crackers and baby cereal. Next, this families teenage sons appear from the kitchen. In their hands are baby bottles and they are sucking down formula through the rubber nipple; the white formula is dripping down their chin as they chug it down as fast as they can.

What would you think? Something is terribly wrong in that home. Adults eating baby-food? Teenagers living on milk? You would excuse yourself early and hit the drive through for a hamburger. This may sound weird, but it is the portrait the writer of Hebrews paints about the spiritual maturity of some of the people in the church in Rome. There were people in the church who were refusing to grow-up spiritually. They were refusing to move on to solid foods. Refusing to move on to solid food is not just a problem they had, but it turns out it is a problem many Christians have today. We are going to look at it this morning.

Hebrews 5:11-6:1

### What was the problem? Chronic Spiritual Immaturity

For the last two weeks we examined some heavy stuff in the sermons. We looked at the relationship between Jesus and the high-priest. The bottom line is that *Jesus is supreme*. He is greater than earthly high priests, the super-heroes of their day, in *every way* because he is greater than everything, he should be the object of our greatest affection. Last week the final comparison we looked at is how Jesus is like Melchizedek. It was a comparison of Jesus to a little known Old Testament priest. Some of you were going, WOW!! Pastor that comparison is into some deep stuff. I really had to use my brain to follow last week.

The writer of Hebrews knows he is about to talk about some challenging stuff with Melchizedek. He knows that some in the audience are going to balk, some here may have already balked last week and said, *why this complicated stuff, just give me three points and a poem and let me out of here*.

In this passage the writer of Hebrews is rebuking people who feel that way. He is not rebuking the Christian who finds Melchizedek hard to understand because they are new to the Bible, he is rebuking people who have been around the church a long time but do not want to hear anything challenging. He is rebuking Christians who don't like to think. They want everything handed to them

all mashed up like baby-food. Let's look at these verse and see what we can learn.

**The immature are slow to learn.**

we have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. Hebrews 5:11

Some of our translations say *dull of hearing*. What does it mean to be slow to learn or to be dull of hearing? It means slow to learn. They weren't catching on quick. Now understand, he is NOT talking about their cognitive ability. He is talking about their *desire* to learn not their *ability* to learn. Remember, he is not talking to new Christians but seasoned Christians who really haven't gotten off first-base spiritually. You can see what is happening. He knows some people are going to tune him out when he starts to talk about Melchizedek. He says, before you tune me out, the reason you seasoned Christians are tuning me out is because you are *slow to learn*. Not because you are not intellectually capable but because your heart has grown dull of hearing. Are you one of those people this morning? Has your heart grown dull to the things of God? Those who are dull of hearing really have little interest in God outside of the basics. They have no interest in picking up a Christian book to learn more, they have little interest in their Bible. When they leave church the thoughts are not about what God is saying to them today through the Bible and how they have learned how they can become more like Christ this week but it is all about lunch and a football game.

Have you ever been on a construction site? What sound does machinery make when it goes in reverse. Say it with me now. Beep, Beep, Beep! That sound is annoying. It is designed to get your attention and save your life so they make it as annoying as they can. But if you are the guy who regularly drives the equipment, after a while do you hear that sound any more? No. Folks, the same thing happens in the church. It is not Beep, Beep, Beep but the Words of life. Have you become so accustomed to God's Words that you aren't hearing God's voice.

I have a little test for you. A few weeks ago we looked at the power of the Word of God in Hebrews. The big idea was that God's Word is alive. God's Word is how God creates and sustains spiritual life in us. Anybody remember that sermon? One friend said to me, *Pastor that was a great sermon, I was really ramped up when I left*. I have a question, what really matters? That he was ramped up when he left, or that he read his Bible more that week. I don't know if he read God's Word more that week, but we all know that If we didn't make God's Word a higher priority we are *slow to learn*. Myself included on that one folks. When we learn something but don't apply something, we are not growing beyond our mashed peas.

Now, let me throw a little grace in here. Nobody is perfect, of course not. Are we all able to read our Bible's every day? Of course not, but that is what we

are striving toward. Slow to learn is hearing the message but not making any changes. It is not perfection but progress.

Here is a practical recommendation to help us move beyond being slow to learn. Buy a notebook and write your notes in it. Writing helps to clarify your thoughts. Find just one thing from a sermon that is preached that God wants you to apply to your life. That is all, apply one thing to your life and write it in a notebook so we don't forget it.

### **Don't get stuck in First-Grade**

**In fact, by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. Hebrews 5:12**

What happens when you don't get the basics? You can not move on. Let me share with you a little secret. I was good at math but I really struggled with algebra. My mother thought it was my algebra teacher. Maybe I was not a good student but in college I sometimes would do the dumbest things. I would solve the equation in Calculus II or Calculus III or numerical analysis and I would have all the calculus right but I had the answer wrong. I couldn't solve the algebra part. It was a problem with the basics in high school. When you don't get the basics, it kills you because you can't move on.

This is what the writer of Hebrews is talking about. He says *by this time* you ought to be teaching the class but you are having to repeat first-grade again and again. Elementary truths here literally means the A, B, C's. It means the first things. You are hung up on the basics.

He gives us what he defines as the basics of our faith. I am not going to spend much time on them this morning but let's quickly look at them.

**Repentance from dead works** - What is that all about?

**For by grace you are saved by grace through faith, it is the gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9**

God isn't interested in us paying him off, he wants our hearts and our hearts are designed for him. He saved us through Christ. We are saved by trusting in Christ. God wants not a work from us, he wants the heart of us.

**We Live by Faith toward God** - We live by faith. The Christian life is a life of faith. Faith means trust. We live following God, trusting in God's love for us and care for us. Our entire life is lived by faith. Remember Shadrack, Meshack and Abednago in the book of Daniel? They didn't bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's idol. They lived by faith.

**Instructions about washing and the laying on of hands** - What he is talking about is the Old Testament rituals. In the book of Hebrews the author is always saying that the washing and rituals of the Old Testament are not the main thing, they are a shadow that points to Christ.

**The resurrection of the dead** - We will rise from the dead and there is life after death. Our death is not the end but only the beginning. This shouldn't be a news flash for anyone.

**Eternal judgment** - After death comes judgment. As we said a few weeks ago, nobody gets away with anything. The Bible talks about the Great White Throne judgment where people are assigned to hell, yes, there are degrees of punishment in hell. The Bible talks about the judgment seat of Christ, where there are degrees of reward for Christians based on how we lived. These are the basics

Now there is nothing wrong with the basics. It is a great place to start. The problem is that while it is a great place to begin, you can't live on that being the point of the message every week. It isn't healthy.

Some churches don't get this. They actually encourage living on milk. You get their flyers in the mail. They advertise their messages a short, topical, always leaving you feeling good with lots of music. Their entire church ministry is designed to get in the spiritual newborns and feed them milk. That is good, but if milk is all you serve, how healthy will your adults be?

Let me stop and brag on you a bit. I am not the deepest preacher, I am not the most theologically profound, but for me to survive as a preacher spiritually, I need to wrestle with more than the basics. I praise God for you as a church because you are meat eaters. You are hungry for more than the basics. For most of us you can leave here this morning feeling like you are heading in the right direction spiritually, you are beyond the baby bottle. Take it as a compliment. There are times when we serve milk but we also serve full course spiritual meals because we need to grow to spiritual maturity, most of us even willing to eat our spiritual vegetables.

One of my favorite things to watch is the hunger of a new Christian. Have you seen them in action. They are in the front row of the church service. They read the Bible cover to cover in three weeks. They just can't get enough of God's Word. They leave the basics behind pretty quickly. They are like healthy children because in a matter of months they want solid food. That is great!

This morning I want to bring up a friend of mine who is a new Christian and I want him to share his story because he is spiritually hungry. Brian will you please come up.

[Brian Lane Testimony](#)

[How Can I Measure Up?](#)

[Train myself by constant use of God's Word](#)

[But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Hebrews 5:14](#)

What is the solid food he is talking about? It is the Word of God. This is why we are reading through the Bible this year as a church. The more word in

our lives, the healthier our spiritual lives will be. Understand that when we don't feed ourselves on the word of God, we will end up unhealthy and spiritually weak. God's Word creates in us a desire to do what God wants us to do. God's Word will strengthen me. It will come back to my mind in my morally weak moments and as a result we can distinguish between good and evil.

Children can't do that. Children have to always be told what is right and wrong. They have little capacity to make right decisions on their own. This is why we put a child safety lock on the cabinet under the sink when children are in the house. To them the bottle of drano looks good to drink. They have no ability for discretion.

Friends, let me share with you something that really pains me to watch. Every week I meet Christians who are making bad choice after bad choice and they are causing themselves wound after wound and they don't see it. Why are they making the wrong choices? Why can't they see it? Because they don't know what the Bible says. A few years ago I was talking with some young men whose parents were all upstanding Christians and these men were involved in their church and on their worship team and the subject of sex came up. Even though they grew up in the church, they all thought there was nothing wrong with pre-marital sex. All three of them. They said the Bible has nothing to say about it. Folks, the Bible says pre-marital sex is wrong. In fact, I wrote up a little sheet for them to show them a few places where it talks about pre-marital sex in the Bible and to help you I put in on my web site and our church's web site so you can look at it if you have questions. My point is simple, they didn't know that sex before marriage was wrong and as 25 year old men they were suffering the consequences of that ignorance. When God says no to pre-marital sex, he says it not to take away your life but to give you the best possible life. You are his children, he wants what is best for you, not what is worst! Is it hard to stay sexually pure. Yes, but it is possible and you will never regret it.

Friends, come to God's Word like your life depends on it. Our life does depend on it. We can't survive on milk.

### **Memorize God's Word**

There is tremendous benefit to memorizing God's Word. If this morning you are struggling with something sinful. One of the best things you can do is memorize a verse of Scripture that applies to what you are struggling with. When we memorize Scripture, God uses it to literally reprogram the way we think. Instead of the dominant thought being sinful, the dominant thought is God's Words. When we face a temptation, God's Holy Spirit will bring that verse back to our mind and apply it to our life for strength against the temptation.

Mom and Dad, give your children a gift, it will help give you a healthy home, take one verse for your family to learn each week. If that doesn't work, take one verse a month. Have the kids read it off the refrigerator at breakfast every day for a month and they will know God's Word for life. God will use that in their lives *forever*.



I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Psalm 119:11

## Conclusion

When I was growing up, we had this wall next to our refrigerator. Every few months mom and dad would have me stand next to the wall and they would mark my height with a ruler and write down the date. Did you grow up with something like that? When your parents were measuring you, how tall did you stand? Everyone wants to be bigger, everyone wants to **measure up**. My friends, this is the challenge of this passage, strive to grow not just physically but spiritually, **measure up** (say it with me). Everyone stand, stand as tall as you can and try and squeeze out that extra quarter inch. Let's prayerfully ask God to help us **measure up**.

**Prayer:** Father, help us to never be a church of spiritually content people. We want to measure up and grow to be as big in Christ as we can. We don't want to just be known as the spiritual milk-duds but spiritually mature people who love the solid food of your word.

## Hebrews 6:4-9 – Don't Fall Away From Jesus

Sign Title: Can I lose my salvation?

March 8, 2009

If you are new, I would like to welcome you to Faith EFC. We are in a series of studies on the book of Hebrews. When we began this series I warned you this book is one of the most challenging books to study in the New Testament. Up to now, we have cruised through the first five chapters without much difficulty. Most of us have stayed on top of it and enjoyed smooth sailing. You are probably thinking, *This book isn't too hard, why did Pastor Kurt say it was so difficult?*

With Hebrews 6 before us, let me just officially welcome you to Biblical rapids. This is theological white water - class 6. The passage we are about to look at is probably the most hotly debated passage in the New Testament. That doesn't mean we won't be able to understand it. Our challenge will be not retreating behind a theological system we learned when we were younger. This morning, let the text speak for itself That is my goal and I hope it is yours.

As we turn to Hebrews 6, remember the context of this letter. It was written to a church of Jewish Christians in Rome. They were struggling. Some of them could lose their life or family because of following Jesus. Some in the church are considering quitting, giving up, going back to Judaism and forgetting Jesus. As they consider this, the writer of Hebrews gives them the strongest warning in all of the New Testament about why they don't want to quit on Jesus.

Hebrews 6:4-6

He then illustrates this by giving an analogy

Hebrews 6:7-9

Has anyone ever heard a sermon on this passage? Well at least I can say I have fresh material.

Before we tackle the tough stuff, let's tackle the easy part in verses 7-9. Verses 7-9 will help us understand the tough part in verses 4-6

**An illustration - Cultivated Land that refuses to produce a crop is in danger of being destroyed.**

This illustration should connect with people in Iowa. We are an agricultural state. This fall Doug took me for a ride in his combine. He has a nifty computer that tells him how much corn he is harvesting from a particular piece of ground. Some ground is more productive than others. Imagine Doug had a field that received all the right rain. It was fertilized right, it had all the bug killers on it. It had everything going for it but at the end of the summer, it didn't give him a crop. Next year he tried again, but nothing of value grew, he tried again the next year but nothing. In fact, all he was ever able to get out of that field was thorns

and thistles. Farmers, what would you do with that field? After years with no crop, I am sure you would be biting your upper lip to keep from cursing at it. The writer of Hebrews says a field like that is in danger of being cursed and burned. So the illustration is about a field having all the right things going for it, but never producing a crop. This illustration was given for a reason. It is an interpretive tool to help us understand what is happening in verse 4-6.

Verses 4-6 are about people who have all the right conditions for growing and producing spiritual fruit in their lives, but nothing is happening. They are not letting the gospel take root and grow in their lives. There is no fruit at the end of their lives. What amazes me is how many things these unfruitful people have going for them. Let's look at the right conditions these people have going for them.

### **What are the right conditions to produce spiritual fruit in a life?**

#### **They have been enlightened.**

**It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened... Hebrews 6:4**

The Greek word for *enlightened* is *photizo*. It is where we get our word photo. It means light. To be enlightened on a subject is to move from being in the dark about something to understanding it. It doesn't mean you believe it, but you understand it. It is like bungee jumping. You may know the physics of bungee jumping. You may have tested the bungee cord and know it won't snap. You watched other bungee jumpers jump. In your head you know all about bungee jumping because you are enlightened on the subject. But it is something completely different to jump off a bridge with a bungee cord wrapped around your ankles. That is moving beyond enlightenment to belief.

This description in this passage is of someone who has been in a position where they have the gospel clearly explained to them. They understand what Christ did for them. There is no lack of comprehension or lack of information. This individual has been enlightened about Jesus but it doesn't say they believed in Jesus.

#### **They tasted the heavenly gift**

**It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift,... Hebrews 6:4**

What is this heavenly gift? I don't know. Some scholars think it is the Holy Spirit. Thankfully, we don't need to know exactly what it is because the key here is what they did with it. They just *tasted* it. If you have been to a Cost Co or major food store, what do they do with a new product they are trying to sell? They give out samples. They are hoping that after you briefly taste their product, you will want to buy their product. They give you a taste test. The word *taste* in the Greek doesn't literally mean consuming food but it means to *come to know something* it means to become familiar with it.

Here we are talking about someone who has come to know the heavenly gift. Not in a full way but they sampled it much like you and I would have a

sample of a dessert that is designed to entice us to buy a product. What I want us to notice is that while they experienced the sample, it doesn't say this person bought the product. They didn't buy the entree of Christ and call him their own.

### **They shared in the Holy Spirit**

**It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit... Hebrews 6:4**

This is a tough phrase to understand. To share in the Holy Spirit appears to suggest that this person is a Christian because they experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in their life. But let's take a closer look. The word *shared* in the Greek is not nearly as strong as it sounds in the English. In the Greek, it can mean close intimacy or it can mean loose association. We have heard of guilt by association. This is benefit by association. Similar to one of us being terrible at baseball but we are playing for the winning team. We experience some of the benefits associated with the team even though we never made it to first base the whole season.

This is describing someone who is part of a church and they are right alongside people who have the Holy Spirit working in their life. This individual is experiencing benefits of the Holy Spirit by association with others.

### **Tasted the goodness of God's Word**

**who have tasted the goodness of the word of God... Hebrews 6:5**

Here is that word *taste* again. Remember, it means a sampled experience. Here the person has not just sampled the holy gift but the goodness of God.

### **Tasted the powers of the coming age.**

Here is that *tasted* word again. Hebrews 2:4 talks about signs, wonders and various miracles that God performed among these Christians. They sampled the power of God.

These people have a lot going for them. Everything is in their corner encouraging them to produce spiritual fruit. Many people believe these verses teach Christians can lose their salvation, they can turn their back on Christ, walk away and never be saved again. I don't believe these verses are teaching that. Let me explain why.

**NOTE: This is not talking about losing salvation.**

### **None of the language is salvation language**

I carefully explained the language here. What did you notice about it? There are no salvation words here; nothing about faith, justification, adoption, or regeneration. The language is all about comprehension, but not belief. It is about benefit by association, not benefit because of actual spiritual life. It is about sampling not buying. These words are describing a person who can be very close to being saved, who are in the church, who understand the gospel,

who can look pretty good on the outside but when you get close enough, even though they have everything going for them, there is no fruit in their life. They are like a field that has everything going for it. It has all the rain, all the fertilizer, it may even be next to a good field, but when the end of the season comes around, there is no fruit.

It is talking about someone having everything going for them spiritually but rejecting it.

### **The passage says it is not about losing salvation**

Another reason we know this passage is not talking about someone losing their salvation is because the passage says it.

Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case - things that accompany salvation. Hebrews 6:9

So the writer of Hebrews knows that he just gave a very stiff warning but then he says, I am confident about better things for you, things that accompany salvation. So the things he talked about before were things that don't come from salvation. We may think these are signs of salvation but they aren't. I don't have time to cover it this morning but the book of 1 John is about what signs accompany salvation. I put some of that in your Small Group study sheet for you to look at later. But for now just understand, he told us that these things are not the signs of salvation.

### **The rest of Scripture tells us we can not lose our salvation.**

Another reason this can not be saying that we lose our salvation is because the rest of Scripture tells us that our life with Christ originates with God. There is nothing we can do to deserve it, there is nothing we can do to take it away.

being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6

those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. Romans 8:30

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will. Ephesians 1:4-5

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. John 10:27-28

They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. 1 John 2:19

I know this may be rattling some of our theological fences because you thought we could lose our salvation. That is not what these verse are teaching.

They are a warning to people who have everything going for them spiritually but are spiritual pretenders. But let's play the other side of the fence for a moment.

### **What does it mean to “fall away” from Christ?**

The writer of Hebrews is warning them not to *fall away*. If we can't lose our salvation, what does it mean to *fall away*? In every church there are people who have everything going for them spiritually. They may look saved but at the end of the day, they walk away from Christ. Let me give you an example.

Judas, who betrayed Christ must have acted almost exactly like the other disciples during the three years he was with Jesus. He was so convincing that at the end of three years of Jesus' ministry, when Jesus said one of his disciples would betray him, they did not all turn and suspect Judas, but they began asking one another *Is it I Lord*. But Jesus knew there was no genuine faith in Judas' heart, because he said at one point.

**Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil? John 6:70**

Jesus knew Judas was a spiritual pretender. Paul also talks about servants of Satan who disguise themselves as servants of righteousness

**For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve. 2 Corinthians. 11:15.**

This does not mean that if you are here this morning as someone who has not trusted Christ, you are a secret servant of Satan sent to undermine the church. You might still be checking out Christ and you haven't trusted him yet and God is in the process of drawing you to himself. I prayerfully hope you will embrace Christ soon.

The writer of Hebrews is simply making the point that there are people who are along for the ride in the church bus and are enjoying the benefits of the ride, but they never bought the ticket by deciding to make Christ the real treasure of their heart. Remember, these folks are really close to the church, people that enjoy many of the benefits of the spiritual life of others. Not because the Holy Spirit is working in their life but because they are associated with people who have the spirit working in their life. At the end of the day they are just like Judas, we will know it because they will fall away and there is no spiritual fruit produced from their lives. So what is “falling away” from Christ? It is when faith becomes hard and the detriments of our faith seem to outweigh the benefits, there are some people who will walk away from Jesus. How do they do that? The only way is that they never really knew him in the first place.

### **Why is it impossible for those who fall away to return to Christ?**

**It is impossible for those who have once been.... if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance., Hebrews 6:4-6**

Why do you think it is impossible for these people to return to Christ? What would a conversation be like with someone like this. If you tell them the Bible is true they will say, *I know all about it but I am rejecting it.* If we tell them God answers prayers and changes lives, they will say *I know that, but I don't care.* If we tell them the Holy Spirit is powerful and brings life to dead and hopeless circumstances they will say, *so what?* If we tell them there is eternal life for a Christian that is beyond description, what will they say? *I know, but it doesn't matter to me.*

They are so familiar with the things God uses to create and nourish spiritual life but they are rejecting them, what else can we do? What else should God do? Farmers, if you have tried everything for a field and year after year there is no fruit, you will eventually conclude there is no hope for the field because everything you have to create life has been rejected.

It is not just Judas who turned his back on Jesus but people who do that are all around us. Axyl Rose, the lead singer for Gun's and Roses had a father who was a baptist minister, he knew it all but chose to reject it all. Marilyn Manson grew up in a conservative evangelical home and went to a private Christian School. He chose to reject all of it. Michael Shermer, author and editor of *Skeptic* magazine and one of the most outspoken people against the Christian faith in America claims at one time he had a born-again experience but turned his back on it.

The Bible gives us another reason why turning our back on Jesus means we can never be brought back to repentance.

...because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace. Hebrews 6:6

This doesn't mean Christ would literally need to be crucified again, it is a figure of speech. It means fully knowing what God did in Christ and they chose to reject Jesus, the king of creation, the one who died for them, the one who loves them more than anyone else, turn their back and walk away. They have chose blatant rebellion against the greatest love that could ever be given to them or shown to them. If we reject Jesus, what is left? Does Christ have to go through his life, death and crucifixion for sin a second time. NO! There is no other option beside Jesus.

## Conclusion

This morning, if you are considering Jesus and your heart is soft to him, today is the day, now is the time to respond to him. Do not assume your heart will always be soft. Jesus says that Satan will try to steal God's Word away from your heart when you leave this morning. Jesus says that the cares of this world will try and choke out God's Word in your life this week. Today, before you leave, decide to make Jesus, the king of creation, the king of your life.

How does this apply to the rest of us? Travel back in time to this church in Rome. Life wasn't easy. Christ was costing them... everything. Some of them



would eventually be burned and tortured for their faith. Nothing was easy about being a Christian. You can hear the sobbing prayers of the women, *Jesus, if you love us, why was my husband taken away from me? Jesus, if you loved us, how could you let my husband lose his job? If you loved me, why is life so hard?* Jesus loves me,... Jesus failed me.

In the fall of 2007 I conducted a funeral, for the daughter of one of my best friends. She was 24. During those dark days, he told me that he could hardly pray, he could hardly open his Bible. He was angry with God. The joy of his life was taken away. It took him months to read the Bible again. Jesus loves me,... Jesus failed me.

Are you in one of those tough places? A place where life is so tough that you wonder if God cares about you. A place where you are beginning to wonder if Jesus even exists. If you aren't in one of those really hard places right now, it is only a matter of time until you will face that major crisis moment. The words of Scripture say to us in those moments that we can be angry, we can be hurt, **don't fall away from Jesus**. If you turn away from Jesus, it means you never knew him. **Don't fall away from Jesus**. Apart from him, there is no hope. **Don't fall away from Jesus**, if you give up on him, it may callous your heart so hard that there is no coming back. In the dark valleys of the soul where everything in life feels like it is falling apart and everything we know about God and his Word feels like it might not be true, there is one thing we don't want to do. *(Say it with me)* **Don't fall away from Jesus**.

## Hebrews 6:9-12 – Keep It Up

Sign Title: Keep Up the Good Work

March 15, 2009

If you are new to Faith EFC, I would like to welcome you. On Sunday mornings, we are studying the book of Hebrews. Last week we looked at the middle of Hebrews 6. It is a piece of Scripture that contains one of the most sobering warnings in the Bible. *Don't fall away from Jesus*. We learned that if a person experiences God's Word, if they taste the goodness of the Holy Spirit, if they are enlightened about Christ and what he did for us on the cross; if in the face of challenges to follow Christ someone chooses to turn their back on Christ and walk away after they have enjoyed that level of spiritual exposure; it is impossible for them to be brought back to repentance. It is sobering to realize how hardened to the things of God we can become if we choose to reject God's grace through Jesus Christ.

While last week was sobering, ironically the next verses of Hebrews are intended to be very encouraging, and after last week, we probably need to hear that.

### Hebrews 6:9-12

Have you been on a road trip and while on the trip, you have that sudden suspicion you are on the wrong road? Your wife pulls out the map and she is looking for road signs to help identify your location while her finger is trying to find your place on the map.

Not knowing if you are on the right road is a frustrating feeling because if you are wrong, you just wasted a lot of time and fuel. You know the feeling where tension fills the car as everyone is looking for a sign that will let you know you are on the right path? Finally you see it, Spirit Lake, 100 miles ahead. Everyone breathes a sigh of relief.

That same uneasy feeling was felt by the Christians in Rome. Last week, the writer of Hebrews said: People who are spiritually enlightened, who tasted the goodness of God's Word. who experienced the powers of the age to come are not necessarily on the right road spiritually. They wondered, if those are not the signs of a relationship with God through Christ; what is? In this passage the writer of Hebrews gives them two road signs they should look for to know they are traveling in the right direction with God. They are the same signs we should look for in our spiritual life. He calls them, *things God will not forget*.

### What Doesn't God Forget?

God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. Hebrews 6:10

What are the road signs we are on the right spiritual road? Our work for God and our service to others.

**God will not forget our works of worship for him.**

The NIV skips over a little phrase in the Greek that many other translations include. This little phrase is very important. It is the phrase “into his name”.

For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. Hebrews 6:10 (ESV)

We are not talking here about general acts of altruism. This is not Faith Hill doing a Hurricane Katrina benefit concert. He says these are works of service *done for God* or *done in God’s name* or *done to increase God’s fame* or *increase God’s glory* that is what God will not forget.

These Christians in Rome had done extraordinary works of service for God’s fame.

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. Hebrews 10:32-34

Do you see why he had confidence in them? Look how they lived. They faced suffering and humiliation. They stood by others who were persecuted. They helped other Christians in their church who went to prison. Get this, they were even joyfully letting their stuff be taken because they were thinking about the better and lasting possessions they had in heaven. Wow, these men and women took their work for God seriously. This is a whole different level than working for God by joining the church choir.

The desire of their heart was to please God even if it cost them. Their motto was *pleasing Christ is more important than pleasing me*. We should notice that pleasing Christ more than ourselves will often involve sacrifice. It might be a sacrifice of time, it might be a sacrifice of money, it might be a sacrifice of popularity when other teenagers choose not to go along with you because you won’t go along with the crowd. Most of the American church doesn’t like to talk about this but it is true. Pleasing Christ will involve a sacrifice. BUT... do you think God will forget your sacrifice for him? Absolutely not! Every time we honor God rather than ourselves God gets out his notebook and says, *I’m writing that down, not gonna forget that*.

Every sacrifice we make for God, is not forgotten. We will probably forget it, God won’t.

**God will not forget our love for His people.**

Someone once said the church wouldn’t be so bad if it wasn’t for all the people in it. I guess the person loved the worship service but couldn’t stand the

person she was next to. The problem is church is not a building or a service, the church is people. We love Jesus by loving his people.

If Jesus showed up this morning and asked for a cup of water, would anyone be willing to get it for him? If Jesus needed a ride to Burger King for lunch, would anyone be willing to drive him? If Jesus showed up this morning we would have to pass out the deli counter numbers at the super market because we would fight over who could serve him first.

According to the parable of the sheep and the goats that Jesus taught in Matthew 25, when we serve brothers and sisters in Christ, we are serving Jesus.

**I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me. Matthew 25:40**

In that parable, the sheep are trying to figure out how they served Jesus. Jesus says to them, when you visited a brother in prison, you visited me. When a brother or sister in Christ needed clothes, you clothed me. When a brother was thirsty, you gave me a cup of cold water to drink. When a sister is sick and you visited her, you visited me. Everything we do for a brother or sister in Christ we do for Jesus and it will not be forgotten by God.

This is one of the reasons I am excited that we are now taking up a benevolent offering that is above and beyond our regular offering. The benevolent offering is distributed by the elders and pastors to brothers and sisters in Christ here in the church who are in need. When we give to benevolent needs in the body, we are giving directly to Jesus. Folks, God will NOT forget that.

The road signs that we are on the right path spiritually are the works we do for God and the love we show towards God's people in particular, those in need. These are the evidences Christ is in our heart. This is how we are to live.

**For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10**

**Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Hebrews 10:24**

**who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Titus 2:14 (ESV)**

Are you familiar with our credo at Faith EFC? I type it in the header of our mid-week email and it is on our letterhead. Our credo is, *passion for God, compassion for our neighbor*. Our credo loosely resembles this. Those who are passionate for God, work for God and those with compassion for their neighbor will love brothers and sisters in Christ.

I was thinking about this and it struck me, God looks at our lives exactly the opposite of how we see ourselves. We forget our works for him and our love for others. We forget helping in the nursery and serving at AWANA. We forget

making a meal and bringing it over to someone's home. We forget the offering once it is in the plate. We forget most of the work we do for God and the love we show toward his people. What we remember are our failures. We remember our sins that are like late afternoon shadows that follow us wherever we go.

Did you ever realize that God looks at us exactly the opposite way. He forgets our sins but he will not forget our works. We remember our sin and forget our works, he remembers our works and forgets our sin. Isn't that great? What a great encouragement when we failure and what are great motivation to serve him.

### **How should we live?**

Living on the East coast in the 1990's, I had the opportunity to drive with my friends to Florida for spring break. All the way down the coast to Florida there are hundreds of road signs to a place I believe was called *South of the Border*. Every few miles a new sign would be up. *Just 375 more miles to South of the Border, we have cold drinks. A little later it would say just 372 miles to South of the Border, we also sell ice cream.* I don't know if this place still exists. Does anybody know?

Here is the key. *As long as you were still passing their signs, you knew you were on the right path.* What is wrong when you are not passing any more signs? You aren't heading in the right direction. This is the same thing the writer of Hebrews tells us.

### **Persevere in our work for God and love for his people.**

**We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. Hebrews 6:11**

A few years ago I was in a conversation with some elderly friends I love and they said, "We are tired of serving in the church. For years we cooked the food for funerals, we washed the curtains in the church, we served in the nursery and now that we are elderly, we don't want to do that any more. It is time for the church to serve us!"

What do you think? What would you say to them?... The sign of a healthy spiritual life is someone who works for God and shows love for his people for just the first 20 years, right. WRONG, those signs are going up *all the way to the very end*. The Christian life is not, I will scratch your back for the first 20 years, then you should scratch mine. The Christian life is saying, after all that God did for me, I can't help but constantly tell God how much I love him by serving you.

Has anybody hit the wall spiritually when it comes to serving people? We all do from time to time. What is the way to get through that wall? See our service for what it really is, not a you scratch me and I'll scratch you service but I love you, not because of what I get out of it, but it is my act of worship to love God by loving you.

### **Avoid spiritually laziness.**

## We do not want you to become lazy... Hebrews 6:12

There is something important here grammatically. It is called a purpose clause. It shows a relationship between two things. In other words, we want you to continue in diligence, *so that* you do not become lazy. The word lazy is the same word used in Hebrews 5:11 to describe people who became dull of hearing spiritual things. They are the pew potatoes. The Scriptures say, be diligent in our spiritual lives so that we do not become spiritually lazy. Keep serving because when we stop serving, it is hard to get started again.

I know how this works around our house. One thing Cindy and I do not want to do in the evening is sit on the couch and turn on the television. There is nothing wrong with the television. It is just that after a hard day of running around, of helping with homework, of running kids to sports practices and making meals, if either of us sit on the couch to watch television after 8:00 p.m., we are done. Nothing else is getting done. So what is the antidote? Don't sit on the couch and allow yourself to get lazy. Don't allow ourselves to turn into spiritual pew potatoes that are better sitters than servers.

### Follow the example of those who were faithful to the end.

We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. Hebrews 6:12

As we wade deeper into the book of Hebrews, we will see it is a book about heroes of the faith, especially Hebrews 11. But in verse 13, the writer of Hebrews gives us a hero to follow. A hero who kept following God when it was hard to do. His name is Abraham. God promised Abraham a son when he was 75 years old. God promised Abraham's descendants would be as numerous as the sand on the seashore. Sounds like a lot of work to start that project when you are 75 but Abraham believed God. Guess what happened? Abraham turned 80, still no child. 85, still no child, 90, still no child, 95 still no child. Don't you think he would question God along the way. God, I thought you said you loved me? I thought you said you would keep your promise? I am 95 and Sara still isn't pregnant. Talk about wanting to turn your back and walk away. That ought to do it. Why keep up your faith when God doesn't seem to show up in your faith? Anybody been there? Do we have any 95 year old childless Abraham's among us? If you are there, you are at a decisive moment of faith. God asks us to keep believing and keep obeying even when it doesn't seem like it is true.

What happened to Abraham at 100 years old? He had a son. Notice something. *God likes to work in a way that everyone knows he did it so God gets all the credit.* How many 100 year old first time parents do we have? Only God could have done that. In fact Abraham's son's name was Isaac. Isaac means laughter. Every time they looked at Isaac, they couldn't help but laugh. Who would believe Sarah finally became pregnant?

What a hero of faith to follow. This morning, **keep it up**, keep following Christ in life like Abraham, even when it doesn't seem God is there. **Keep it up**, keep working for God's glory and loving God's people. Be diligent about it to the

end. **Keep it up**, so that we don't become spiritually lazy. **Keep it up**, we may forget our work for God and remember our sin but God remembers our work for him and forgets our sin. **Keep it up**. We need more modern day heroes of the faith for the rest of us to follow. **Keep it up**, the signs of a healthy spiritual life are working for God and love for his people. You are already doing it! **Just keep it up**.



## Hebrews 6:13-20 – I've Got You

Sign Title: I've Got You

March 22, 2009

Do you remember when you were little and you went to the pool for one of the first times in your life? Most of us have a memory of our father or mother standing in the deep end of the pool, a few feet from the wall, telling us to jump into their arms because they would catch us. Do you have a memory like that? What were you thinking when they asked you to jump? You are crazy! You said, "Come closer! You didn't want to risk drowning in front of everyone. What did mom or dad say to you as they held out their arms, "Jump! **I've got you!**"

I hope you eventually jumped. Since you are here today I can safely assume you survived.

I want you to think with me about something. What was the real issue at the pool? Was it a fear of drowning or were you learning you can trust your parents? I think we were learning we could trust our parents. In fact, we eventually learned there is no safer place to be than in the arms of our parents. They love us. We can trust them!

This morning, we find a very similar situation in the book of Hebrews for Jewish Christians in the city of Rome. Life is falling apart in a more significant way than AIG going under. God says to them. When life falls apart, it will be OK. I know everything looks uncertain around you but **I've got you**. Let's learn what this is all about.

### Hebrews 6:13-20

This portion of Hebrews gives us two reasons why we can be incredibly confident that when God says **I've got you**, he is serious about it. He will never let us go.

### Why can we be sure God won't let us go?

#### God's promises are solid.

When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. Hebrews 6:13-15

Last week we began looking at the Abraham story. Do you remember it? Abraham and Sarah were working on a child for a long time. No go. Abraham is 75 with no kid. Sarah feels like a failure. God promises Abraham he will have a son and he will have descendants like the stars in the sky. What happens when Abraham hits 80? Hits 85? Hits 90? Hits 95? Here we have what looks like God forgetting to keep his promise. Doesn't it? What happens when Abraham hits 100? Along comes Isaac, their first-born! Remember last week we learned Isaac means laughter. Every time they looked at this kid, they just couldn't help

but laugh, what an awesome God thing! God keeps his promises. Even when it looks like he forgot. As Paul Harvey would say, and now for the rest of the story... Today there are 14 millions Jews alive. Did God keep his promise? Yes. Isaac was only the beginning. It is just that God likes to keep his promise in a way that everyone knows he was behind it.

Promises don't mean much to us. When we think about a promise, we usually think of people breaking them, not people keeping them. Remember when you were a kid on the monkey bars and you were going to lean back and you would say to your friend, *will you hold my feet?* Then as you thought about the possibility of your head smacking the concrete below you, you looked at your friend again and said, "*Do you promise to hold my feet.*" That was almost an invitation to have her drop you.

There is a difference between God's promises and our promises. Do you remember the scene from the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe when Aslan made a promise to the white witch that he would die in place of Edmond?

[Show movie clip](#)

What happened? The witch is accustomed to promises being made but not promises being kept. Aslan, who represents Christ, is different. He can not make a promise and not keep it. Whatever God speaks, is truth. God can not lie

[God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Numbers 23:19](#)

So if God makes a promise, it is reliable. God will keep it no matter how impossible it might look or unlikely it would seem. God has to keep his promise because his character demands it.

The obvious question is, God promised a son to Abraham, what kind of promises has God made to us.

[All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. John 6:37-40](#)

Here is a promise from Jesus Christ that is timeless. This morning, if you have not given your life to Christ, he promises that if you come to him, no matter how messed up your life is, no matter how ugly and broken you are. It doesn't matter how bad it is. He will NEVER drive you away. He PROMISES to save everyone who looks to him and believes in him. If we do that, we *will* have eternal life and we can look forward to a resurrection on the last day and of being with Christ faith to face. *God promises that!* It will happen God says, trust me, *I've got you.*

You want another great promise?

being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6

How is that for a promise. What God starts in our life, he will make sure it is carried on to completion. What great encouragement! Last week we learned that we have to keep it up! Keep it up! Keep going for Christ! This week you probably came home and said, "Keep it up, I can't!" Here is the good news, God will keep it up in you! He won't let our spiritual life die. He created our spiritual life and he will sustain our spiritual life.

And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? Romans 8:30-31

What awesome news. God chooses us to be his child even before he creates us. Our lives go forward and somewhere along the line, he calls us. We become soft to the things of God and respond to him. We are justified by Christ, fully forgiven of our sins and eventually glorified. We are welcomed home to be with Christ. God will keep his promise. He will not call us and justify us but fail to glorify us. God keeps his promise. What does he say to us? **I've got you!**

### **God's oaths are unchanging.**

I would think trusting in God's promises because we can trust God's character would be enough for us. It should be enough. But God wants to encourage our trust in him even more. So what does he do? He goes one step further, he confirms his promise with an oath.

Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. Hebrews 6:16-17

An oath is a step beyond a promise. It is greater than a promise. When we go to court, we take an oath on the Bible saying, "Before God, I will tell the truth." Some of us say, "I swear by my mother's grave, I am telling the truth." or "May God strike me dead if I am not telling the truth." Personally, I would be a little careful on that one. But the point is that an oath is our appeal to something greater than ourselves as our witness.

Now there is something really incredible in this story of Abraham. God promised Abraham he was going to have a son. God knew it would be hard for Abraham to believe the promise because he would have to wait 25 years for God to fulfill it. So God makes the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12, he then repeats it in Genesis 13, he then repeats it in Genesis 15, but he ends the promise in Genesis 15 differently. Abraham is told to take some animals, cut them in half, set the parts on the ground opposite each other and wait. While Abraham waits, a smoking fire-pot appears and goes back and forth between the animal pieces. What is that all about? Great stuff here folks. In Abraham's world, when you took an oath you did it by cutting animals in half and walking

between them. Both parties walked between the pieces. The symbolism was clear. If we break our oath to one another, may we look like these animal pieces. DEAD! This is a serious oath, we could call it a blood oath between parties. But what did we notice about how this oath was taken? Did Abraham walk between the cut up animals? No! Only God did in the theophany of a smoking fire pot. This is incredibly important.

Many of God's covenants with his people are conditional. For instance, in the Old Testament, if God's people worshipped him faithfully, they would dwell securely in the land. If they broke their end of the covenant, God would send them into exile. But here God promises to give Abraham a child, no matter what happens. When God takes a blood oath, based on his character, it is even better than a promise.

The writer of Hebrews says when God wanted to show us even more convincingly his unchangeable character he did it with an oath. Since there is nobody greater than God to swear by, God has to swear an oath to himself.

In a few weeks we are going to study how the writer of Hebrews applies this to Jesus Christ but I couldn't help myself. I am going to give you a sneak peek of it this morning and show you how the writer of Hebrews applies the importance of God's oaths.

**And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without an oath, but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever.'" Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. Hebrews 7:20-22**

Here is the good news, God says, my promises are good, I will keep them, I have to because my character can not lie. I realize this is hard to believe when life is really tough. It was hard for Abraham to believe so I guaranteed my promise to him with an oath, swearing by myself that I would do what I said.

We have Jesus as our high priest standing before God to plead for us in our struggles and help us in our weaknesses. Jesus isn't going away. God swore on oath he would be our high priest forever. This was not just a promise but an oath that God made to himself.

**What does this mean for me today?**

**Be encouraged, we can hold on to Christ in tough times.**

**we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. Hebrews 6:18b**

He says, be encouraged, we can hold on to Christ. Life may look pretty rough. We may feel like a 95 year old childless Abraham but be encouraged. We know for sure Jesus will not let us go. God promises to complete in us what he began in us. We are his responsibility, he won't let us go. I need that. When I think that making it to the end spiritually is all about me and my efforts, that I fail most miserably. It is only when I realize that my life with God is something he began and he will complete that I can hold on to my hope. How about you?

Anybody need the encouragement of knowing God will complete the work he began in you?

**I have a solid anchor in the storms of life.**

We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.  
Hebrews 6:19-20

What incredible stuff. We have an anchor for our soul. Let me give you a little anchor history. Anchors were originally nothing more than a big rock with a rope tied around them. Eventually they were wooden spikes with metal to give them weight that held them to the bottom. It was in this period of history the modern anchor became popular. These modern anchors were popular because they held! Even in the roughest of seas, the anchor held to the sea floor.

The anchor became one of the symbols for the early church. In fact the tomb of the famous church leader Priscilla is decorated by 60 anchors.

Show anchor pictures of anchors on catacomb tombs.



Why was the anchor the symbol of the early church? Because they had an anchor to hold on to. God had promised he would save them no matter what storms of life hit them. God promised to complete the work he began in them no matter how weird life became. God swore an oath, to show he would not change his mind, that Jesus Christ now was the high priest forever. Nobody is coming after him to improve on his work! No matter how rough life became, no matter how seasick they felt, as long as they held onto the anchor of Christ, they knew *for sure* they would finish and be with Christ.

When we think of an anchor, we think of it being thrown overboard and going down. They thought of it a little differently. Their anchor went up. This passage says Jesus is literally our forerunner, he is like the guy who crossed the finish line first. He entered into the very presence of God as our forerunner and he goes into the presence of God and says, I've got a whole bunch of my

brothers and sisters in tow and they are coming soon. Could there be anything more solid? The very character of God? The very promises of God? The very oaths of God? God promised he will finish what he began in us, we will be with him in the end. No matter how wild life gets, just keep our eyes on Jesus, our anchor.

## Conclusion

How was your week? Take any water in your boat? Struggle in a battle with sin? Feel like your job will never come? Feel like the marriage will never get better? Feel like God may have forgotten you?

Stand with me on the edge of the pool. Are your eyes looking at the waves in front of you? Are your eyes wondering if you can survive the deep water? Lift your eyes up. Look with me to the outstretched arms that are just a few feet in front of you. It is Jesus Christ and he says **I've Got You**. You will make it. I will see you make it to the end.



## Hebrews 7:1-19 – Jesus is Greater

Sign Title: Why don't we follow the Old Testament?

April 19, 2009

Good morning, if you are new, I would like to welcome you to Faith EFC. We are studying the book of Hebrews and we briefly stepped away from it last month because I took some vacation time and we enjoyed an exciting Easter service, but today we are back to this exciting book. A book that is all about Jesus.

Sometimes, when I preach I am reminding us of things we already know. Other times, I have the privilege of teaching something new. This morning, we are in Hebrews 7 and we definitely have something new. How many of us know the importance of Melchizedek for redemptive history? What I learned this week about Melchizedek is fascinating and I know you will enjoy hearing it.

### Hebrews 7:1-19

All of Hebrews 7 is about Melchizedek. The writer of Hebrews first introduced Melchizedek in Hebrews 5 but in Hebrews 5:10, he says, "I would like to say a lot more about Melchizedek, but you wouldn't understand because you are too slow to learn." I don't think you can handle the heavy stuff. Hebrews 7 is what he said, he was afraid they couldn't handle in Hebrews 5. So here comes the heavy stuff. We will look at it with a series of questions. Who is Melchizedek? How great was he? How does this message apply to me?

### Who is Melchizedek?

Let me briefly tell you Melchizedek's story. In Genesis 14, we find four kings from the north in the middle east, they ruled as far north as modern day Iran. They conquered the Jordan valley, including the famous and affluent cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. For 13 years the four kings of the north forced the five kings of the Jordan Valley in the south to pay tribute. As you would expect, the five kings of the south eventually tired of this and rebelled against the four kings of the north. What do you think the four kings of the north did? They came down and kicked around the five southern kings, including the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. One of the captives these kings carried away was a man from Sodom named Lot. Lot was Abraham's relative. One of the captive prisoners escaped, found Abraham and told him what happened and that his own relative, Lot, was captured.

This week, we are trying to teach the Somalian pirates a little phrase, "Don't mess with the U.S." Don't attack our ships and don't carry away the captain of an American ship or it will not go well with you." This is similar to what happens in Genesis 14. When Abraham hears what happened to Lot, Genesis 14 says he quickly called together 318 men who were *born and trained for battle* in his own household. Abraham has 318 men in his family estate that were born and trained commandos. They set off in pursuit of these four kings and they found them, they beat these kings up and send them running for home. Abraham



frees Lot and is returning home with all the plunder from war and something interesting happens out of nowhere.

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered our enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. Genesis 14:18-20

Those are all the verses Melchizedek gets until he is mentioned briefly in Psalm 110 and then in Hebrews. The guy only gets four verses in Genesis like a blip going across a radar screen, we know nothing more about him. Why is he even mentioned in the Bible? What is significant about him? Here comes the exciting stuff! Hebrews 7 explains the importance of Melchizedek.

**Melchizedek had a small part but he was a big guy.**

**Melchizedek was an eternal priest-king.**

This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace." Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever. Hebrews 7:1-3

Melchizedek was like a Reeses Peanut Butter Cup, he was two great things put together. He was a priest *and* a king. In Israel, priests and kings must be kept separate. There were grave consequences for anyone who tried to combine them. For example, in 1 Samuel 13, King Saul offered a sacrifice when Samuel was late in arriving. What happened? God rejected Saul's kingship. He lost his job over it. In 2 Chronicles 26 we see King Uzziah, who was generally a good guy, went into the temple to offer incense, God whacked him with leprosy till his dying day. No second chances on this one, you do not put these two offices together.

But here is a unique thing. Melchizedek is a priest *and* a king of God. Even his name is special. Melchizedek means king of righteousness. He is also king of Salem, which mean king of peace. Incidentally Salem is the ancient name of the city of Jerusalem.

What is happening? Genesis 14 gives us a little foreshadowing. It is possible for the priesthood and the kingship to be combined and the person who fits that bill would need to be the king of righteousness and peace and would rule over the city of Jerusalem. Two thousand years later, who rides into Jerusalem and the people are calling the king of Israel? Who brings righteousness and peace with God through his death and resurrection? Are you starting to see a connection?

In verse 3, of Hebrews 7 the writer does something interesting. The Jews were very concerned with genealogy and heritage. This is why Luke and

Matthew begin with a long genealogical background for Jesus. If you don't come from the right heritage, you couldn't even gain a hearing with some people. For example, priests who served in the temple had to be physically descended from Levi to serve in the temple. Here is something interesting, in the Genesis 14 account of Melchizedek where he blips across the radar screen there is no description of his family, no genealogy, not statement of his death, no description of his pedigree. Jews reading this are scratching their head. Where is the pedigree? That is important stuff! The writer of Hebrews says there is no pedigree for a point. Melchizedek foreshadows that God will create a priest without him being part of the proper pedigree, without him being part of the Levitical line. In fact, God can create a priest who, unlike the levitical priesthood, will serve without a beginning or an end, just like he did for Melchizedek. A man who had no beginning or end.

Who was Melchizedek? Some people think he was an Old Testament appearance of Jesus Christ. Myself, I don't think it was. Hebrews 7:3 says that Melchizedek was *like* the Son of God, he wasn't the Son of God.

I think Melchizedek was a man God somehow made a king and priest by divine appointment instead of hereditary line. Melchizedek was a foreshadowing of the great king - priest who would be appointed by God, Jesus Christ.

In the next few weeks we will become more familiar with Old Testament foreshadowings of New Testament realities. For example, the Old Testament sacrifices and the structure of the temple in the Old Testament will be described as shadows or rough outlines of reality. I like to think of Old Testament foreshadowing like the line drawings we make on coffee table napkins. Have you ever done that? Outlined a picture on a napkin to describe something? The outline is a pretty rough representation of what you are describing, but at least your friends get an idea of what you are working on. This is what Melchizedek's cameo appearance on the stage of history is all about. There is an eternal king-priest who brings righteousness and peace that God can and will bring.

### **Melchizedek's greatness trumps Abraham's greatness.**

Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people - that is, their brothers - even though their brothers are descended from Abraham. This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater. In the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor. Hebrews 7:4-10

It is hard to overstate the reverence given to Abraham by the Jews. He was chosen by God as the father of their nation. To this day, three major religions of the world trace their spiritual heritage to Abraham: Judaism,

Christianity and Islam. When you are dead 4,000 years and 4 billion people still revere you, you were a great man! Yet, as great as Abraham was, Melchizedek was greater. How can I prove that?

Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of everything. Genesis 14 is the first time we see the term tithe in the Bible. It simply means a tenth. The tithe took on a baseline status for gifts in the Old Testament and it is embraced as an entry level of giving for God's people to follow. Here is the point, you give an offering to someone greater than yourself. Abraham gave his offering to Melchizedek because with God, Melchizedek was greater than Abraham!

### **Melchizedek's greatness trumps the Levitical priesthood.**

Let me summarize verses 8 to 18. Levi was Abraham's great grandson. Since Levi is a descendent of Abraham, he is no greater than Abraham. Levi was a son of Jacob whose descendants God designated to be a tribe of priests. Remember what a priest does? He represents us to God. The Levites offered sacrifices, they served in the temple, they administered the whole spiritual system of Israel. They were the top spiritual dogs but they were no greater than Abraham.

No only were they no greater than Abraham but there was a defect in the Levitical priesthood. Nothing in the sacrificial system actually solved the sin problem. It was a never-ending reminder of sins, but there was no freedom from sin. The Bible tells us this again and again.

The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect)...Hebrews 7:18-19a

What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet." But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. Romans 7:7-8

The purpose of the law was to make us aware of our sin, not to free us from our sin.

Now is the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! 2 Corinthians 3:7-9

If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come - one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?  
Hebrews 7:11

The Levitical priesthood didn't take care of sin. The priesthood and the law showed us our sin and was a continual reminder of the need of sacrifice and death to pay for our sin.

The Old Testament talked about the need for a major upgrade to the priesthood to take care of our sin because the Levitical priesthood couldn't cut it. It couldn't save us from sin. Psalm 110 was written by David 1,000 years after Abraham and over 500 years after the Levitical priesthood was established.

**The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." Psalm 110:4**

God says, through David, there is a priest coming who will be around forever who will not come through Levi but he will be of the order, that is a type of Melchizedek's priesthood.

The writer of Hebrews says, the Levitical priesthood could not bring perfection. God spoke through David saying there was another priesthood coming that would be like Melchizedeks and would last forever?

### **Jesus is greater.**

Let's collect what we learned and summarize it. Melchizedek was greater than Abraham, a guy who is dead 4,000 years and 4 billion people still revere him. Melchizedek is greater than Levi, because he was only a descendant of Abraham. Melchizedek is greater than the whole Levitical sacrificial system of Israel because it came from Abraham and nothing in the sacrificial system actually took away sin, it just showed us our sin, otherwise the sacrifices wouldn't need to be done again and again. Melchizedek only had 4 verses but he was one great dude. A king and priest combination, a king of righteousness and peace who was without beginning or end so essentially his kingship-priesthood lasts forever. But Melchizedek really isn't the great one. As great as he was, he was only a pencil line sketch outline done on a coffee table napkin that was fulfilled by our everlasting priest and king, who makes us righteous and who gives us peace with God and who will serve as our priest before the father and our king forever. What is his name? Jesus Christ. He is the great reality Melchizedek pointed us to.

### **What does this mean to me?**

**Read my Bible realizing Jesus is the center of everything.**

There is a freshman mistake many Christians make. Sometimes we look at our Old Testament thinking the full meaning of every passage is found just in that passage and it's context. There is more to our Old Testament than meets the eye. For example, there was more to Melchizedek than met the eye in Genesis 14. The Old Testament is filled with pencil sketch outlines on coffee table napkins that point us to the reality and necessity of Christ. The Christian life is all about Jesus. He is the hinge upon which every page in our Bibles turn, not just some of the New Testament pages. Look how Jesus said he relates to the old Testament.

**“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. Matthew 5:17**

The second mistake we can make is a graduate level mistake. It is a mistake called Theonomy. What is Theonomy? It is good for Christians to study the Old Testament background so we better understand the New Testament foreground of Jesus. Sometimes Christians can become so enamored by the Old Testament background their affections are captivated by the Old Testament background rather than the foreground of Jesus. Their love for Jesus becomes smaller and smaller as their affections for the Old Testament laws, rituals and ceremonies grow.

Remember, everything points to and is fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus completes it. What does it say about how we are to treat our Old Testament

**By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear. Hebrews 8:13**

Have you ever wondered why Christians don't follow the Old Testament laws and ceremonies? Have you ever wondered why we are not more Jewish? It is not because we lost sight of our Jewish heritage, it is because Jesus supersedes our Jewish heritage.

## **Conclusion**

This past week, I was flipping through itunes and they were advertising a trailer of the new Fast and Furious 4 movie. While I am not recommending the movie because the trailer shows some scenes I do not want in my memory, the car racing scenes are incredible. Most of them are real and not done with computer graphics. The trailer has some incredible stunt scenes with a Buick Grand National that were amazing. After watching about 2 minutes of the trailer I found myself saying, “If this is what the two minute trailer is like, I can't wait to see the two hour movie!”

Who is Melchizedek? Think of him like a 4,000 year old trailer designed to whet our appetite for the real thing, Jesus Christ. Jesus is greater than Abraham, he is greater than the Levitical priest system, he is the reality everything in the Old Covenant pointed to. Jesus is the burning center of everything with God. Jesus is greater than everything.

## Hebrews 7:18-28 – Jesus, the Priest I Need

Sign Title: Jesus, the Priest I Need

April 26, 2009

Good morning, I would like to welcome you to Faith EFC. We are studying the book of Hebrews and last week we began the exciting and challenging 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book. We learned about a little known Old Testament character named Melchizedek. He isn't that popular of a Biblical character. I don't know anyone who named their child after him. He only has 4 of the 23,000 verses in the Old Testament, but while he has a small part, that doesn't mean he was an insignificant guy.

The number one man in the Old Testament is Abraham. God began redemptive history through him. 4,000 years later, through Judaism, Christianity and Islam, 4 billion people still revere him. Abraham is a significant man. As great as Abraham was, amazingly, Melchizedek was greater. God instituted the whole Old Testament sacrificial system through Abraham's great grandson, Levi and it is run by Levi's descendants call the Levites. That Old Testament sacrificial system is the warp and woof of Old Testament worship; but Melchizedek was greater than all of it. As a priest and a king, Melchizedek trumps the whole religious system God gave to his people in the Old Testament. So while Melchizedek has a small part, he was a big guy.

But great as Melchizedek was, he is nothing compared to Jesus Christ. Melchizedek's priesthood was just a pencil sketch drawing on a coffee table napkin to whet our appetite for the great high priest to come that surpasses Melchizedek in every way, Jesus Christ. Melchizedek's priesthood was similar in many ways to Christ's. It was designed to be the 2 minute trailer to whet our appetite for the full blown two hour movie of Jesus Christ. Jesus is greater than anything God has done before and he is greater in every way. This morning we are continuing to build on that theme of the greatness of Jesus as we look at the priesthood.

### Hebrews 7:18-28

One of the frustrating parts of modern life are telephone help lines. Press 1 for English, 2 for Spanish. Then you have another 6 options. If it is billing press 3, if it is service press 4. Finally to personalize your journey through the phone tree you hear, "You are caller number 11, your wait time is 43 minutes." Does anyone get frustrated with that? I do! Usually the first thing I do when I hear a phone tree is press 0 so I can speak to the operator. Please, just give me a real human being when I need the help line. That's what I need, a real person. Anybody ever feel that way?

People in New Testament times were no different. When they needed help, they wanted a real person to talk with. When they had troubles, they went to one of the Old Testament priests. The priest brought the worshippers needs before God, they atoned for their sins, they taught the people God's Word. It felt



like having God with flesh on. One of the big rubs Christianity had going against it for 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews is the priesthood. At least Jews had a real, honest to goodness priest to talk to and bring their problems to God. Christians, talk with Jesus whom they claim is better than Melchizedek and the entire Old Testament system, but give me my priest to talk with, that is what I want, that is what I need. The writer of Hebrews says, you don't understand, as Christians, we still have a high priest. Jesus is our high priest and we come to him in our time of need. He is a better high priest than any earthly high priest was or could be.

In this section, we have the battle of the high priests. It is a WWF show down to answer the question, who is better, praying to Jesus or talking to my living breathing high priest. The writer of Hebrews presents a series of comparisons. Let's do some comparing.

### Which Priesthood Has Stability

How did the Old Testament priesthood begin? God set it up In Exodus 28

Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons.... so they may serve me as priests.. Exodus 28:1

God set up the Old Testament priesthood but how long was it intended to last? This is very important. The writer of Hebrews says there was nothing wrong with the priesthood, God set it up at that time, but if we read our Old Testament carefully, we see he didn't set it up for all-time. He didn't set it up with an oath. When we swear an oath, we want people to know our words are truthful. When God swears an oath, it is not to show us the truthfulness of his words, because all his words are truth, He swears an oath to to show us the permanence of his words. In other words, he is saying something will be true for all time and God won't be coming out with something new and improved.

God doesn't swear oaths all the time. We find him doing it in Genesis 22 where he swears he will have a perpetual and permanent love for Abraham's descendants, the Israelites. They will always be God's people and he will always have a special love for them. God has done a good job at keeping that promise. Are the ancient Amorites existing today? How about the Moabites? How about the Israelites? Yes, and God has a special place in his heart for his people and he has sworn he will not let them go. God keeps his oaths for all time.

The next time God swears an oath to let us know something is for all time is when it comes to the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

"The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever.'" Psalm 110:4

Jesus' priesthood was confirmed by God the Father with an oath, so it will last forever. So make the comparison. The Jews have earthly high priests who were designed by God to be temporary versus Jesus Christ, who is a priest forever and God confirmed it with an oath. That means it is not temporary and it can not be improved upon. It is like going to school and the earthly high priest is



a temporary substitute teacher, vs. Jesus who is the permanent teacher. Who do you want to trust for your final grade? The permanent one.

### **Which Priesthood has a better covenant.**

**Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. Hebrews 7:22**

Earlier in Hebrews 7 we learned when there is a change of priests there is a change of the law. We are learning that with our President. When there is a change of Presidents, the laws of the land change. So the writer of Hebrews realizes that Jesus is a completely different priest, who comes from the tribe of Judah, there will be a completely different covenant with him. A covenant is like a relational contract, it is how two parties were to relate to one another. Let's compare the Old Covenant with the earthly high priest to the new covenant that Jesus inaugurates.

F.F. Bruce has some insightful things to say about the Old Covenant. Do you realize everything about it was designed to keep us away from God. Just think about the temple. It was located only in Jerusalem. One place on earth you can go to get to God. It was hard to get to. It was located on the top of a hill and there were no metro trains going into down town Jerusalem, you climbed a mountain. When you finally arrived at the temple, you couldn't just walk in, there was a wall around it that was 1,000 feet on a side by 1,500 feet on another side. The temple covered the equivalent area of over 300 football fields. The outer wall was designed to keep you far away. Once you were able to get past the wall it was like a maze inside. There were a series of barriers to keep you back. One had a great welcome sign over it that said, "If you are not a Jew or a believing Gentile, and you are caught past this wall you have nobody else to blame but yourself for your own death." How is that for the friendly church. There was the court of the Gentiles, then the court of the women and when it finally came to the temple, only the priests could go in. When it came to the holy of holies, only the high priest could go in and only once a year. Everything about the structure of worship in the Old Covenant said, "Keep Away!" God is holy and you are not!

It is not just the physical structure of worship that says back off. It is everything about keeping the Old Testament laws that says, "You can't make it." We think of the Old Covenant being about the 10 commandments. How do we do at keeping them?

Everybody stand up. Just a few questions for you. Let's work our way through the ten commandments. If you have murdered someone sit down. Jesus says if you have been angry with someone in your heart, you murdered them. How about stealing? Anybody ever taken something that wasn't yours? How about lying? Anybody ever lie? If you are standing now, you can just sit because you just told a lie.

That is only 3 of the 10 commandments, but the law was much more serious than 10 commandments. The Jews identified 618 commandments they needed to observe under the Old Covenant. How do you think you would do keeping that many straight? The whole theme of the Old Covenant is God is

holy, you are not so “Back Away!” You will never be good enough. Yes, under the old covenant, we have physical priests we can talk to but who wants to live under that covenant?

Jesus is a new priest, not of a temporary covenant but he is a permanent priest forever, and he inaugurates a new covenant. You want to know what is so exciting about this? Did you ever read about what life under the new covenant of Christ is like? Look at how we relate to God. This is exciting.

“The time is coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” Jeremiah 31:31-34

That is a great covenant. Which one do you want to live under? Have I sold you on Jesus as the greater high priest yet? It only gets better.

### **Which Priesthood can fail us?**

Has anyone worked on their grill this spring? I took mine apart to work on it. Last time I bought a grill I bought a stainless steel one hoping it would last, but it didn't. The plastic wheels are broken off, and the burners are clogged with rust. I think the grill makers have an agreement to not make a grill that will not last longer than 3 years because they fall apart. Has Anyone else had that experience with their grill? It is not just grills that fall apart. We fall apart. The priesthood under the old covenant was intentionally temporary; God knew the priests would fall apart. God taught this to the people with Aaron, Moses' brother, the first high priest. Before he died, God had Aaron, Moses and Aaron's son, Eleazar go up Mount Hor and there on the mountain, so everyone could see what happened:

Moses removed Aaron's garments and put them on his son Eleazar. And Aaron died there on top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain.” Numbers 20:28

Later in Joshua 24:33 Eleazar dies and Phinehas, his son, becomes the priest and the final words on every priest was always, “and he died”. The Jewish Talmud lists 318 different high priests who served from Aaron to the time of Jesus. For the last 100 years before Christ came, the high priesthood was changing all the time. It became a very political position so people were in and out of the position every few years. You just got to know the guy and he was gone. As great as a high priest was with God, he couldn't overcome the problem

of death, sickness, forgetfulness and all the foibles of humanity tarnished his ability to serve as a perfect priest.

How does this compare to Jesus? Rather than being overcome by death, he overcame death. The card that always snuffed a high priest out of existence, was taken by Jesus, torn up, and thrown away. What kind of high priest do you want representing you to God? One who is struggling over death just like you or one who faced death and then rose again to overcome it?

**Jesus is a priest that can save completely.**

**Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Hebrews 7:25**

Notice that when we come to God through Jesus he will save us completely. Jesus has done everything that needs to be done to save us. The word *completely* has a sense of fullness and completeness to it. It means completely, forever for all time. Nothing more needs to be done to save us and nothing more can be done to save us.

Have you ever done any canning? We have a few of those canning jars of jelly that were given to us and we have carried them around for years. Here is a question, are the canning jars full when you open them? No, there is an air pocket. They are not complete. We can add to them. With Jesus Christ, picture the fullness of his salvation like a canning jar that is so full that if you try and add one drop of liquid more, it would just run down the side. When Christ saves us, there is nothing more that we can do or that needs to be done because he saves us completely.

It doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter what you have done, when we come to God through Jesus as our high priest, his death on the cross as payment for our sin is all that is needed. He saves us completely and forever. That is so hard to get our minds around. We are so used to people failing us, to not keeping their word. Jesus doesn't fail us.

Not only does he save us completely when we come to God through him but he always lives to intercede for us. In the Old Testament times you would tell the priest your struggles and he would reword that into a prayer to God for you. But what if the priest had a bad day, what if he had a headache, what if he didn't understand you? You have a problem.

Not so with Jesus, he knows our hearts so he can't misrepresent us. He always lives to intercede for us. I like the way Chrysostom, a first century pastor, described this. He says a man was coming home and to prepare for his arrival his wife told his son to go to the field and pick some flowers. The kid came back with a few flowers but mostly a bunch of weeds. The mother got ahold of it, pulled out the weeds, put in more flowers and gave it to her husband when he came home she said, "These are from your son." This is what Jesus does for us when we pray.

Our prayers are full of weeds. We do not always know what the right thing is to ask for. We fall asleep when we pray, we ask for the wrong thing because we don't know all the circumstances, we make mistakes. But Jesus is one great high priest, he takes our weak prayers and like re-arranging flowers, makes them into something beautiful. For example:

- We pray, God take my pain away. Jesus translates it to Father, give her the strength to make it through and not fail you.
- We pray, give me money because I want something. Jesus translates it to, help her be more satisfied in the good giver than the gifts.
- We pray, give me a spouse so I can be happy. Jesus prays, give him the strength so he stays holy.

Folks, this is great, Jesus prays for us! There can't be anyone better praying for us than Jesus Christ.

### **Which Priesthood meets my needs?**

Such a high priest meets our need - one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. Hebrews 7:26-27

A big problem with the earthly priest hood was sin. When a earthly high priest had to offer a sacrifice on the day of atonement, they needed to begin by offering a sacrifice for their own sin before they could offer a sacrifice for the sin of the people. The sinfulness of the earthly high priest was a barrier to their work. The priest's sinfulness barred him from coming before God. That is why purity was so incredibly important to the priests, they were sinful. Remember, when the high priest offered a sacrifice for himself and for the people on the day of atonement, he had a rope around his foot in case God struck him dead because of his sinfulness. It is nice to have him representing you but it is limited.

Not so with Jesus Christ. Look at his character. Holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners. He doesn't need to offer a sacrifice for his own sin. He doesn't have a rope around his ankle in case God strikes him dead. He died and beat death. Where did Christ offer his sacrifice? Not in the earthly temple which is just a copy of the heavenly reality but in the heavenly reality. What kind of offering did Christ give for our sins? He gave himself. When you hitch the infinite purity of Christ with the infiniteness of his identity as God; when he offers himself for our sins, we have the infinite offering for sin that is possible. Christ's offering of himself is the offering to outdo all offerings, it is the offering for sin that can not be outdone. The whole Old Testament system which pointed to Christ is now obsolete. The Old Testament priests which pointed to Christ's priesthood is now obsolete.

Christ's priesthood is what we need. It is permanent, sworn by God with an oath, it is about a new covenant that brings us to God not keeps us away from

him, Jesus' priesthood won't fail by death - he conquered death, Jesus saves us completely and he is our perfect representative to the father with our prayers who can know us and represent us better than anyone on earth could. Jesus is the priest who offered the ultimate sacrifice of himself. He obsoleted the entire Old Testament sacrificial system and priesthood.

### What does this mean for me?

There are two famous paintings of Jesus. One is by Holman Hunt. It was painted in 1853. The other is by Warner Sallman painted around 1940. Both of these paintings portray the same verse.



Light of the World  
by Holman Hunt



Christ at Heart's Door  
by Warner Sallman

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. Revelation 3:20

Warner Sallman was a Christian who hoped his painting would encourage others to open the door of their heart to Jesus. Holman Hunt was not a Christian. He knew what the Bible said, he attended church, he knew the claims of Jesus but Holman Hunt didn't believe Jesus was great enough to be the once for all sacrifice for sin. He didn't believe Jesus was great enough to be the only high priest we will ever need. He couldn't imagine Jesus was *that* great of a high

priest? Where are you today? Do you believe Jesus is great enough to be all you need? The writer of Hebrews has passionately said to the Jews in Rome who think they need something more and to us this morning, Jesus is the only priest we need, it won't get any better because it can't get any better. As I close in prayer, will you join me in either reaffirming Christ as all you need or perhaps acknowledging that for the first time today?

*Jesus, thank you for being all I need. Thank you for totally understanding my life because you lived real life. Thank you for being the perfect and once for all sacrifice for sin. Thank you for being the perfect and faithful high priest to bring my tears and prayers to the father. Most of all, thank you for your death for sin bringing a new way for me to know the heavenly father, thank you for a new covenant that doesn't keep me distant from the Father but because of you, I am drawn close. This morning, I abandon my trust in every other religion and in anything else I am trusting in besides you Jesus. Jesus, you are all I need. Amen.*



## Hebrews 8:1-6 – The New Normal - Part 1

Sign Title: The New Normal

May 3, 2009



Did anyone see the March 26<sup>th</sup> issue of TIME magazine? The cover caught my eye. It was a simple white cover with a big red reset button on it. The lead article was titled *The End of Excess*. It was an official welcome to the new economic normal. For example, from the 1980's through 2007, Americans increased the amount of money they borrow. The average American now uses 35% more of their income to pay off mortgage, car loans and credit card bills than they did 20 years before. In the last 20 years, the average American went from saving 11% of their income to only saving 1%.

We didn't just increase our spending but we increased our eating. Every year for the last 20, the average American gained 1 pound. We are 20 pounds heavier today than we were 20 years ago. But with the collapse of the housing and stock market, *Time Magazine* believes we are watching the end of excessive materialism. The economy hit reset and we are entering a new economic reality where luxuries can no longer be considered necessities.

People are stressed out because our new economic reality changes everything we knew about handling money. Life is harder and the money doesn't flow quite so easily. As the article says, get used to it, *welcome to the new normal*.

Folks, I have another headline for us this morning. The God of the universe hit the reset button 2,000 years ago and put the whole world under a completely new way of relating to him. There is a new spiritual reality going on that is completely different from the old one and most people don't get it. Everything is changed about how we relate to God. There is a new version of spiritual normal. Just like we are learning to live in the new economic normal, this morning, we are exploring what it looks like to live in the new normal spiritually.

### Hebrews 8:1-6

**Prayer** - *Thank you God for this morning, thank you for the beauty of the sun and the growth of crops. Thank you for our health and strength to serve you. I especially thank you for these people and for the joy of teaching your word to them. Stir in their heart a greater delight for Jesus. Amen.*

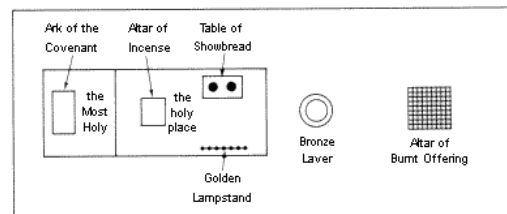
This message and next weeks message are tied together at the hip. So this week is called The New Normal - Part 1 and it is about the new way we can know God through Jesus, next week is The New Normal - Part 2, it is about the new way God relates to us. Everything has changed. The application is simple. Stop living like the new normal isn't true.

**Jesus is Seated because Payment for My Sin is Completed**



When we moved here last summer we camped in our home until our furniture arrived. We were prepared to wait a week for our moving truck. We packed an electric skillet, we had food, we planned to camp at home. We could survive without furniture; but there was one simple piece of furniture I really wished we had with us. What do you think it was? A chair. Thankfully the Bossards and the Whitings came to our rescue. It felt really weird to have nothing to sit on but the floor. Chairs are important when we want to take a rest.

Look with me at the layout of the OT tabernacle, what common piece of furniture was it missing? A chair. Why was there no chair? Because a priest's job was never done. There was always another sacrifice to offer. When we picture priests at work, don't picture them like road construction workers who are leaning on the blunt end of a shovel waiting for something to do. It was just the opposite. It was busy work. A priest was only allowed to serve from age 20 to 50. They had an early retirement, but that was because the work was hard and it was a lot of work offering all the sacrifices. Knowing what we do, let's read Hebrews 8:1 again.



The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, Hebrews 8:1

For the writer of Hebrews, Jesus sitting down is a big deal. He says four times in Hebrews. Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; and 12:2. Why is Jesus seated?

Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. Hebrews 7:27

He offered himself as a sacrifice for sin. It is over with. It is complete, no other sacrifice for sin needs to be made. The whole idea of making a sacrifice for our sin is completely done. The writer of Hebrews says this again in Hebrews 9:12 and 10:2. Say it with me, *Jesus died for my sins, once for all.* It is not like he took out a mortgage on our sin where there are now monthly payments needing to be made. It is done; over with; There is no sin we will commit that Jesus has not already paid for. How do we know that? Jesus paid for our sins, say it with me *once for all.*

Now you are probably wondering, Pastor Kurt,... then what was the Old Testament sacrifices of animals all about? Didn't they do something? Well, they didn't pay for any sin. Jesus paid for all of it. He is the *once for all sacrifice.* What did the OT sacrifices do? They didn't pay for sin, they covered sin. When an animal died in the OT it was like God took that animals blood and used it to write an I.O.U. over top of our sin. Sin was still there, it was not paid for but God had put his stamp over it saying, I will pay for it with blood, significant blood, not just animals blood.

This morning we took communion. When Jesus established communion just before he went to the cross and to die for our sin, he said about the bread “this is my body broken for you” and about the cup, “this is my blood shed for you”. What do you think Jesus meant by that? Some churches believe when we take communion the bread and the wine *actually become* the body and blood of Christ after it is prayed over and given to the people. What do you think? Is that what Jesus had in mind? Was Jesus speaking metaphorically or literally? Did he want people to eat a real flesh sandwich? No. But even more importantly, think about this. If Jesus wasn’t speaking metaphorically and the bread and cup become the actual body and blood of Christ it would be an insult to the completeness of the work of Christ because his sacrifice for our sin is being done again and again. We look back upon what Christ did in full, not upon what we must not continually do. Jesus sat down, it is done, there is no more sacrifice for sin that can be made. This is the new normal. All of our sin from the beginning of our life to the end of it is paid for completely by Jesus Christ and if we trust in Christ through simple faith, that is the new reality we experience.

Remember the painting of Jesus by Holman Hunt that we looked at last weekend? Remember how Holman just couldn’t get his mind wrapped around the fact that what Jesus did for us was so significant that it made him the only way to God for the entire world? We just learned about what Christ did for us with our sin and the completeness of what he did is something we have a hard time wrapping our minds around it because it is hard to understand something THAT GREAT!

Let me speak to your heart. What do we do when we fail God? We feel like we have to punish ourselves. We deprive ourselves of something, we berate ourselves, we hate ourselves all so we can say to God. God, “See, I am sorry for my sin. I feel like I am in that whack a mole game and you will whack me and punish me for my sin any moment now because I deserve it.” See God, “I am punishing myself because I am so disgusted with myself.”

What do you think God feels about that? Do you think he says, “Punish yourself harder after what you did, you deserve it?” No! He says, don’t you get it. ALL the punishment you deserve for your sin is already paid in full by my son. ALL OF IT! I love you. It hurts me to see you hurt yourself. You are my son, you are my daughter, I love you. Wrap your mind around that. It is hard to conceive of but here is the good news, that is the new normal for us through Jesus. *Jesus is seated because payment for my sin is completed.*

**I have access to God through his right hand man.**

In one of Chuck Colson’s books, he tells the importance of where you have your desk. Colson served as a special aide to President Nixon and over time they moved his desk closer and closer to the oval office. He realized, the closer someone is located to the president, the more powerful they were becoming because they had greater influence. That is why I tell Sheryl, our church secretary, she is one of the most powerful women in the church. She has

a desk just outside of the pastor's offices. She has nothing to worry about until we move her desk to the other end of the building.

The same was true in the ancient world. When you were invited over to a home for dinner, the closer they seated you to the head of the house, the more honored position you were given. In Hebrews 8:1, look where Jesus is seated.

We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven. Hebrews 8:1

Jesus is God the father's right hand man. This means Jesus has the most honored position in existence, second only to God the Father. Not only does Jesus have honor, but he has influence. Just as Chuck Colson had more and more influence over President Nixon, the closer they moved him to the oval office, Jesus can not be moved any closer to God the Father. He has access.

I have a friend who is a former FBI agent and I like to have fun with him asking him about his security clearance. What kind of stuff did you work on? How much do you know about the war on terror? Did you work on anything from 9/11. Most of the time he tells me he didn't have that kind of level of security clearance. He wasn't given access. Folks, none of us have the necessary security clearance to have access to God. But through Jesus Christ, everything changes. Picture this, here is God the Father, creator of space, time, matter, life, he is the origin of everything. Sitting next to him on his right side is Jesus who is just like us. He is fully God, but also fully man. Nothing in existence has greater access to God than Jesus. Jesus fully understands us. Think of Jesus like the ultimate back stage pass to the God show.

Thursday morning, I got up early and went for a prayer walk. As I am walking along I was praying. Not praying loud but my lips were moving. People are driving by me on their way to work and they are probably thinking, there goes a really weird guy, he is talking to himself. Folks, the reality is that when we pray, our prayers have direct access to God through the back stage pass of Jesus Christ. That is the new normal. In the past God was separate from us, he was distant. High priests could only enter the holy of holies once a year in total fear. Some people wonder why I end my prayer always in the name of Jesus. Easy answer, my prayers are not going anywhere without him. He is the backstage pass that gets my prayers to God. To remind myself of that I close my prayers in Jesus' name. I challenge you to do the same. It is recognizing the new normal. Let's face it. When people aren't approaching God through Jesus, what are they doing? Nothing more than talking to themselves. But we have God's right hand man, so our prayers make a difference. This is another mind blower. Does God ever feel far away? Under the old normal, he was distant. Welcome to the new normal. The only way we will have better access to God than we do right now through Jesus is by being dead. For each one of us, we can not get any better access to God than coming to him through Jesus. So the new normal means *Jesus is seated because all payment for sin is complete. We have full access to God through his right hand man.*

## Jesus is serves in the heavenly reality, not the earthly copy.

This morning I brought with me a picture of my wife. These pictures are not recent, they were pictures taken in 1992 when we were dating. I loved these pictures. I kept one on my desk and when I was tired of reading a boring theology book, I could look at her picture to cheer me up. For a time I had the other picture on the dashboard of my car. That didn't work, I had a hard time keeping my eyes on the road in Chicago traffic. These pictures *were* very important to me. Why *were* they important to me. Everything changed when I married Cindy. The pictures were good but actually having her as my wife is MUCH better. When you have the real deal, you don't care about the picture. The real deal is so much better.

With Jesus, we have the real deal. If you are still caught up in the pictures when you have the real deal, you have a problem.

If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." Hebrews 8:4-5

When Moses went up Mount Sinai, God gave him a pattern of what the earthly tabernacle was to look like. Does that mean that God whipped out blueprints? No. The word for pattern could maybe be better translated as *model*. Here is my son's model rocket he built in school this week. It is a miniature model of a real rocket. Both of these work, this one goes up in the sky and pops it's lid off and falls to the ground with streamers, the real one delivers nuclear warheads that can vaporize the state of Texas. All the model does is *imitate* the real one that exists in a missile silo in Kansas.

The Old Testament tabernacle was the Estes model rocket version of the actual sanctuary in heaven. Old Testament priest offered animals that didn't pay for sin, they only covered it. Little spiritual I.O.U's. The real sacrifice couldn't take place in the model of a tabernacle, it could only take place in the real tabernacle.

There is something deep but really important for us to pick up here. There are many things about our earthly world that are just earthly copies of spiritual realities. Theologians talk about how the Bible tells us many things in life are just little copies of models of much greater and more significant spiritual realities. Let me give you an example.

For the last few weeks, we are talking about same sex marriage in Iowa. The Bible is clear that same sex marriages are not God's desire for humanity. Romans 1 clearly says God does not desire this but maybe even more helpful is 1 Corinthians 6:9

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolater nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders...will inherit the kingdom of God. And that

is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

That is some strong language letting us know homosexuality is not part of God's desire for our lives. But notice something important here. The Bible bypasses the whole discussion of was I born this way or not. It doesn't matter how you feel or the homosexual desire you may have. God recognizes some people may feel that way. What this verse focuses in on is practicing homosexuality.

So the practice of homosexuality is not God's desire for anyone's life. But let's take this deeper. Why not? Is God just trying to repress a homosexual's desire? What makes it wrong? Look with me at Ephesians 5 that talks about marriage and the way a husband and wife are to relate to one another in marriage.

**Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord... Husbands, love your wives... For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:22-32**

Paul, you are talking about something practical and important, the relationship of a husband and wife and how they become one in marriage, why did you throw this twist in at the end about you actually talking about the relationship between Christ and the church?

The relationship between a husband and wife, the way one submits and the other loves, the way they become one flesh and experience incredible intimacy and relational satisfaction is just an earthly copy of a much greater spiritual reality, the relationship we experience with Christ as Christians. The blessing and fullness of marriage is just a miniature early rocket of a the much greater spiritual reality. So why is homosexual marriage wrong? Why does God not want it? Not because God hates people who struggle with homosexual feelings but homosexual marriage is an affront to the picture of the relational roles, intimacy and satisfaction that can only be painted on this earth by a husband and wife through the exclusive bond of marriage.

## **Conclusion**

Welcome to the new normal. A mind-blowing level of full forgiveness, unprecedented back stage access to God through Jesus and the superior ministry of Jesus Christ for the first time wasn't about acting something out with an earthly model like a kid playing with legos but took place in the superior spiritual reality so the earthly significance of places, times, rituals, certain kosher foods, etc.... is now obsolete. His ministry is about spiritual reality, not earthly copy.

This morning, are you living the new normal? Here is the news, there are a lot of Christians who are not living the new normal. They are still caught up in

places, rituals, foods and the trapping of making their worship about earthly shadows not recognizing its obsolescence through Jesus. Many Christians can not believe God paid for it all when they fail again and again. We don't realize the unprecedented access we have. As we come before the table. Focus with me on the new normal. Today, begin living the new normal with me.

## Hebrews 8:7-13 – The New Normal - Part 2

Sign Title: The New Normal - Pt. 2

May 10, 2009

The world is changing. Life will be radically different in the next 5 years. Technology is one of the reasons our world is changing so fast. This year, 1 in 8 couples that married, met on-line. If [www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com) were a country, it would be the 5<sup>th</sup> largest country in the world because it has 200 million users. This last month, Google processed 31 billion search requests. Things are changing, there is a new normal coming, a completely different world is right around the bend.

Last week we began unpacking this new normal in the first half of Hebrews 8 as we learned about the new way we know God. This morning, we will look at the rest of Hebrews 8 and learn about the new way we experience God's relationship with us.

The way God chooses to relate to us is called a covenant. Before we go any farther, let me explain what a covenant is.

### What is a covenant?

A covenant is a like a last will and testament. When Cindy's father passed away, the question everyone asked was, "Where is Pop Garcia's will?" What kind of questions do you think they were wondering? "Did he leave me money?", "Who gets the house?" and the ladies are wondering, "Who gets the china?" What happens if you don't like the way he wrote the will? It doesn't matter.

A will establishes the way Pop Garcia related his assets to the remaining members of his family. Pop Garcia could choose to change the will and set up a new will, but nobody can *make* him do that. It is completely his choice to set things up the way he wants.

When God establishes a covenant in the Bible, it is very similar. He sets up the way he will relate to us. It doesn't matter if we like it or not, it is not up for discussion, it is just the way it is. God can choose to change a covenant relationship, but that is his choice. Just like it is the author of a will's choice to change his will when and if he wants.

In the Old Testament, God set up different covenants. Some were conditional, like the one God made with his people on Mt. Sinai where he says, you follow me, I will bless you; you turn away from me and it will not go well with you. Other covenants were not conditional, like the covenant God made with Abraham.

Sprinkled throughout the Old Testament are hints God was planning on a new covenant, he was planning on establishing a new covenant for his people that would be totally different from anything he did before. God was rewriting the will. It was going to be vastly superior to anything else.



This new covenant changed things so radically that it was enough to divide our Bible's in half. Our Bibles contain the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word Testament is the word covenant. The first part is about the old covenants; with the coming of Jesus Christ we have a vastly different new covenant.

This morning, as we turn to Hebrews 8, we will be reading a quote from Jeremiah 31. For you trivia buffs, it is the longest Old Testament quotation in the entire New Testament.

### Hebrews 8:7-13

God gives us five promises about his relationship with us because of the new covenant.

#### God promises he won't give up on me (It is unconditional)

Do you remember your first girlfriend or your first boyfriend? Do you remember the thrill in your heart to be with them or even just thinking about them? Everything was rosy in the world because you had them in your life. The grass was greener, the sky was bluer, life was good; or at least we thought everything was good. Can I safely assume, that relationship didn't work out? You broke up. Remember the pain of rejection? Every one of us experiences it. Rejection is one of the most painful human emotions because it cuts at the heart of our identity when someone says, "You're not good enough for me." In the adult world, this is why divorce is incredibly painful, it is about rejection and the wounds last for years.

Maybe you felt a similar feeling when you were let go from a job. You were trying your best but the boss comes into your office and says, "It is not going to work out. Friday is your last day." How do you feel when you walk out of the office? You gave your best but you are not good enough. You feel lousy. It is the painful feeling of rejection.

It is heart crushing to be rejected by someone you love, it is bitter to be rejected by an employer but *even more* devastating is being rejected by God. Yes, God rejects people. How do you think Judah ended up in captivity in Babylon in the Old Testament? In the Old Testament, why was Israel destroyed by the Assyrians? How did an entire generation of Israelites go from miraculous deliverance from Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, watching water come from a rock, finding manna every morning on the desert floor but then go from the apple of God's eye to trudging through the desert for forty years until every last one was dead? They were rejected by God. Rejection by God is the most devastating rejection we can experience.

Do you ever fear God's rejection? Do you ever look at your soul in the mirror and are filled with shame? There are times I felt that way. Even King David was afraid of God's rejection after committing adultery with Bathsheba. He says in Psalm 51.

Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Psalm 51:11

I have some good news this morning. Some news that is so good it doesn't seem like it could be true. This good news is found in the new covenant.

It will *not be like* the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because *they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them*, declares the Lord. Hebrews 8:9

Sometimes the best way to describe what something is, is to describe what it is *not* like. Here is the good news, this new covenant God offers us through Jesus Christ is not like the old one. If we fail God, he will not give up on us. Turn to the person sitting next to you and say, "God will NOT give up on you." Even if we are unfaithful to God, God *promises* not to give up on us. How does that make you feel? Anybody need that promise? I do!

Now some of us are cheerleaders for the Old Covenant, "Pastor Kurt, don't preach that! If you tell people they can fail God, but God promises not to give up on us; people will have no fear of God, they will sin all the time because they know God will *not* give up on them. Pastor, you need to put some fear in people." What do you think? Does knowing God will not give up on us make us excited to sin more? No! Friends, if we understand what God has done for us through Jesus Christ, the last thing we want to do is sin. We want to please him out of thankfulness in our heart because of how great this new covenant is and how incredible is his love for us through Jesus.

How many of us remember learning to drive a stick shift? I will never forget age 16 learning to drive the family stick shift Volkswagen Rabbit with my Father. He took me to a steep hill, pulled the parking brake, put me in the driver's seat and said, "Get the car up the hill." I was scared. There are three pedals but I only have two feet and every time I take my foot off the brake to hit the gas, I rolled backward down the steep hill. Needless to say, I kept stalling the car. It was terribly embarrassing for a 16 year old as I kept rolling backwards down the hill in 12 to 15 foot spurts. But I had this going for me. My dad was NOT going to give up on me, no matter how many times I failed. Did that make me want to fail more? No, I wanted to try harder because I knew no matter what happened, he was committed to my success. The same is true of our heavenly father.

**God promises to change my affections. (It is internal)**

The story is told of a mother in a restaurant with her young daughter. During the meal, the girl kept getting up from the table and skipping around the restaurant rather than eating her food. The embarrassed mother kept grabbing her and sitting her down. Finally the mother realized she couldn't control her daughter. To keep from embarrassing her again, she sandwiched her daughter between the wall and her body in the restaurant booth. Finally pinned down with no place to go the little girl looked at her mother and said, "I may be sitting on the

outside, but I am walking around on the inside.” Mom could change her behavior, but she couldn’t change her heart.

The problem with the former covenants God set up is very similar. They were focused on external obedience guiding us toward a change of internal attitude. They were about rituals, holy places and special days. Worship was done on the outside but none of this worship changed the real problem, the human heart. If you could change the heart to worship on the inside, then the outside takes care of itself.

**This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts.**

**Hebrews 8:10**

**I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Ezekiel 36:26-27**

Under the old covenant, following God’s laws was burdensome, don’t do this, make sure you do this. God’s laws were good but they weren’t delightful to keep. Under the new covenant, following God’s law is delightful. It is what we want to do. This doesn’t mean pleasing Christ is easy, but it is what we want to do.

We see this all the time with teenagers. Their parents are dragging them to church. “Mom, why do I have to go to church.” Going to church isn’t a bad thing but it is a burdensome thing. God is their cosmic kill joy. Reading God’s Word is burdensome, Harry Potter is more interesting. The attitude is, what can I get away with? What is the minimum I have to do to be on the OK with God?

Then they go to a youth retreat and something clicks. All of a sudden, you can’t get them out of the church building. They are reading entire books in the Bible, not just chapters of the Bible. Knowing God is a delight to them. It is satisfying them. Rather than wondering what they can get away with, they want to know God more so they can please him. What happened? They became a Christian. Spiritual conversion took place. God took away their hard heart of stone that rebels against God’s laws and gave them a heart of flesh. A heart that has a desire to follow God.

This morning, are you struggling with persistent sin? You promise yourself again and again to change but lose the battle every time. How do you find freedom from persistent or hard to overcome sin? Does it mean we just need to try harder? No, that is the old covenant way and it doesn’t work. Get to know God deeper. The deeper we know God, the more God changes our heart. God gives us a heart that wants to follow his decrees and keep his laws.

**God promises not to hold back intimacy (It is universal)**

My favorite professor is Dr. Haddon Robinson. I enjoyed him leading my doctoral program. In class, he conducted himself casually but professionally. I

experienced him in a completely different way when he came to preach at the church I was serving. I picked him up at the airport in Grand Rapids and had the chance to talk with him for the two hour drive to our home. There was a completely different feeling.

He had just been appointed President of Gordon-Conwell and he shared how events transpired that led him to that position. The story took most of our two hour trip. He shared the kind of details he couldn't share in class. While Haddon cares for all of his students, that ride made me feel like a valued student that he cared about.

Every one of us appreciates when we are treated as special, valuable and close, especially by those we admire.

In the Old Testament, God chose particular people to be intimate with. God chose to reveal himself to Abraham, he chose to reveal himself to Moses, with David and with the Israelites. God wasn't intimate with everybody. Wouldn't it be amazing if God chose to reveal himself to us on a deep level also?

One of the amazing things about this new covenant is God promises not to limit intimacy to the rich and famous, to the Jewish people or to a particular denomination. It is universal. God promises to reveal himself to anyone who seeks after him.

**I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. Hebrews 8:10b-11**

This means that no matter who you are this morning, no matter what you have done, no matter how intellectually quick or how intellectually slow you are, It doesn't matter if you are 9 years old or 90 years old. When we come to God through Jesus Christ who is the mediator of this new covenant, God will be intimate with us. When we seek him, we will find him. God will not hold back from revealing himself to you.

This morning, every one of us can know God's love for us and the comforting and leading of God's Holy Spirit in our lives. God will not hold back.

**God promises not to remember my sins (It is merciful)**

When I was younger, I used to have a great memory. Unfortunately, those days are long gone so, I am thankful we have name tags every week to help me remember your names. Anybody else have trouble with their memory? While having a bad memory is a sign of our overcomplicated, over cluttered lives and our aging brains; sometimes the best thing we can do is not remember.

In marriage, one of the best things we can do is choose not to remember. I don't mean not remember our vows or not remember our anniversary. Of course, I am not suggesting we should forget Mother's Day. Sometimes the best thing we can do is choose not to remember how someone we love hurt us in the past.

When you get in an argument with someone you love, don't bring up the past. Don't go home and say, "You forgot this year, just like you forgot last year." It will not help. You can not change the past. Sometimes the best thing we can do is choose not to remember the past. There is some great news about remembering the past in the new covenant.

For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.  
Hebrews 8:12

Last week we learned something incredible about what God did for us through Jesus Christ. God forgave all our sins. Christ is seated at the right hand of God because all the payment for our sin is completed. Now, there is even better news. Not only is our sin completely paid for, but God promises not to remember our sin. That doesn't mean God forgets. He can't forget anything. It means God is not going to bring it up any more. It is no longer a topic that needs to come up in conversation. Turn to the person next to you and say, "God promises, you don't need to talk about it again." Could anything be better?

**This covenant obsoletes the former one. (It is eternal)**

This past week was trash week in town. It always amazes me what we put in the trash. I was on a walk and a neighbor put out a wicker bench and table that looked so good I called Cindy on my way to work and had her grab it and put it on our back porch. Yes, I will admit, we are a family of trash pickers. What really threw me off was what I saw thrown away at the school. There was a palate full of good looking computers, all thrown in the trash. Each of those computers was probably purchased for several hundreds of dollars. There they were, thousands of dollars on a wooden palate in the rain, just waiting for the garbage truck.

5 years ago those computers were worth good money, but today, they are in the trash heap. There is something else obsolete and old that we get to throw in the trash heap this morning. It is the Old Covenant.

By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear. Hebrews 8:13

Everybody put your hand up and wave good-bye with me to the old covenant. "Good-bye"

## **Conclusion**

Our world is going through incredible changes. This year there will be more information produced than in the last 5,000 years. While our world is drastically changing, the changes this year are minor compared to the change God made 2,000 years ago when at the Last Supper Jesus inaugurated the new covenant when he said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

How does this apply to us? When the author of Hebrews wrote to these Jewish Christians in Rome, he wanted them to know it was OK to let go of their Old Covenant rituals and traditions. The old covenant rituals and traditions is not

what it is all about. They are obsolete when compared to Christ. God has done so much more for us through Jesus Christ and the New Covenant we now enjoy through him. In Jeremiah 31, even the Old Covenant talked about the new covenant coming and replacing the old one because it is so much better!

That sounds interesting, but it doesn't seem particularly apt to us. There are not many of us feeling convicted to offer animal sacrifices or observe Jewish holidays.

But the more I think about it. We are still struggling. We often act like we are still under the Old Covenant.

- Anyone here ever failed miserably enough that you wondered if God would give up on you? That is the old covenant.
- Anyone still hoping the sins our our past would be not just forgiven but forgotten? That is the old covenant.
- Anyone wondering if God could be close enough to comfort our heart. Under the new covenant, he will.
- Anyone struggling with sin because the promises you have made to yourself just don't change your heart. Under the new covenant, God will change our desires from the inside out.

## Hebrews 9:1-15 – What to do when life stinks

Sign Title: What to do when life stinks

June 7, 2009

I love life! How about you? This is an amazing time to be alive! We live in a free country, we in one of the most prosperous countries in history, we live in a beautiful part of the country. This is an amazing time to be alive! Is there anybody else here who thinks it is a great time to be alive?

Now some of you don't have quite as much enthusiasm. Maybe you weren't cheering because you are an introvert and that is OK. But I know some of you didn't cheer because you *aren't* excited about life. You are saying, Pastor Kurt, quite honestly, life really stinks right now. I'm just not that excited about it. What you said is true but I am not feeling it.

What should we do when life stinks? What should we do when we start thinking this is a terrible time to be alive?

Sometimes the best thing we can do to put our problems and burdens in perspective is to look at the big picture. Yes, we may be upset because our coffee maker is broken and all we have is slow speed internet but look at the big picture. I think you will agree this is an amazing time to be alive! Do you know what life was like 100 years ago. It was not an amazing of a time to be alive.

- The average life expectancy was 47 years.
- Only 14% of homes in the US had a bath tub (there were a lot of stinky people!)
- 8% of the homes had a telephone and a 3 minute call from Denver to New York cost a months income.
- There were only 144 miles of paved road
- 90% of US physicians had no formal training, it was just figure it out as you go.
- Most women only washed their hair once a month and they used egg yokes for shampoo.

Anybody feel better about being alive in 2009 instead of 1909? This is an amazing time to be live! **Look back! It helps you realize just how good you have it!** If you understand the idea of looking back to help us realize how good we have it now then you understand the argument of Hebrews 9 because that is what the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hebrews is about.

This morning we are studying the first 15 verses of Hebrews 9 and there are two parts to this message. We will spend the first part of it looking back on the Old Covenant and how people related to God before Christ, then, in the second part of the message we will look at the New Covenant and how awesome our relationship with God is now because of Jesus Christ.



Before we jump in I want to give a little caveat. The author of Hebrews is not trashing the old covenant. I am not here to trash the old covenant. It was a good covenant because without it, there was nothing to relate to God! The author of Hebrews is not trashing the old covenant, he is using it to show us how much better life is now that we have the new covenant through Jesus Christ. It is like computers. 15 years ago Cindy, my wife, worked on a massive mainframe with 7 gigabytes of storage. Today I have 16 gigabytes of storage on my cell phone! The old was good, but it is nothing compared to the new!

Hebrews 9 begins by reminding us what life was like under the Old Covenant.

## What was life like under the Old Covenant?

### Everything was regulated!

Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship... Hebrews 9:1

The second half of Exodus and the whole book of Leviticus is regulations for worship. 47 chapters with everything spelled out exactly how you worshipped. Exodus 25:9 God says to Moses, make everything *exactly* like I showed you on the mountain. There was no building committee! God regulated everything. It wasn't just the layout of the OT tabernacles design God regulated. It was also the sacrifices (two a day, a lamb in the morning and the evening), it was the sin offerings, the grain offerings, drink offerings, ceremonies, feasts, mandated tithes, temple taxes, diet restrictions, what you could eat, how food should be prepared. Everything was regulated! There was no creative worship team needed!

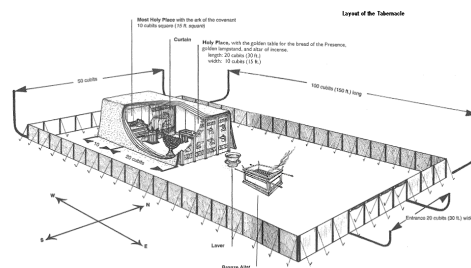
In fact most of Exodus all the way through Deuteronomy can be summed up in one of two phrases, "Thou Shall" or "Thou shall not". God says those phrases 793 in those books. Everything is regulated. There is no discussion. You buck the system and it gets ugly fast. At best you are excommunicated and worst you are killed.

### It was remote.

...and an earthly place of holiness. Hebrews 9:1

We are going to have some fun. The writer of Hebrews describes the tabernacle built by Moses to remind us what this earthly place of holiness is like.

Let me describe it. The tabernacle was a portable tent for worship. It was surrounded by a courtyard curtain that was 150 feet by 75 feet. This curtain was white to symbolize purity. Like when a bride wore white in a wedding to symbolize her purity for her husband.

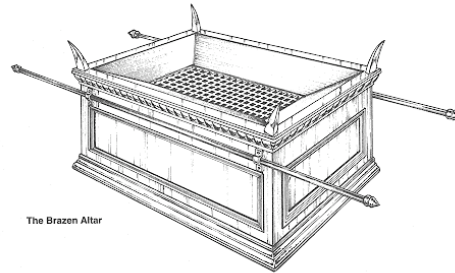


In the courtyard was the altar of burnt offerings where animals were sacrificed and



The Brazen Laver

the bronze washbasin for the priests to wash their feet and hands because sacrificing all these animals was messy business.

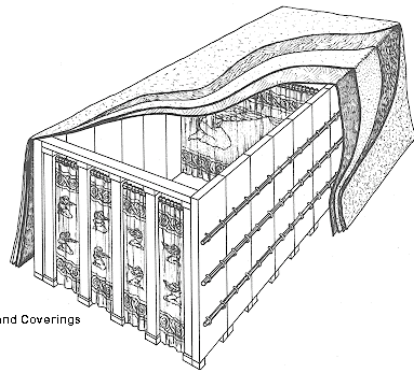


The Brazen Altar

But the other side of the tabernacle had an additional flat roofed tent with the holy place and the holy of holies. It was 15 feet by 45 feet. The holy place had some important furniture in it. The lamp stand was made of gold with three branches on a side, 7 total, each supporting a flower shaped lamp holder.

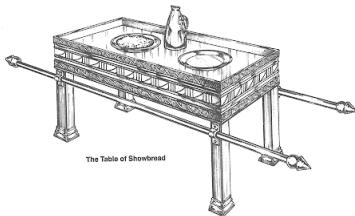


The Golden Lampstand



The Layout and Coverings

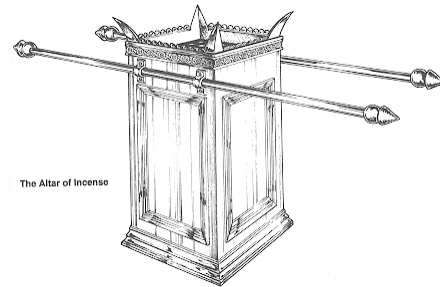
The table of presence was also there. This table had 12 loaves of bread, one for each tribe. The bread was replaced weekly on the Sabbath. The priests had to eat the old bread before they could put out the new.



The Table of Showbread

says the altar of incense was there. Different passages in the Bible describe the altar of incense in different place. Some passages say it was kept in the holy place, others say it was in the most holy place. How do we reconcile this? Is Scripture contradicting itself? Look at what the altar of incense looks like. It is designed to move! Leviticus 16:14 says that priests were never to approach God in the Holy of holies without incense. Maybe they moved the altar of incense inside somehow, maybe they took a censor,

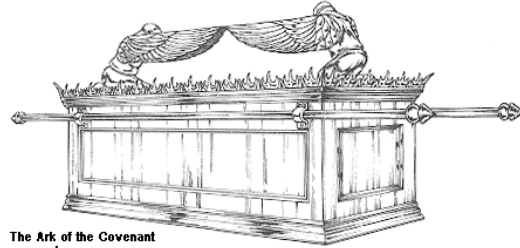
Next the writer talks about the holy of holies (the most holy place), the most inner part of the tabernacle. For you scholars you will see that he



The Altar of Incense

which is like a little shovel, of coals with them in the Most Holy place. I don't know.

What is clear throughout all of Scripture is that there was one permanent piece of furniture kept in the Holy of Holies. That was the ark of the covenant. It was a box made of acacia wood covered in gold. The top of the box was the mercy seat that had cherubim angels on each end of it.



The Ark of the Covenant  
and  
The Mercy Seat

These angels extended their wings over the box and their heads were formed looking down. Why were they like that? This is where God showed up and God is so holy symbolically the angels won't even look at him out of reverence.

What was in the ark? There were three things, each of which reminded the Israelites about something they learned in the past. There was the jar of manna. This reminded them that no matter how bad it looked, if they trusted and followed God, he would provide for their needs every day, just like he did in the desert every day for 40 years. There was Aaron's rod that budded. In the OT there was a time of rebellion against the Levites. A group of cheese heads didn't like the Aaron and Moses in charge of the nation. They wanted to get in on the action so they stirred up an ancient version of a church split. Moses said, here is how we will settle it. Everybody bring their staff's before God one night and lay them by the tabernacle and we will see which ones God chooses. Overnight Aaron's staff of dead wood budded, flowered, and even fruited. You can read in the OT what God did to the grumblers, it wasn't pretty. So the Israelites were to always remember not to mess with God's chosen man. Lastly there were the two tablets of the ten commandments. That reminded the Israelites not to play fast and loose with God's laws, those laws were like a contract God gave them to live by. They were written by the finger of God. Not a contract to blow off.

### It was restricted

These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties,... Hebrews 9:7

Into this first section the priests were always going, busy, busy, busy. Rituals, sacrifices, regulations constantly busy. It is like they are following a detailed recipe card all day long as they cook up worship for God but when it comes to actually making contact with God in the Holy of holies this is a major red tape zone. Totally restricted.

but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. Hebrews 9:7

The one day a year the high priest went into the Holy of holies was called the day of atonement. Early in the morning, the high priest put on his elaborate robes then the sacrifices would begin. By the time it came for him to finally prepare to go into the holy of holies he had already sacrificed 22 animals. This was all very busy and very bloody. When it came time to go in, the high priest would take off his beautiful and intricately woven robes and put on a plain white linen robe that had no decoration on it of any kind. He would then go to the streets and buy a bull with his own money. He sacrificed it for his own sins. He would catch some of the blood of the bull in a golden bowl then the high priest would carefully make his way into the holy of holies holding the golden bowl of blood ahead of him and using it to push open the curtain. Why? God said he was not to approach without blood. Then he would sprinkle some of the blood on the mercy seat and get out of there. The Scriptures stipulated he was not to hang around in there lest God strike him dead. After the bull for his own sins, he would come out and there would be two goats. They would cast lots to determine a loser. The loser was killed and some of that goat's blood was put in the golden bowl and back into the holy of holies the priest would go, using the bowl of blood to push open the curtain. There he sprinkled some of that blood on the mercy seat for the sins of the people and he would get out of there because he was scared and didn't want to be struck dead.

Then he would take the remaining goat and put his hands on the goat's head and confess the sins of the people onto the goat. This was called the scapegoat. Then the goat was led far far away into the wilderness never to be seen again because it ritually signified the sins of the people were taken away.

Remember everything was regulated and had to be done precisely. There was no messing around with this, no second chances. Leviticus 10 tells us the story of two of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu who tried to do some free styling with worship and offering unauthorized fire and God struck them dead. In other words, God was into the details even down to using the right book of matches to light the fire. Is anyone feeling like this worship is awesome but it is also fearful scary stuff. It is tight, it is restricted, no second takes. In fact you know how at NASA they have space shuttle simulators so astronauts can practice everything for a mission because there is no second chances when they are placing a \$10 billion dollar satellite? The high priest ran through the day of atonement simulation scenarios so he didn't get anything wrong!

So this worship is intense, it is scary, but it is also pretty ineffective! You would think that after all this you would be good to go and totally cleaned up. Think again! The day of atonement was only for the unintentional sins of the people. What about the intentional sins? What about people like David who knew it was wrong to commit adultery with Bathsheba but he didn't really care and he also intentionally bumped off Uriah her husband. What sacrifices was he to offer? There are none! The old covenant didn't have anything to fix that. That is why in Psalm 51 David says

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;... Psalm 51:16

He is stuck. There are no sacrifices for high handed sin. How many of us would be stuck under the old covenant?

### **It was religious**

This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washing - external regulations applying until the time of the new order. Hebrews 9:8-9

You know what that reminds me of? A prescription drug commercial. "Taking Levitra can cause a serious drop in blood pressure, you should check with your doctor if taking nitrates for chest pain..." At the end of all this intense stuff for old covenant worship there is this major disclaimer. "This is only an illustration and not able to cleanse the conscience of the worshiper".

Wait a minute! After all this intense worship what do we get, nothing more than an illustration. Nothing more than something external. This old covenant worship leaves you going home and it may look a little better on the outside to people but you still go home feeling guilty on the inside, it didn't clean up anything on the inside! You still go home feeling like a complete failure before God. You aren't cured, you aren't fixed. This whole old covenant system is about as effective as a cancer patient going to a beauty salon. They may look a little better on the outside but they are still dying on the inside where it really matters.

That is the old covenant. It is regulated, it is restrictive, it was ineffective for willful sin and it didn't cleanse the conscience or change the heart. It was better than nothing but what we have now because of Jesus is so much better. Remember, **sometimes looking back helps us realize how good we have it now.**

Anybody ready for some good news? You ready to see how good we have it? Let's look forward! The new covenant through Christ. "But when Christ appeared..." Can I get anyone to cheer!

### **But when Christ Appeared...**

#### **Worship is about a better place.**

...then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood... Hebrews 9:11-12

How many of you will camp this summer? How many of you have a tent? The problem with a tent is it never goes back in the bag like it came out. After putting the tent up and tearing it down a few times, the tent begins to wear out.

Soon you have sap on it, you have holes pumped through the sides with the poles and it starts to fade with the weather. Tents are not made to last forever. It doesn't take long for them to fall apart.

Thankfully Christ offered himself as the sacrifice for our sin not in the earthly tent copy (that no doubt was beginning to fall apart) but Christ offered himself in the heavenly reality. Aren't you thankful that our eternal redemption does not depend on a tent that falls apart?

### **There are better results**

...thus **securing eternal redemption**. Hebrews 9:12

What did Jesus do when he offered himself once for all? He did three things. He secured eternal redemption. Underline those three words this morning in your Bible. I want you to remember this when you get come back to them.

**Redemption** - We have a debt we can not pay, that is our sin which separates us from God. Jesus steps to the plate and he redeems us. He literally buys us back with himself. Jesus literally offers to take his death and the pain of his punishment for sin and use it to pay our un-payable bill to God

**Secure** - This means that when we trust in Christ to pay for our sins, nothing can happen to us. Our salvation is not going to be lost in the mail. There will not be a glitch in a web server in heaven. John 10 says that when we trust in Christ, nothing can snatch us out of God's hands.

**Eternal** - Everyone is looking for a lasting investment that will not lose value. Here it is. Long after the porsche is in the junk yard and the gold ring has wasted away, our restored relationship to God because of Christ will still be there. I don't care how rich you are. I don't care what you own, if you are living under the new covenant with God because of Christ, you are a richer man or woman than anything this world has to offer. There is nothing more precious or valuable than relating to God under the new covenant through Jesus, it changes everything!

### **There is better purification**

For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Hebrews 9:13-14

If the silly ashes of a heifer could purify the flesh, imagine the purification power of Christ in our lives under the new covenant. Think of the old covenant like taking a shower in the morning. It cleans us up on the outside so you look good and you smell better. Under the new covenant with Jesus, not only does it



clean us on the outside but we are purified so deeply our consciences are cleansed, we don't feel guilty, our love for sin is taken away. Living under the new covenant; knowing God through Jesus Christ we become a completely different person. We are no longer about dead works. We don't live to gain God's favor but we live out of thankfulness for God's favor. If this morning, you are struggling with sin, come to God and meet him under the new covenant through Jesus Christ, he will purify you, not just on the outside but he will change your very heart and desires.

### **We have a better promise**

Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.  
Hebrews 9:15

Tune in right now. The old covenant was try hard and we will see if you make it. The new covenant through Christ is stop trying and accept everything I have done for you, I took care of it all. I love you.

Do you have it? Are you living under the new covenant? Are you? Look at me? Your faces tell me that some of you are and some of you don't know what I am talking about. You haven't experienced it. Is there a time in your life when you can say I know I received Christ and my life is completely different, my heart is washed, my guilt is gone, my life is changed and Christ is more important to me than anything, he is the treasure of my heart?

I don't mean have you heard about the gift of eternal life? I don't mean, do you know what it is. I don't mean, can you explain it. I mean, have you received it? Is Christ the treasure of your heart or are you just dinking around playing the church game? The Bible says in Romans 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth and believe in your heart, you will be saved. Have you done that? Are you sure? Do you want to be sure?

You can reach out and receive the gift of eternal life today. It is simply a matter of confessing Christ as your savior and believing in your heart. It is saying, "God, I am a sinner, I am completely messed up. I need a new heart and new life. I need Christ's death to pay for my sin and I need Christ's purification in my life all the way down to the deepest and darkest corners of my heart. If Christ is the treasure of your heart, he will do that.

It is simply confess and believe. Right now, with no music playing, no heads bowed, if you are here this morning and you want to get this settled for all of eternity and say Jesus, I need your secure, eternal, redemption and I you want to clean up my life, not just a little buff and shine on the outside but changing the very shape of my heart; stand right where you are right now!

*...wait for responses...*

Pray with me, "Jesus, I want to know you under this new covenant. Forgive my sins, cleanse me inside out. Thank you for dying for me. I want to



live being thankful to you. There is nothing more valuable than you Jesus.  
Amen.

## Hebrews 9:16-28– Once

Sign Title: Once

July 12, 2009

Some things are so great they can happen only once. We are born only once, we graduate from high school only once. We die only once. This morning, God's Word will press this theme into our hearts. There are some things with God that are so great, they *can only happen once*.

Before we dive in, it was 5 weeks ago when we were last in Hebrews. When we last left Hebrews, we were comparing; comparing the old covenant from Moses with the new covenant through Christ. We learned that while the old covenant sacrificial system was good, it was relatively ineffective. It was intended by God to be not much more than a living illustration of our state before God. As an illustration, the old testament sacrificial system was just a temporary and partial fix for the problem of sin. It only addressed sins of ignorance, not sins willfully committed (which are most of them) and it was never able to relieve the guilty conscience or change the desire of man's heart. The blood of goats and bulls can't wash away sin.

All this changed with the new covenant through Jesus. In every point the old covenant was weak, the new covenant is strong. There are only three conditions people are in. 1) Without the old covenant there was *no access* to God, with the old covenant we moved to *limited access* to God, with the new covenant we have *full access*.

Parts of this morning's message will sound familiar. That is OK. In this section of Hebrews, the author is sharpening our focus on the greatness of the new covenant with Christ compared to the old covenant with Moses. Why is he repeating himself? The greatness of Christ is such an important theme that we can't lose sight of, like pounding a nail, he is driving it home again and again.

Our Scripture is detailed so to teach it I will read through portions of it and stop to explain and apply it.

### Death activates a will

In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. Hebrews 9:16-18

The flow of thought is much clearer in the Greek than the English. This is what you can not see: The word for *will* and the word for *covenant* are the same words in the Greek. What is true for a will is true of a covenant. For a will to go into effect, the signer must be dead. Death empowers the will. Apart from death, a will is nothing more than a piece of paper.

When my wife's father passed away, what was the big question the relatives were asking? Where is the will? Nobody was thinking about it when he

was living, everybody was thinking about it after he died. The paper that had no authority before his death became very powerful after his death. Death empowers a will. The word *will* and the word for *covenant* are the same words. So what would it take to empower God's covenants with us? Death. *Even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood.* Just like a will, a covenant is powerless without death.

## The old covenant

### Activated through death.

When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. He said, "This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep." In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Hebrews 9:19-22

He is quoting Exodus 24, the beginning of the old covenant. To empower it, Moses sacrificed young bulls and took their blood and sprinkled the book of the covenant, sprinkled the altar, and the people with blood. For this first covenant to go into effect, everything needed to be covered in blood. There needed to be lots of death to activate it.

It wasn't just the beginning of the first covenant that needed death to activate it and blood to empower it but later in Israel's history it was also the tabernacle and everything that was used in its ceremonies that needed to be activated with death and empowered with blood under the old covenant. Imagine the tabernacle on opening day when it was dedicated. It's gorgeous curtains, its polished gold, the intricately woven priestly garments. Everything was splattered with blood.

### Empowered through blood.

It wasn't just inauguration day that was filled with death and blood, it was all the time. During the 1,000 years the old covenant was empowered there were over a million animals sacrificed. There was so much blood shed during Passover that a trough was constructed from the temple into the Kidron Valley for the disposal of blood - They build a sacrificial plumbing system to get rid of it because it was all over the place.

Why did God want all this death and blood shed in the old covenant? Blood symbolizes death. The issue is not the blood itself but how the shedding of blood is associated with death.

For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. Leviticus 17:11

So we learned these connections: 1) Death activates a covenant; 2) Blood empowers a covenant and without blood and death there is no forgiveness of sin.

Here is something important for us to remember. In your mind, step back in time. The old dealt with our separation from God because of our sin. In the old covenant, everything dripped with blood because the only way to handle sin was with death, the animal's death was symbolic of the death you deserved. Nobody could forget the seriousness of sin. You sin, death was needed to cover it, a life for a life. Again and again all day long.

**The wages of sin is death. Romans 6:23**

This is something we have lost sight of. Every sin we commit can only be paid for by death. We think our sins can be forgotten, they can be passed over or ignored. It doesn't happen that way with God. Every one of our sins deserves death.

When we go to the courthouse a judge decides our case. He tries to determine if we will be fined, if we will be imprisoned or maybe even executed for our crime. The penalty for our crime is based on the severity of our offense to society. If we go jaywalking, that is different from murder and deserves a different penalty.

God doesn't have those kinds of deliberations with sin. Every sin is a crime of rebellion against Him. *Every sin is a capital offense to God.* For God all sin can only be paid for one way,...death.

We now understand that death activates the old covenant, that blood empowers the old covenant (that is why it was splattered over everything) and the goal of it was forgiveness of our sins, which always deserve our own death.

## **The new covenant**

### **Activated by a better death.**

**It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Hebrews 9:23-24**

The copies of heavenly things on earth needed to be purified with blood. The copies of the heavenly things is the furniture of the earthly tabernacle. They needed to be purified with blood, but remember, they are only copies of the heavenly reality. They are like a plastic model. They are just a miniature copies of a greater reality.

If it took the blood of a goat or a calf to purify under the old covenant, it would take something much more powerful to purify things not in the earthly copy of the sanctuary but the real heavenly sanctuary. That is why he said *the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.* In heaven you

need more powerful blood to make forgiveness work in the real sanctuary. You need more powerful blood, to power up the new covenant. Christ's death activates the new covenant and his blood has the kind of purification power a goat or a bull could never have. It was with his blood he entered the real sanctuary in heaven.

Did he have to throw his blood all over the sanctuary like Moses did to purify the earthly tabernacle? No. The real sanctuary in heaven, *is already pure*, it doesn't need to be purified. What is the one thing God wants to bring to heaven that needs purification to be there? US! Christ's blood is what covers us.

### **Empowered by a better blood.**

Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Hebrews 9:25-26

Remember the similarities of the old and new covenant. Both were begun by death. Both found their purification power in blood. The physical setup of the earthly sanctuary is a miniature copy of the real sanctuary in heaven.

Here is one thing that is different. It is a BIG difference. The sacrifices of the old covenant were repeated day after day and every year. Blood and more blood to keep the ineffective old covenant powered up. Layer after crusty layer of blood splattered on the ark of the covenant. You didn't need to use luminol from the Forensic File crime show to find the blood. It was all over the place. Caked layer after caked layer of it. Because it had to be repeated again and again we know it was ineffective, it was incomplete. It was a band-aid that covered the wound but never healed the wound.

### **Christ died ONCE.**

The new covenant is so different. Christ died ONCE. His death inaugurated the covenant replacing the old and the power of his sacrificed blood was so great that it didn't just produce forgiveness of a sin, or sins for a period of time but it is capable of purifying us from all sin for all time.

Think about the value of Christ's death. Christ's blood is the most precious blood that every flowed through the veins of a body. A man who is fully God. The forgiveness and cleansing power of his blood is so great that when we trust in Christ we are covered with that blood and it cleanses not just the sins of ignorance but our willfully committed sins. It even cleanses our consciences. It reforms everything in us so the great love of our life is who it should be, Christ, not ourselves.

Are you getting the picture of the greatness of what Christ has done? Do you understand the significance of what it means to say Christ died *only once*?

His death is so great it could never be repeated again? Anything that diminishes the greatness of Christ's sacrifice and triumph over sin is offensive.

Did you know that millions of people this morning are worshiping Jesus by re-crucifying him? They don't see his death on the cross as once for all time. I am serious. I have nothing personal against the Roman Catholic church or the mass. I love many things about the Catholic church but this is really important. It is a major issue that belittles what Christ did for us and that he only needed to do it ONCE. They believe Christ is literally re-crucified every weekend in the mass. The council of Trent made this official church doctrine in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Christ becomes present in the Sacrament of the Altar by the transformation of the whole substance of the bread into His Body and of the whole substance of the wine into His Blood... Ludwig Ott, Foundations of Catholic Dogma, pg. 379.

The holy mass is a true and proper sacrifice. It is physical and propitiatory, removing sins and conferring the grace of repentance. Propitiated by the offering of this sacrifice, God, by granting the grace of the gift and the gift of penance, remits trespasses and sins however grievous they may be... Ludwig Ott

Did you hear that? The satisfaction of God's wrath against our sin is dependent on the taking of the weekly mass which they believe becomes the real body and blood of Christ freshly re-sacrificed for us each weekend. That is how God's wrath against sin is propitiated.

Does Christ's death satisfy the wrath of God? Yes. Does the bread and wine become the physical body and blood of Christ? No. Do we need to take the actual body and blood of Christ each weekend to keep removing our sins? No. Why not? What does Hebrews say? He was sacrificed *once*. Re-crucifying Christ each weekend is an affront to the greatness of Christ.

This is why when you see Catholic crucifixes, Christ is still on the cross. They believe his sacrifice is still going on for you. But the Bible says it is done. Do we love our Catholic brothers? Of course. Do we hold many things in common with our Catholic brothers? Yes. Do we take the mass? No. Friends, it is good to have convictions about things. Especially something that matters. Holding high the greatness of Christ, is it something that matters?

**I will die only ONCE. Am I ready?**

Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people... Hebrews 9:27-28

This past week was the Michael Jackson funeral. Did you watch it? The funeral was a celebration of his life. What struck me was the absence of what the Bible says happens to us after death. Stevie Wonder said about Jackson, "God must have needed another angel." Did Michael Jackson become an angel? What does he face after death? What will each one of us face after death?

According to the Bible there are only three groups of people in the world. Those separated from God because of sin, those with limited and partial access

to God under the old covenant and those with full access to God and all their sin paid for under the new covenant with Jesus.

Apart from Jesus Christ, is there any way Michael Jackson could be in heaven? As someone said, "Even the king of pop will bow before the king of kings."

## Conclusion

Jesus' life, death and resurrection for our sin is the biggest event of the universe. It is an event that is so big it can *only happen once*. When our system of time was set up it was measured either B.C. (before Christ) or A.D. (Amino Domini - which means in the year of our Lord). Everything is measured from Jesus because it was the one event that is so significant, it is unrepeatable.

This morning, you may have known Christ for years, you may have grown up in the church but the familiarity of everything of what it means to be a Christian has dulled your senses. This morning, get a crystal clear picture of the greatness of Jesus and what he did for us. Don't leave church without it.

If this morning, you do not know Christ. Today is the day, now is the time to move from separated from God to full access with God. To have all your sins forgiven, to have your guilty conscience changed and to experience God remaking the desires of your heart in purity and truth.

That can be done by simply acknowledging your sin, asking Christ's death on the cross to pay for your sin and striving to make Christ the most important thing in your life.



## Hebrews 10:1-18 – It's All About Jesus

Sign Title: It's all about Jesus

July 19, 2009

Raise your hand if your basement or garage is filled with stuff? What is in our basement and garages? Stuff we don't use but we just can't let go of.

I read a story of a woman in New York City who just couldn't let go of her old stuff. She kept everything in her apartment. She stacked stuff all the way to the ceiling and there were just these little paths she walked through, like a rat in a maze. One day her piles collapsed and she was trapped alive. It took an army of volunteers to dig her out. We are saying, lady, why couldn't you let the old stuff go when you get something new? We laugh... but many people struggle to let go of the old when they get something new. Refusing to let go of the old, even when you have new that is vastly better, is not just a problem of the modern world, it was also a problem in the ancient world.

We are studying a book in the Bible called, ... what? Hebrews. The entire book is a series of contrasts. They are contrasts between the old covenant, given through Moses, and the new covenant we have through Jesus Christ. What we have through Christ and the new covenant is much better than anything else God did for us before. But what should we do with the old covenant? What role should it play in our lives? Should we store it in our basement or garage in case we need it some day? Should we combine it with Christ? Let's dive into chapter 10 of Hebrews in search of an answers to that question.

### The old covenant couldn't get the job done.

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Hebrews 10:1-4

The old covenant wasn't getting the job done. It wasn't able to save people from their sin. It was only a shadow not the reality. This word for shadow, in the Greek it is a very special type of shadow, means a *fuzzy* shadow. Not crisp and clear but vague and blurry. There is a big difference between a person's shadow and the person. Fuzzy shadows are colorless, lifeless, no detail, no substance. It is only a rough representation. That is all it is. That is what the old covenant is. It is a fuzzy shadow representing the problem of our relationship with God (sin) and the only way it can be fixed (death). It is not meant to be more than that.

When you read your Old Testament what you find is rules, lots of them, rules and rules and rules. Some people think if we can just keep the rules we are good with God. It doesn't work that way. Read it a little closer. How many rules

are there? Hundreds. The rules are there to show us how far short we fall from God's holiness, not to be a ladder up which we can climb into holiness.

Have you seen one of those portable speed limit signs that has a radar gun in it with a display telling you how fast you are going? We had them in Michigan. We called them *guilt boxes*. The sign says, the speed limit is 25, your current speed is 39. Why do the police use them? To make you feel good? No, they are designed to making you feel guilty for breaking the rules. That is what the Old Covenant rules were there for. They are guilt boxes showing us how messed up we really are when compared to God's standards. You break the rules and it is death, death, and more death.

This was the limitation of the old covenant. It was only designed to show us the problem of sin, but it never fixed the problem of sin. What does it say... *It can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.* This phrase *make perfect* is the same phrase we saw in 7:19 and 9:9 and it means *make mature*. It means to grow out of something.

Mom's, remember changing your child's diapers in the middle of the night? It is day after day and week after week of disturbed sleep. Some nights you say to yourselves, "Will this ever end? Will this child potty train?" You keep telling yourself, by age 16 she *will* be potty trained. She *will* mature out of this. The old covenant couldn't give you that. It couldn't mature us out of spiritual diapers. We could clearly see the problem of sin but there was no solution for it.

If the sacrifice of a goat or a bull took away sins, the animal peddlers would have gone out of business, but they didn't. They were doing a thriving business because animal blood never takes away sin. There is blood everywhere in the temple but the people still go home feeling guilty.

In v.3 when the writer of Hebrews says, *all the sacrifices were was a reminder of sins.* He is upsetting their apple cart. Put yourself in the ancient world. The writer of Hebrews is writing to Jews. This whole old covenant thing was their baby. It was their identity. They are God's people and sacrifices are what God's people do. So when the writer of Hebrews says this, the whole old covenant system is nothing more than a big reminder of how messed up we are, how do you think they felt?

Do you mean that is all we get as God's chosen people? We get to be a big picture to ourselves and others of the sinfulness of mankind. Do you mean everything we have done for a 1,000 years is absolutely useless to fix the sin problem! Yes, that is exactly what the writer of Hebrews is saying! Can you imagine how hard this was for them to accept?

The writer of Hebrews is not the first person in Scripture to realize the old covenant sacrifices weren't working. Many of the prophets talked about the same problem.

“The multitudes of your sacrifices - what are they to me?” says the Lord. “I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings!” Isaiah 1:11-13a

With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:6-8

Folks, everybody knew the offerings weren't working but nobody wanted to let it go. Why was it so hard to let go? Everyone likes to think we can do something to deserve God's love. Everyone likes to be in a position where we can do something to pay for things.

For example, when you go out to dinner with another couple, what is the big fight about at the end of the meal? Who will pay the bill. The person who loses the fight says, “I will get it next time”. You go out of town for the weekend and when you come home you find that your neighbor cut your grass. In one way you are happy but in another way you are pretty angry because now you have to wait till your neighbor goes out of town for the weekend so you can cut his grass. Folks, there is a sinful bend in our hearts which leaves us wanting to do something so we don't have to take anything for free. We would rather say “I did it. I deserve it.” It is the same way when it comes to God. We want to say, “Look at me God and all my prayers, look at me and all my gifts to the poor, look at me and all the good things I do to *deserve your love for me.*”

This is why the old covenant was so hard for people to drop. Just like we want to say we paid for the meal, they wanted to say, I bought the bull, I paid for it. I did it.” God says, no way buddy, the old covenant *never* fixed anything! It is not about you. Stop pretending you can fix your sin problem. To make sure you don't get caught up in yourself the whole sacrifice thing was and is nothing more than a picture that doesn't fix anything. How is that for a major slap in the face.

### **God's plans were always about Jesus.**

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll— I have come to do your will, O God.’”First he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them” (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Hebrews 10:5-10

He starts out quoting Psalm 40:6-8. What makes this interesting is that it is not an exact quote of Psalm 40:6-8. What makes it even more amazing is that it is part of an inter-trinitarian conversation Jesus had with his heavenly Father. This is like eavesdropping on the trinity.

Jesus said to his father, *you do not desire sacrifices and burnt offerings*. Taking care of the sin issue with goats and bulls wasn't working for God. Remember, it is nothing more than a guilt box. What was God's plan all along to take care of sin? It was Jesus Christ. God's son taking on a human body to die for our sins. That was God's plan to take care of sin from day one! It has always *been* about Jesus. He is not some last minute addition because the old covenant wasn't working and God the Father was resorting to desperate measures.

Jesus says, "It is written about me in the scroll". If you were here around Christmas you were with us when we did a special study on The angel of the Lord, finding Jesus in the Old Testament. What we saw is that Jesus is all over the place.

After Jesus rose from the dead and we walked with disciples on the Emmaus road, what did he do?

**And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. Luke 24:27**

The Old Testament shows God's plan always was to take care of sin through Jesus. Let me give you one example of Jesus in the Old Testament.

**For David himself says in the Book of Psalms, " 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.' Luke 20:42 (quote from Psalm 110:1)**

How many Lord's are talking in Psalm 110:1? Two! One of them gets to sit until the other makes his enemies his footstool (this is significant and we will learn more about this in a few minutes).

There are two applications the writer of Hebrews makes. Since the old covenant was not working and it never intended to solve the sin problem what should we do with the old covenant now that we have the new?

**...so get rid of the old system when you have Jesus in the new.**

**Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. Hebrews 10:9**

The NIV says he *set aside* the old covenant when he established the second. Other translations say *he abolished* the old covenant. That Greek word translated *set aside* or *abolished* is the same word used in the Bible to describe the murder of the infants in Bethlehem when Herod tried to kill Jesus. The writer of Hebrews is saying Jesus sacrificed the entire old testament sacrificial system. It is dead, it is gone, it is out of commission. Throw it in the junk yard, all it did was show us our sin problem. It was a guilt box. Did you ever wonder why the church doesn't observe all the Jewish holidays and festivals in the old covenant?

Here is the reason. The Bible tells us not to! It is not about the old covenant system. **It is all about Jesus.** It always was about Jesus. Does that mean we tear our Old Testaments out of our Bibles? No! It means we read the front of the book differently now that we know how the back of the book tells us the story ends.

**...so Jesus is all we need**

And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Hebrews 10:10

Here he is pounding that *once for all* nail again. We looked at this last week. Jesus died once for all. That means, he died once,... for all. That is all that is needed to take care of sin. This is important, it is how we can sniff out a heretic. Anybody who denies the *once-ness* of Jesus' death for sin or the *for-all-ness* of his death for sin is not from God. How many times has the writer of Hebrews said, *once for all*. You see Muslims say Jesus was a great teacher but that to take care of our sin *once for all*? Jehovah's Witnesses say Jesus didn't do it all but you have to help him with other things to finish taking care of sin. We don't need to help Jesus with our sin problem. He took care of it once for all. The *for-all-ness* means that Jesus' death for sin takes care of my sin problem of my past, my present and even my future sin *even before I commit it*. But what about the Old Testament? What about Moses, who was God's mouthpiece for the old covenant? What about David, a man after God's heart? If the old covenant doesn't save anybody and Jesus is the only way to be saved, how does Moses get to heaven? Later, Hebrews will explain this in more detail but realize Moses looked forward to Jesus. Moses looked forward to Christ's coming just like we look back on his coming. **It's all about Jesus.**

**God's plans will always be about Jesus.**

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, Hebrews 10:11-13

Some of this is review. In the old covenant sacrificial system, the one piece of furniture God didn't put in the temple was a chair. That was because a priest's work was never done. There was no break time. They were sacrificing for sins all the time. Here comes Jesus, he offers himself as a sacrifice for sins and he gets to do what no other priest could, he sits down. It is job complete; that's a wrap; it is over with. So when Jesus' work was completed, he is now seated. What is he doing while he is seated?

Earlier we learned that he intercedes for us to the father but here we learn he is also waiting. He is waiting till God the father defeats his enemies and makes them a footstool for his feet. That is what we just saw in Psalm 110:1, it was also what we saw in Hebrews 1:13. God the father will have everyone bowing to Jesus. He is the king. Everybody will acknowledge Christ's right to

rule over creation. Everyone will bow down to him. We will either bow down to him out of love and respect, because he is our savior, or we will acknowledge him as our king because we are his defeated enemies. So rather than have him as our king for this life, we are his footstool for the next.

Where are you this morning? Do you think Jesus is just one of the many ways out there and everybody gets to pick the God they want because all religions are the same and what you worship is a matter of preference. Jesus is NOT one of many choices on the McDonald's value meal. According to the Bible, *it was all about Jesus from the very beginning and it will be all about Jesus forever in the future.* He is the only way to take care of our sin problem. *It is all about Jesus.* Get this thing out of your head that says all religions are the same. They aren't. *It is all about Jesus.*

### **Jesus' new covenant gets the job done.**

The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. Hebrews 10:14-18

The writer of Hebrews is putting the nails in the coffin of the old covenant. To do it he goes back to the book of Jeremiah where in the old covenant God told us what the new covenant would be like. Jeremiah specifically said in Jeremiah 31:34 that in the new covenant, *our sins and lawless acts will be remembered no more.* The new covenant will do away with sins once and for all. So if you are Jewish and you are holding onto the old covenant and wondering if this is all too good to be true, read what the the old covenant says will happen in the new covenant. God will take care of our sins once for all. If our sins are forgiven then all the offerings for sin are obsolete!

It is amazing how forgiven we are through Jesus. But before we close, there is one practical point of application. If our sins are *all* forgiven, why do we still struggle with sin? If my sins are forgiven once and for all before God, why can't I be done with my struggles with sin once and for all?

For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. Hebrews 10:14

We are now fully forgiven before God because of Christ, but we are in the process of sanctification. That means that our purity before God is in the process of displaying itself more and more in our lives. The more time that passes, the more we walk with Jesus, the more we know Jesus and the more Christ remakes us to become like him. Here is the good news. I am not perfect but standing before God I am perfect. When God the father looks at us, he sees the purity of his son, on our lives. When God looks at the purity of our lives, he sees the purity of Jesus. *It is all about Jesus!*

### **Conclusion**

I want everyone to stop everything. Freeze. What is our relationship with God all about? **It is all about Jesus!**



## Hebrews 10:19-22 – Draw Near to God

Sign Title: Draw Near to God

August 2, 2009

Cycling in Iowa is different from cycling where I grew up on the East Coast. What makes it different? The hills! Our little corner of Iowa doesn't have many of them. In New York state there are many difficult hills to climb, but after the working up the hill, there was always the thrill of flying down the back side.

In our study of the book of Hebrews, have been on a hill climb. We wrestled through some difficult theology and in doing so, we learned a lot about Jesus. Jesus is greater than anything God did before his coming. Jesus is greater than anything God will ever do. Jesus is the center of everything.

Earlier in the book of Hebrews we learned Jesus is greater than every angel, he is greater than Moses, greater than Abraham, greater than Levi and every high priest. The new covenant Jesus brought us is much better than the old covenant, in fact it sets the old covenant aside. Christ's sacrifice for sin is so great it pays for all sin, for all time with the one sacrifice of his life.

Jesus is greater than everything. To comprehend the greatness of Jesus, we climbed some challenging hills. I am thankful to tell you that as of this morning, we are cresting the hill. We are about to go down the back side where the pedaling gets easier and the ride is exhilarating.

This morning the writer of Hebrews will briefly summarize everything we have learned in the book of Hebrews and then he will begin showing us the back side of the hill; how to apply this to real life.

Hebrews 10:19-25

**What has God done for me?**

**Jesus paid the price for my sin.**

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is his body, Hebrews 10:19-20

This was hard for people to hear. Confidence to approach God, that is shocking. Everything about the entire OT sacrificial system was designed to teach we can *not* have confidence approaching God. If anything, we are to be filled with fear. That was the natural reaction of the people in Exodus when the Old Covenant was being inaugurated.

When the people saw the thunder and lightening and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. **But do not have God speak to us or we will die.**" Exodus 20:18-19

It wasn't just at the beginning of the Old Covenant when the people were filled with fear but remember what it was like when the High Priest went into the

holy of holies once a year. He went in with bells on his garments so people could hear he was still alive and God hadn't struck him dead, he practiced the day of atonement ritual in a day of atonement simulator so he could get it right. The high priest went into the holy of holies feeling like he was going under the knife for triple bypass surgery. He may not come out of this alive. Approaching God was a scary thing.

What does the writer of Hebrews tell us? Jesus paid for our sin, once for all. The barrier of sin that separated us from a holy God is gone! There is a new way through the curtain into the holy of holies, it is through the body of Jesus. So we can come before God with confidence because when God looks at us through the lens of Jesus' blood, we are squeaky clean. We can march right up to God with NO FEAR! Instead of coming before God for a short and fearful time, we get to pack the moving van and move right in to the presence of God. Full barrier-free access to God is something inconceivable in the OT; but we have it through Jesus. The writer of Hebrews says... That is the point of everything I have taught you. This is why Jesus is the only way to God and all religions are not the same. Only Jesus paid sin. Mohammed didn't, Joseph Smith didn't, Krishna didn't, Buddha didn't... only Jesus.

### **Jesus is my advocate to the father.**

We don't just have *full access* to God through Jesus we have *unprecedented advocacy* with God.

...and since we have a great priest over the house of God... Hebrews 10:21

Jesus is our great high priest. The priests in the OT were the bridge between the common people and the uncommon God. One hand reaching toward God and another hand reaching to the people. Here we have Jesus who is the best priest anyone could dream of. He is fully God and fully man. He understands God's holiness and he understands our weakness. Tell me, when we go through tough times in life and we cry to God in prayer; who else would you want with you when you plead your case to God? Who else could better understand your struggles? Who else could be a better advocate with you to the father than Jesus Christ? Nobody. That is what we have!

That is the brief summary of everything the writer of Hebrews was teaching.

### **Why did the Father send the Son for me?**

#### **The Father did this for His glory.**

Doesn't this sound too good to be true? Why would God do all this for us? Why would He pay for our sin? Why would He send his own son to do it? Is it because God knew we were essentially nice people? Is it because we deserved it? Absolutely not. In Romans 3:10 the Bible says *there is no one righteous, not even one*. Why did God do this for us? *God did it for His glory!* God took some of the objects in the universe that are most fully deserving of his wrath and punishment and turned them into objects of his most undeserved mercy.

Of any element of God's creation, who deserves to be punished for their crimes against nature and their crimes against one another more than mankind?

They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power. 2 Thessalonians 1:9

Everlasting destruction means fatal punishment that will not end. That is incredibly scary.

The other side is what is offered us through Christ. Not everlasting destruction but the ability to come directly into God's presence now. Having all of our sin for all time completely forgiven. Understand what God did for us in Christ. When Christ came to earth, in the incarnation, Jesus fused himself with a human body *forever*. Forever, Christ's divinity is now permanently combined with his humanity. For those who identify with Jesus, we now have an elder brother named Jesus. In eternity we are not the objects of God's fully deserved wrath but we are objects of God's completely undeserved mercy.

For example, right now, the angels are above us in order of power and authority, but according to 1 Corinthians 6:3, in eternity we take on a rank above angels and become God's highest created order of being; since we are part of Jesus' family. Jesus is our brother, he has as part of his being, a permanently glorified human body.

For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:9

Could there be anything more mind blowing? Are you beginning to understand how amazing the treasure of Jesus is?

Paul writes about this same thing. God chose to take some of the objects that deserved God's wrath and, through Jesus, to make them objects of God's completely undeserved mercy. Put a star next to this verse in your Bible.

What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory. Romans 9:22-23

Doesn't what God has done for us through Jesus just blow you away? Do you see why we can't be ashamed of the gospel but we need to tell our friends and neighbors? This is the message we tell them. God loves you! Through Jesus he wants to wipe away all of your sin. That is just the beginning. Wait to you read the fine print about the retirement plan in eternity. Apart from Christ, we have no hope.

**God did this for my pleasure.**

We are designed by God to be pleasure seekers. Don't be ashamed of loving pleasure. Don't be afraid to want pleasure. God created us to enjoy pleasures. Pleasure is a good gift from God.

The desire for pleasure is what motivates most of what happens in the world. We drive by the marina in Okoboji and they put boats by the road. What are they doing? They are saying, *here is pleasure, it could be yours!* You go to the car dealership and see the new cars and the dealer says, *here is pleasure.* There is nothing wrong with pleasure. We are designed to seek it and to be satisfied by it. But the pleasures of cars, boats, houses is only temporary and like a bubble, it has no substance to it. It quickly bursts and is gone.

The older you become the more refined our pleasure seeking becomes. Rather than the pleasure of things, you long for the pleasure of relationships. The greatest pleasures in this life are found in relationships. Ask any 20 year old if they would rather have, a great spouse or a new boat. They will tell you the pleasure of the spouse trumps everything. This is why when a young couple gets married, they think they can live on nothing. They have love, what other pleasure do they need. Nothing else matters.

The richest part of relational pleasure is when undeserved love is shown to us. What a pleasure to know we are loved and wanted, not because of what we do but because of who we are.

Isn't that what every wife wants, a husband who seeks her, who wants her just for who she is on her good days and her bad days, with the makeup on and the makeup off. Isn't that the greatest pleasure of someone elderly in the nursing home? A son or a daughter who seeks their presence, who wants to be around them, just because they are loved.

If those are the criteria for the richest pleasures in life, where is the richest most undeserved love we will ever receive to be found? Who has sought us most? Who has sacrificed for us more than anyone else? Jesus Christ. To all of us who are pleasure loving hedonists at heart, the richest pleasure to be found is in the love of Jesus.

You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. Psalm 16:11

They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. Psalm 36:8

That is quite a contrast. Those who reject Christ will suffer eternal destruction. Those of us who embrace Christ will enjoy the eternal pleasure of God, beginning now and lasting forever. So if you love pleasure, delight yourself in Jesus. It can't get any better than spelunking the caverns of God's undeserved love.

**How do I apply this to my life?**

**Draw Near to God.**

In the verses that follow, the writer of Hebrews is on the back side of the mountain and he begins to take these incredible truths and apply them to our lives. There are a series of applications he gives that all begin with the phrase, *let us.* This morning, let's just look at the first.

...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Hebrews 10:22

When you strip away all the modifiers, there is one clear command. *Draw near to God*. If this morning, you are filled with shame because of your sin, confess your sin to Jesus Christ and ask for the complete and total forgiveness he has obtained for you on the cross, to be applied to the sin of your life once for all. Don't let your conscience keep you away as it tells you that God could never forgive you. Nothing could be further from the truth. God forgave us from all of our sin through Jesus. Draw near to him. Pursue Jesus.

Does God understand your struggles and your pain? Yes, Jesus knows what it is like to be betrayed, he knows what it is like to barely have enough to live on, he knows hunger, he knows the agony of temptation. Draw near to God through Jesus, he understands. Pour your heart out to him. Ask for his help. He will be there.

let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4:16

Draw near to Jesus. Nobody loves us more. Nobody cares more. There is no better pleasure in this life than discovering the incredible scope of God's love for us through Jesus. The more we know about what God has done for us through Jesus, the deeper the joy of our heart.

**Be a Hedonist! Enjoy the exquisite pleasures of God's love and our destiny.**

We don't have to build a tower like they did in Babel to reach God. We do not have to travel to the dome of the Rock like the Muslims do to find God.

He is with us this morning. We draw near to him by reaching with the hands of our heart, not the hands of our body. We draw near to God by turning our affections to him. It is little different from any other relationship. It is talking to and listening to God. I have a homework assignment for you this week. Live this command of God. Draw near to him because nothing on God's part is holding us back.

This week walk and talk with God. Take a walk on one of our walking paths and pour your heart out to God. Tell him how much you love him. Tell him how thankful you are to Jesus and what he did to free us from our sin. If you are going through a tough time, pour your heart out to Jesus and tell him all about it. His shoulders are big enough to carry your burdens.

Step two - After walking and talking with God, take the time to sit and listen. Read God's Word with a notebook and pencil in your hand. Write down the verses that God applies to your heart. Tear a copy of those verses out of your notebook, keep them in your pocket and read them every time you reach in for your keys.

Draw near to God. We have free and complete access to God offered to us through Jesus.

## Hebrews 10:24-25 – We Need Each Other

Sign Title: We Need Each Other

August 23, 2009

A few weeks ago, a scary moment happened to a man in our church. Most of us already know about it. Dave Hagedorn suffered a massive heart attack. Medically speaking, he died. The doctors shocked his heart 14 times before it began beating again. It is a medical miracle Dave is still with us. We thank God for his kindness to Dave and his family. Our prayers are and will continue to be with him.

How to sustain physical life is not something I know much about. This morning, we are studying a passage in the book of Hebrews that talks about sustaining an even more important life, spiritual life.

**And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25**

Three Sundays ago we passed over the peak in the book of Hebrews. The writer moved from telling us all the good things we have in Christ and he is now applying it to our life. Three weeks ago we looked at that first application which was, "Let us Draw Near to God" because we have unprecedented access to God the father through Jesus Christ the Son. Apart from Jesus, nobody can approach God because the curtain of sin shut everyone out. With Jesus, we have full access to God the father.

This morning we move to the second big difference Jesus makes for our lives. Since we have such a great savior, let's look out for one another so that we do not drift away from Jesus.

Life can be really tough. We are not designed to live life alone and it is especially important we do not try to live the Christian life alone. Let me say it stronger. Lone ranger Christians *will not survive* to the end. We usually think our faith is a personal thing just between us and God. That is partially true. We begin our spiritual lives by trusting in Christ personally but we sustain our spiritual life corporately. The writer of Hebrews tells us a healthy spiritual life is only found in realizing we need each other to make it to the end. He gives us three commands to obey about our love for one another so we finish well spiritually.

**How do we stay spiritually healthy?**

**Spur one another on to love and good deeds.**

**And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Hebrews 10:24**

We just returned from our family vacation with my parents. We enjoyed Yellowstone, the Tetons and saw a good portion of Wyoming. Wyoming is



cowboy territory. One of the displays at our hotel was on spurs. I never thought much about them until last week. I learned they are to irritate the horse. They are designed to provoke him to action.

The NIV translates a very interesting Greek word as spurring. Other translations say *stir up* or *stimulate*. The Greek word means *to move someone into action*. In the negative sense it means to provoke, like a bully would pick a fight with someone. But here the word is not being used in a negative sense, it is a positive sense. We are to provoke others from mere talk into actions when it comes to love and good deeds. We are to be not just talkers but doers.

The writer of Hebrews says we are to *consider* how to spur people into greater measures of love and good deeds. We have to think about this. We need to make plans to do this.

Did anyone come to church with their spiritual spurs on today? Did anyone come here this morning with the intent of purposefully helping other people in their spiritual walk? Most of us didn't come here that way. We came so people would *help us* spiritually. We didn't come to *help others* spiritually. In fact, most American Christians like to get the singing and the sermon over with and bolt out the door to be first in the lunch line. I can understand why we feel this way. There are some great places to eat in town. But spiritually encouraging others takes time. It takes time to meet people and love people.

The writer of Hebrews says, if we are going to survive to the end spiritually, make plans to spur love and good deeds in the lives of others. Let me give you some examples of how we can do that:

**Encouragement** - Life is tough. One of the easiest and most important things we can do for one another is commit to be an encourager.

**Acts of kindness + Service** - Life has some rough bumps in it. When we hit those bumps, one of the best things we can do is be there for one another. When I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I was hit by a car while riding my bicycle home from school. I nearly lost my life from the resulting head injury. What helped my parents make it through that time was their church family. The meals that were made, the friends who prayed with them and walked with my parents through that time were invaluable.

Of course there are other stories. Sad stories of people who professed Christ but who never got over feeling unloved. Today they are bitter and mock the church. Are they saved? That is a question only God can answer. What is important to learn is that we have incredible power to either help or critically damage the spiritual life of a brother or sister in Christ.

**The power of example** - Titus 2:7 says that Titus was to teach by setting an example for other believers about the way the Christian life is lived. I have always been someone who likes reading technical material, especially technical stuff about God. But as I have grown a little older, so have my taste in books. Some of my favorites are biographies. One of my favorites is by Robert

McQuilken entitled, [A Promise Made, A Promise Kept](#). McQuilken was the president of a thriving seminary when his wife was diagnosed with Alzheimer. Over time she slowly lost her mind. First she couldn't plan a menu, soon she was disorientated and couldn't be left alone. In the dead of winter she would wander aimlessly in the cold without shoes or gloves looking for her husband, too disorientated to fend for herself. Rather than put his wife in an institution for the last 5 to 10 years of her life, Robert McQuilkin left his job as a seminary president to personally care for his wife, who no longer recognized him, until her dying day.

Robert McQuilken is a spiritual hero. What an encouragement to stir up love and faithfulness in our marriages when our marriages aren't all that we expect.

So let us consider how we can stir others up to love and good deeds in their spiritual lives. We can do that through encouragement, acts of kindness and the example we set in our lives.

### **Don't give up meeting together.**

**Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing,...**  
**Hebrews 10:25**

The word for *meeting together* conveys a formal gathering. Let us not forsake the formal gathering of Christians, which some are already in the habit of doing. Why would it be so important that the Holy Spirit would see fit to include it in the Bible? There is nothing more spiritually invigorating than being with other Christians who are passionate for Jesus. One of the most damaging things we can do is to ignore that opportunity. Apparently some of the Christians in Rome were habitually not getting together. The reasons why aren't given. Perhaps it was because of the threat of persecution. There were probably other reasons

- They might miss the Chariot races
- They lost a day of work
- They were up too late on Saturday night to make it to church

Those are the kind of excuses they might give but what were the real reasons? What are the reasons behind the reasons? Idolatry (sports are more important than God); Greed (the extra income was more important than their spiritual health); Affections (finding the love of pleasure more delightful than the love of God).

How about this reason. They are regularly missing church because they aren't Christians. Am I saying that everyone who regularly misses church is not a Christian? I am saying, the evidence leads to that conclusion.

We simply can not do it alone. Our faith is too flimsy to stay strong without the love and support we get from one another. Think of church gatherings like pit stops on the Indy 500. Do they win the race? No, but without them you won't

make it to the finish line. My prayer is that you leave on Sunday with a fresh set of spiritual tires and fuel in your tank for the laps of the next few days.

This verse is not just about Sunday morning worship, though it includes it. This verse is very broad. It includes any regular gathering for the sake of spiritual encouragement and enrichment. Does this include small groups? Yes.

Does it leave room for occasional absences? Yes? It is talking about a habit. I did a little research on Wikipedia and found it interesting that scientists say it takes three weeks to form a habit. Perhaps that means that skipping church for three weeks is habit forming. Skipping church is not a habit we want to form for no other reason than our own spiritual health. We need one another to survive spiritually.

### **Let us encourage one another**

**Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:25b**

The day approaching is the return of Christ. The closer that day is, the more seriously we need to take our responsibility to encourage one another. This word *encourage* is a word we learned about earlier in our study of Hebrews in chapter 3. It means to come along side of someone and call out to them. Maybe you remember the examples I used. I shared how we do this positively. I told you of how I tried to do this with my son David in cross country. As he ran in the race, I would run to a spot in the track near him and call out words of encouragement as he was struggling to make it through a difficult part in the course. I also gave the example of how I called out words of warning to my father when I was walking with him along the New Jersey shore and he almost stepped on a jelly fish that washed on shore and was upside down.

When we get together we are to encourage and warn one another. That is part of the Christian walk. When we get together, we get together to encourage others. Most of us think church is all about what we get out of it. That isn't the church. Some of the greatest joy and satisfaction in the Christian life is found in how God uses us to encourage one another.

If you are here this morning thinking what you need is someone to be your friend, what you really need is to be a friend to someone else.

If you are here thinking you need to be encouraged, what you need is the joy of encouraging someone else.

The theme of these verses is that as Christians, our care and love for one another is one of the ways God helps us finish our spiritual lives well. We can not sustain our spiritual lives alone.

Let me give some suggestions on how we can help one another persevere.

### **Practical Suggestions to Finish Well**

### **Be regular at church gatherings.**

Do you know how hard it is to minister to people who play church peek-a-boo. Now-you-see-me-now-you-don't. God calls us to prioritize our regular church gatherings in our lives for our sake, not for His. I know this is very hard in our busy modern society. There are lots of distractions, there are lots of ways to spend our time, lots of idols in our lives begging to be worshipped and Sunday is a great time to worship.

I want to lovingly say something. For many this is not enough of a priority. While our membership is larger than it has ever been, while we have enjoyed the largest worship service in the history of the church and the largest offering in the church's history, our attendance numbers this summer are down. Do not forsake regularly gathering, not just for your own sake but other Christians need the encouragement and spurring that your life provides.

### **Get in a Small Group**

This fall we are kicking off small groups again. The only way to connect in a meaningful way is through a small group. I can't encourage you enough to be a part of one. Nobody finishes well when they finish alone.

### **Join the Care Team**

Warren Wiersbe said, *If you assume 100% of your people are hurting, you will be right 90% of the time.* Look around you. Sitting next to you are people who have real needs. We don't look that way because we cover it up but underneath it all there are real needs that God wants to use us to meet, for our own spiritual health and for theirs.

One of the ways to do this is to join the Care Team. If you would like to learn more about the Care Team and how you can help meet the needs of others, check that box on the back of your connection cards.

### **Conclusion**

When I began I mentioned Dave Hagedorn whose heart stopped a few weeks ago. Do you know who sustained his life? God did. How did He do it? I watched God use a team of doctors and nurses in the emergency room who frantically worked to re-start his heart. God worked through a skilled surgeon who put stints into clogged arteries. God sustained Dave's life through others. That's not a bad picture of how God keeps us alive spiritually. We need each other to survive.

## Hebrews 10:26-31 – Apostasy

Sign Title: Apostasy

August 30, 2009

Let's begin with some trivia. How many times this year will we see a full moon?... only 13 times. The rest of the time, only part of the moon is visible. Of course, the whole moon is always there, only part of the moon is shown to us. Have you heard of moon theology? Does anybody know what it is?

Moon theology is only giving part of the picture about God. Many churches do this. Everyone loves to discover what God did for us through Christ. We love to hear about full and complete forgiveness of sin offered to us through Jesus. We are amazed by God's amazing grace. I love that, you love that, it will preach, it will grow a church. *But* that is only *part* of the picture. Just as real as God's grace for us through Christ is God's wrath against sin. Most churches don't talk about it because people don't want to be reminded of it.

Sin is serious. It is deadly. It is not just a bad choice, it is willful rebellion against God. Christ died to free us from it. If you are here this morning and you profess to follow Christ and you are cherishing sin in your heart, this message is for you. This entire message could be summed up in one statement. *We can not cherish sin and cherish Christ at the same time.* The consequences of trying to hold both are devastating. We are going to learn about them this morning. Prepare your hearts because we are about to read one of the strongest warnings in all of Scripture about followers of Christ cherishing their sin.

Hebrews 10:26-31

### What is apostasy?

Have you heard of the term apostasy? It is a very common subject in Scripture. It is a person who comes close to embracing Christ but either because the cares of life distract them or because the cost of following Christ is too high for them; they choose to walk away from God.

In the OT, king Saul was the poster boy for apostasy. He had all the right information, he was in the right place, he was doing the right thing, he even experienced the Holy Spirit working powerfully in his life. He prophesied with OT prophets on more than one occasion. He looked like he was close with God, but when push came to shove and you stripped Saul down to just his inner heart; it wasn't about God being on the throne in his life, it was Saul on the throne of his heart. He was driven by what Saul wanted, not what God wanted so God rejected him.

Who is the poster boy for apostasy in the NT? Judas. He hung out with Jesus. He was on everybody's short list of being a true disciple for sure. He knew everything about Jesus, he saw Jesus perform miracles. I suspect God may have worked supernaturally in his life from time to time. He had all the knowledge, he looked really good. He looked *so good* everyone trusted him with

the money. But when his allegiance to Christ was put to the test he scored a big fat zero.

Let me give you a definition of apostasy.

**Apostasy is a conscious continued rejection of the truth after knowing it, prior to embracing it, from which there is no recovery.**

Churches in America are filled with apostate people. People who know the truth, they comprehend the truth but they haven't embraced the truth as their own. When life gets tough, or when the cares of the world distract them, they fall away. One of the reasons there are so many apostate Christians in America is the gospel is watered down to make it palatable to everyone. God is pictured as primarily focused on our happiness and comfort rather than promoting his glory through our lives. Folks, life isn't about us, it is about God and his glory. When people hear life is not about them and their happiness but about God and his glory, many people walk away.

**Apostasy is a conscious continued rejection of the truth after knowing it, prior to embracing it. From which there is no recovery.**

Let me clarify something. Apostasy is not to be confused with backsliding. Backsliding is when you truly know the Lord but you slip into a carnally minded Christian life and you hear a message that grabs you by the throat, pins you to the wall and you wonder how you could have drifted so far away. You repent and respond. Anybody had a time of backsliding in their life? This is the difference between someone who is *apostate* and someone who is a *backslider*. Both apostates and backsliders will feel remorse about sin in their life. The backsliders move from remorse for sin to repentance of sin. Repentance means change. The backsliders feel bad *and* do something to change. The apostates feel bad but won't change.

### **What does apostasy look like?**

#### **Deliberate willful sin**

**If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth,... Hebrews 10:26**

Deliberate sin is willful sin, it is intentional sin. It is not an accident, a mistake or a sudden stumble. The word deliberate in Greek is in the present tense which means it is a continuous pattern of choosing the same sin. You could get radical about it. You could get an accountability partner, you could insist on change and commit your heart to be different but instead apostates rationalize their sin and continue to soak their sneakers in the same sin week after week, month after month, year after year.

Let me just shoot straight. Many Christians, both men and women, are involved in habitual sins they have remorse for but they are not willing to get radical and face them head on. Many Christians struggle with internet pornography. Week after week they give in again and again. Rather than finding

an accountability partner, rather than confessing their sin, swallowing their pride to deal radically with their sin they continue to dabble in it for years.

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. Matthew 5:29-30

Folks, willfully persisting in sin is a recipe for apostasy. If internet pornography is something you are struggling with, how you respond to this message from God's Word determines if you are apostate or you are a backslider. Do something about it. I put on our web site under the sermons section a special supplement on strategies to handle the sin of pornography. If you are struggling, download it, print it off (immediately turn off the computer) and work through it.

Some of us struggle with forgiveness. Have you ever struggled to forgive? I have. Struggling to forgive is one thing but to cherish thoughts of revenge is another. It begins to boarder line on apostasy.

Others of us get overbooked and fail to serve our brothers and sisters in the church, others of us get overspent and fail to give but to know what is right in these areas and month after month, year after year continue to choose what is wrong is deliberate sin.

### **Trampling the Son of God**

How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot... Hebrews 10:29

Trampling something under foot is to show disdain for it. It is to show it as worthless to you. A smoker takes a cigarette and after they are done, what do they do with the butt? Trample it. A guy dates a girl and they have a bitter break up and how do some guys handle it? He takes her picture out of his wallet, tears it up and steps on it because he is saying, she means nothing to me.

Yes, some people do this to Jesus. They know what Jesus has done for them but with their words and actions they treat him like he was a girlfriend who broke up with them. This is not ignorance. This is actively disregarding Christ. If you are a Hindu who never heard about Jesus, you can not commit this sin. This is someone knowing about Jesus but saying, you mean nothing to me. This happens all the time in America. I believe it would be better to be in hell and not have known Jesus than to know Jesus and willfully trample him under your feet and pay for it in hell for eternity.

### **Treated as unholy the blood of the covenant**

...who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him... Hebrews 10:29



Trampling the son of God under foot deals with the person of Christ, treating as unholy the blood of the covenant deals with the work of Christ. It means you take what Jesus did and say it isn't a big thing. It isn't the one unrepeatable act of history. It isn't the once for all forgiveness of sin. Instead of it being a big thing, it is a casual thing. Do people in the church do this today? Yes, all the time. One example is during communion. That is why we put a warning sheet in the bulletin each communion Sunday. To participate in the Lord's table, yet know there is deliberate, continuing sin in your life that you are not taking steps to avoid, that is the recipe for apostasy.

Another way we treat Christ's work as common is by not sharing Christ with our friends. If what Christ did is the best news for everyone in the world to not share that news with our friends at work or in the gym is treating his word as common, not extraordinary.

### **Insulted the spirit of grace**

**...and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?... Hebrews 10:29**

Strangers can hurt us in a limited way but family can devastate you. The closer people are, the more they have opened themselves up in a relationship the greater the potential for injury. For instance, pretend we are at a pool and someone offers their hand to help you out of the pool and you say, "No thanks, I want to climb the ladder", that is no big deal, no insult. Now, pretend you fell off a bridge and you are heading down river toward a waterfall that will end in your certain death. Your father was somehow able to take thousands of dollars to hire a helicopter and rescue crew and with the help of the rescue crew your father holds out his hand to pull you out of the water before you go over the falls, and you rejected it. Can you imagine the insult?

Listen folks, we are heading for the falls. After death comes judgment. There is only one hand reaching for us, that is the hand of Jesus. It came at a great price to get his hand reaching out to us. He died for us. Rejecting Christ when we know what he did for us outrages God's spirit.

Listen, it is better to not know Christ and to be a Hindu in hell than to know Christ, treat him casually, cherish sin or reject him.

### **Where does apostasy go?**

**If we deliberately keep on sinning... only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging first that will consume the enemies of God. Hebrews 10:27**

This Greek word translated *fearful* is only used 3 times in the NT. All three of them are in the closing chapters of Hebrews. This same word is used in the Septuagint to translate Habakkuk 1:7. This was a description of the kind of fear the people had of the Chaldean warriors. You know what the Chaldeans did to the people they conquered? They stuck poles in the ground, sharpened the point and stacked their defeated foes on the pole. Human shish kabob. It was an awful heart paralyzing fear. This is not a fear of heights or a fear of spiders but

the kind of fear you experience when you completely understand the horrors of a gruesome death and you are near to experiencing it.

It says, we can expect raging fire that will consume God's enemies. Many scholars believe that is a veiled reference to the rebellion of Korah in the book of Numbers. Do you remember the story?

The people rebelled against Moses. They didn't want him as their leader. They wanted to distribute the leadership out and forget following the man God chose for them. Remember what happened? The ground opened up and swallowed Korah and his followers then a plague broke out that began consuming the people. If Aaron hadn't stepped into the midst of the people with a censor from the tabernacle to stop the plague, the people would have been consumed. If that is how God reacted to the rejection of Moses, his imperfect messenger that he used to rescue his people from slavery in Egypt, how much worse will it be for the people who choose to reject God's perfect messenger, his Son, who came to rescue them from slavery to sin?

It is not possible for me to convey to you or for us to even comprehend what a fearful thing it is to face God's judgment and wrath apart from Christ. Some of the worst judgment and wrath coming are for those who know the truth about Jesus but deliberately keep on sinning. They try to cherish sin and Christ at the same time.

### **Am I apostate?**

This is the question everyone is asking this morning. You really determine the answer. If you leave here today just feeling remorse and not taking steps of repentance then you are apostate. If you feel remorse and take steps of repentance you are a backslider.

If you are worried about this, you probably aren't apostate. Apostates, don't care about this, their hearts are cold enough that even the fire in this passage can't warm them.

Why did God give us this passage? God gives warnings to keep us safe. Remember the *Beware of Dog* sign I used a few months ago? The sign is not put up to make us scared but to keep us safe! This passage is a warning to keep us from drifting away from Christ.

Everyone faces a time in their life when God doesn't add up. A time when God feels like he is absent. Maybe you have looked and prayed for a job for months and it just hasn't come. Inside you are angry with God. Part of you wants to throw the towel in because he hasn't come to your rescue. For others it may be sickness. You hear stories of people healing but you just don't get better. You have poured your heart out in prayer but God hasn't moved. Your life feels like it is drifting away and you sometimes wonder why you should even pray.

No matter how dark you may feel, no matter how overwhelming life can get, don't turn your back on God. When we die, it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God without Christ. Treasure him more than any loss you

may have. In the end. It will be worth it. How worth it is it to treasure Christ to the end. That my friends is what we will discover next week.

## Hebrews 10:26-31 – One Breath Away

Sign Title: One Breath Away

September 6, 2009

Has anyone gone snorkeling or scuba diving? I have done some snorkeling. Years ago I bought a mask, snorkel and flippers. While our family was at a beach full of children building sand castles, I squeezed into the flippers, stretched on the mask, bit onto the snorkel and jumped into the lake.

I discovered a completely different and amazing world that was all around me, but it was out of view. The fish were beautiful, the water was clear and the sand teemed with life. This was an amazing and beautiful world that was so close to me, yet I never realized it. It was all just one breath away.

Last week in our study of Hebrews, we looked at Hebrews 10:26-31 which grabbed our throat and pinned us to the wall.

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God... It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Hebrews 10:26-27,31

This passage is one of the strongest warnings in the Bible about the danger of choosing to cherish sin while claiming to cherish Christ. This Scripture provides a fearfully strong incentive. None of us want to fall into the hands of the living God.

As I considered following up on these frightful passages, I thought it would be good to look at the topic of perseverance from a different angle. The Bible tells us to persevere, not because of the fearful things that await us if we don't, but we are to persevere because of the delightful things that await us if we do. How much do you know about the joys that await us in heaven with Jesus? Pleasures that are just one breath away.

As I began studying heaven, one thing became obvious to me. Most of us know very little about it and even great Bible scholars don't talk about it. For example:

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, one of my spiritual heroes who wrote a 900 page book called The Great Doctrines of the Bible. Do you know how many pages he devoted to heaven? Two.

Louis Berkhoff wrote a massive 737 page Systematic Theology that is required reading for most seminary students. How many pages does he write about heaven? One

Since we talk about it so little, nobody is excited about going there. In fact most people picture eternity as boring. Mark Twain in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* pictures heaven as boring.

“She went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn’t think much of it... I ask her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said, not by a considerable sight. I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together.”<sup>3</sup>

This is why we end up with cartoons like this. What do you think? Will eternity be boring? What will eternity be like? Let’s find out because once you know, you will *want* to be there!



### There are two heavens.

We usually refer to heaven as the place Christians go when they die. This is what we tell our children, “Grandma died, she is in heaven”. But is that true? Will Grandma live forever-after in heaven? Actually the answer is No, when Christians die, they do not go to heaven where they will live forever. Instead we go to an intermediate heaven. In that intermediate heaven those who die await Christ’s return to earth, our bodily resurrection, the final judgment and the creation of the new heavens and earth. When Christians die, do they go immediately to be with the Lord forever, Yes. As Paul says

**We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:8**

Will we be with the Lord forever after we die, Yes; but we will not reside forever in heaven in the way it currently exists.

Let me suggest an analogy. Suppose you live in a homeless shelter in Miami. One day you inherit a beautiful house overlooking Santa Barbara, California. You board a flight for your trip. On your way you have a 12 hour lay over in Dallas. Now when the ticket agent asks you where are you headed, what will you say? Santa Barbara, by way of Dallas.

Most books on heaven fail to distinguish between the present heaven and the eternal heaven on the new earth. This is a massive blind spot in modern Christianity and not knowing this difference gives us a warped picture of eternity.

Revelation 21 says the present heaven will be relocated to the New Earth. Similarly, what we now refer to as Hell will also be relocated after the Great White Throne judgment to the Lake of Fire. When heaven is relocated to the new earth for eternity, life will be similar to what we now know, only exponentially better and completely without the affects of sin.

So the question, “What is heaven like?” really has two different answers. The present heaven where believers go when they die is located in the angelic realm and is distinctly separate from the earth. By contrast, the future Heaven will be in the earthly physical realm, on the renewed earth where we have

---

<sup>3</sup> The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, pg. 6

renewed indestructible, physical resurrection bodies. Then the dwelling place of God will also be the dwelling place of humanity, in a resurrected universe. This may be new to your thinking but the Bible is very clear about it.

I saw a new heaven and a new earth... I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God... and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.'  
Revelation 21:1-3

Most people view eternity as anti-incarnational. Many of us have bought into something called Christoplatonism. Plato popularized the view that matter is evil and spirit is good. We think of our bodies as evil and something to be shed away at death like a snake molts his skin. We think of our physical bodies and the tangible world as sub spiritual. Folks, that is not what the Bible says. God designed us with bodies. When God created this world, he said it was *very good*. Matter is not evil, we are designed by God for a body and for this world.

Revelation says God's plan for us is to be a resurrected people that will receive resurrected incorruptible bodies and we will live on a resurrected earth. Just as Christ coming to earth was about God fusing himself with a real human body, the new heaven and earth is about God fusing heaven with earth, an earth free from the destruction of sin. Rather than our going up to be with God forever, God will come down to live with us forever. Simply put, though the present Heaven is "up there", the future eternal Heaven will be "down here." If we miss this and adopt a Christoplatonic view of life that is anti-body and anti-matter, we can not understand the joys of eternity.

### **What will our life be like in the present heaven?**

What happens after we die? Some people believe the soul sleeps or there is a long period of unconsciousness between life on earth and life in Heaven. The Bible doesn't say that. When the thief died on the cross next to Jesus in Luke 23:43, Jesus said, "*Today, you will be with me in paradise.*" 2 Corinthians 5:8 says "*to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.*" Philippians 1:23 says "*those who die are with Christ.*" So when we die, our consciousness is NOT snuffed out rather we continue to exist and have full consciousness from the moment of death onward. It is like snorkeling, we just enter a different and amazing world that is only one breath away.

What is this present heaven like? In Luke 16:19-31 Jesus gives us a window to see.

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send

Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ “But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’ “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ “ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’” Luke 16:19-31

Something we need to know is the word *hell* in v.23 has a footnote to it. The footnote says, “hades”. This parable is not referring to the final state of those without Christ. Hades is the temporary place of punishment until Christ’s return. So Jesus is giving us a window into the present afterlife.

I want us to notice three things about life after death.

**Nobody lost their identity** - Lazarus is still Lazarus. The rich man is still the rich man. No one is annihilated but everyone retains their identity. Amazingly it appears we may also have some kind of physical form. While we will not receive our resurrection bodies until the New Heavens and New Earth, the rich man knows Lazarus has the tip of his finger and he has a tongue. There may be some kind of body

**There is pleasure and pain** - Lazarus is comforted. He experiences pleasure and the companionship of Abraham (and probably others). The rich man is in agony and is experiencing isolation. This destroys Huckleberry Finn’s idea that he would rather be in hell because at least he would be with Tom Sawyer. Hell is isolation.

**There is a great chasm that can not be crossed** - Notice there is a great chasm between Lazarus and the rich man that can not be crossed. Apparently those in hades can see what they are missing. One thing those in hades wish they could do is warn those on earth about what awaits them but they can’t, there is no second chance. Hades is filled with missionaries who will never have a chance to go because it is too late.

The present heaven is a place of comfort and companionship. One of the things those in the present heaven do is watch us on planet earth.

**Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Hebrews 12:1**

The writer of Hebrews is calling to his audience’s mind a mental picture of the Greek and Roman competitions. The situation is similar to a professional football game. The throngs of fans are intently watching what is happening on



the field. The saints who have gone before us on the playing field of life are now watching us and cheering for us from the present heaven. You want to know what brings this crowd of saints watching us to a standing ovation?

I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent...In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Luke 15:7+10

Notice, it did not say the angels are doing the rejoicing, the rejoicing is taking place in the presence of the angels. Who do you think is doing the rejoicing?

### **What will life be like in the new heavens and earth?**

Skipping over debates on the rapture and the millennium, Revelation 21-22 tells us the climax of God's plans where we will live forever in the new heavens and the new earth.

Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. Isaiah 65:17

In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. 2 Peter 3:13

God's plan is not to just take us to the present heaven but to bring us to the new heaven and the new earth. God could just destroy this original creation, but he won't do that. God did not renounce his claim on what he made. He isn't going to abandon his creation, he is going to restore it. We won't go to heaven and forever leave earth behind. Revelation 21-22 says God will bring Heaven and Earth together into the same dimension, with no wall of separation.

Hebrews is teaching us that what Christ did is bigger than our imagination. Christ didn't just die so that mankind will be restored to God. He died so the earth, the universe would forever have the curse of sin removed from it.

...the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. Romans 8:21

God is the ultimate salvation artist. He loves to restore things to their original condition but in the process of doing it he makes them even better than they were before. That is what God is doing for us through Christ. He restored our relationship with God, but in the process he sets us on a path through Christ, where we will become so much more than Adam and Eve ever were. The new heaven and the new earth follow the same path. They are the current heaven and earth completely remade without sin and better than our current heaven and earth ever could be.

...must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets Acts 3:21

God will eventually restore *everything*, not just us. God will restore us to what we once were, fully embodied beings and he will restore the entire physical universe. God will not throw away his handiwork and start from scratch - instead, he uses the same canvas to repair and make more beautiful the painting marred by the vandal. The vandal doesn't get the satisfaction of destroying his rival's masterpiece. On the contrary, God makes an even greater masterpiece out of what his enemy sought to destroy. To affirm anything less is to not believe the Scriptures.

And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment - to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. Ephesians 1:9-10

Just as the wall of sin that separated God and mankind was torn down in Jesus, so too the wall that separates Heaven and Earth will be forever demolished with the new heavens and earth. Christ will become the unchallenged, absolute ruler of the universe and redeemed humans will be God's unchallenged, delegated rulers of the New Earth. God and humanity will live together forever deepening their friendships.

### **What will we do?**

The new heaven and new earth will be an eternity of life similar to life of this earth, but without any of the affects of sin upon our body, our relationships and upon our world. The new heaven, new earth, and our new bodies will be similar to what we have now, free from sin and vastly improved. This picture of eternity like a major upgrade to your computer software. Is it the same computer software, yes, but it is bug free and vastly improved.

Will we play golf in eternity? I expect to. For those of you who love football, with your redeemed bodies, you will be healthy enough to play it, not just watch it. For those of you who like coffee, expect to drink it. Doctors, you will not be needed, but we will we have enjoyable satisfying work. Think of everything the way it is supposed to be, only better. That is God's plan for us as we dwell together with him for eternity.

In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis portrays the White Witch, who parallels the devil, as having a hold on Narnia that makes that world "*always winter, but never Christmas.*" Those loyal to Aslan, though they've never seen him, eagerly await his appearing, for only he can make the world right again by assuming his role as rightful king.

It was not just the individuals of Narnia who needed Aslan to come, it was the entire world of Narnia that needed him. Aslan is the son of the great Emperor beyond the Sea. Yet he delegated the responsibility of ruling Narnia to the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve: Peter, Edmund, Susan and Lucy. They are the rulers of Narnia. Likewise, God intends for *us*, sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, to be the rulers of His New Earth, which he will powerfully deliver from its always-winter-never-Christmas curse.

## Conclusion

What lies just one breath away for the follower of Christ? Instantly ushering into the presence of God in the angelic realm. While life there is active, we won't stay there. God will give us incorruptible bodies to live on an incorruptible and perfected earth with Christ as the head over everything. In that very physical creation, there will be learning, sports, cities, civilization and culture, as son's of Adam and daughter of Eve, he will give the right to rule it under his authority for eternity to us. It is a mind blowing incredible future that awaits each one of us, just around the bend.

In 1952 young Florence Chadwick stepped into the water of the Pacific Ocean off Catalina Island, determined to swim to the shore of mainland California. She had already been the first woman to swim the English channel, both ways. The weather was foggy and she could hardly see the boats accompanying her. Still, she swam for 15 hours. When she begged to be taken out of the water the boats accompanying her urged her to continue because she was so close. Exhausted and with no land in sight because of the fog, she stopped swimming and was pulled from the water. Once on the boat, the sun broke through and the fog began to lift. She realized her mistake, the mainland was only ½ mile away. In her own words, "If I had just seen the shore, I would have made it".

Perhaps this morning, you can identify with Florence Chadwick. Life is tough, you are weary and it looks like life will only get worse, not better.

I hope that for the last 30 minutes the fog was lifted. As brothers and sisters in Christ, you could see the amazingly beautiful shore that awaits us and is only one breath away.

## Hebrews 10:26-31 – The Joy of Losing

Sign Title: The Joy of Losing

September 6, 2009

This is a true and amazing story of a duke who lived in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. His name was Raynald III. He lived a life of indulgence and was extremely overweight. Most people called him by his latin nickname, *Crassus*, which means *fat*. After a violent quarrel, Raynald's younger brother, Edward, led a successful revolt against him. Edward didn't kill Raynald. Instead he built a room around him in Nieuwkerk Castle with normal sized windows and doors. He promised his older brother complete freedom if he was able to leave the room.

This wouldn't be difficult for most of us since nothing was locked, but Raynald was too big to fit through a normal door. All he had to do for freedom was lose some weight. But Edward knew his older brother lived for instant gratification. Every day he sent him delicious food. Rather than dieting his way to freedom, Raynald became fatter. He spent the next 10 years in that room until Edward, his younger brother, was overthrown. Raynald could never fix his eyes on the real pleasure that could be his, because he had not learned to live beyond satisfaction for the moment. Raynald never understood the joy of losing.

The truth is, while most of us aren't addicted to food like Raynald, we all struggle to live for pleasures greater than the moment. How can we become people who live for greater things? That is what we will discover this morning.

Hebrews 10:32-34

**Losing can be joyful.**

Did you hear what I heard? Maybe it was a misprint. I thought I read the word *joyful*. Let's read it again to be sure.

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property,... Hebrews 10:32-34

Notice how they suffered. They suffered directly in a *great contest* in the face of suffering. In the Greek this is the word *athletisis* which is where we get our word athletics from. It means a fight or combat to see who would win. So there was some kind of battle going on. It was a battle to see if their faith would prevail or they would cave in under pressure.

Scholars believe this is a reference to the suffering Christians in Rome experienced under the emperor Claudius or Nero. I believe this is a reference to the first persecutions Roman Christians experienced under Claudius.

Rome was filled with Jews. There were as many Jews in Rome as in the city of Jerusalem. Judaism was the monotheistic religion of Rome and it was

protected by the state. Secular history of the time tells us that during Claudius' reign controversy broke out in the Jewish synagogues of Rome over the identity of Christ. The result... the Christians were expelled from the synagogue and ostracized by Roman society. This left Christians in a position of being despised by the Jews and Roman culture. This is why they were publicly exposed to insult and persecution.

But they didn't just experience insult and persecution, they also chose to associate with other Christians who were experiencing insults and persecution. They willingly sacrificed their good reputation to associate with them.

Junior High students, this is like choosing to sit next to the person nobody likes during school lunch. If you do that everybody starts whispering, what's wrong with her? Why is she sitting next to that girl. Nobody likes that girl. What happens? Soon, nobody likes you.

They even chose to show compassion on those in prison. Who are those in prison? These are fellow Christians who were suffering and imprisoned for Christ. We have to understand the ancient prison system to understand how this cost them. Ancient prisons were not like modern prisons. They didn't have cable TV, there was no expensive athletic equipment for the prisoners. There was no library for a prisoners reading material. In the ancient prisons, food, clothing and necessities of life were provided by your friends and family. If they didn't take care of you, you went hungry. When you provided for a prisoner, you chose to associate yourself with the prisoner. It was a scary place to put yourself.

Imagine choosing to provide the food for Jeffrey Dalmer on a daily basis. What would people think about you? What would they say about you in public? It would affect your business, your livelihood, everything about your life was at stake. Yet, this is what these Christians did for one another.

Now we don't want to paint the fairy tale picture that it all worked out happily in the end. As a result of choosing to love their Christian brothers and sisters, these Christians paid a price. Their homes were plundered, drawers were rifled through, credit cards and bank books were stolen.

They chose to experience great personal loss and they did it joyfully. They gave of themselves for their brothers and sisters to an extraordinary level that is hard for us to understand. Isn't this against human nature? We love safety, comfort, ease, fun, lots of possessions, money and the free time to do what we want. When we have it, we are happy, if we don't we complain. Here is my question: How did they become the kind of Christians that could lose what everyone values and they could lose joyfully? We want to know because we want to be that kind of person.

**I can lose joyfully when I have something better.**

The answer to where they found joy in losing is found in v.34  
...you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. Hebrews 10:34

When you know you have something better you are not paralyzed by the loss of something that isn't that important to you anymore. Every week the trash truck comes by. Many of the things we throw away are things we once treasured; but now they mean little to us. Why? Because we have something much better.

This week, I threw away an old MP3 player that still worked. The metal case was green from sweat but it still worked. I remember when I bought it. I was so excited I could run with music. I valued it. I treasured it. While nothing has changed about it (other than the green corrosion), it isn't worth anything to me any more. I could let it go and even do it joyfully, do you know why? I have an iPhone. You didn't see me crying when the trash truck took it away.

How can these Christians joyfully accept the confiscation of their property? How can they joyfully love their suffering brothers and sisters in Christ, fully expecting their own businesses and lives will tank when people see them doing it. How could they joyfully give up money, pleasure, popularity, influence, power, and a good reputation. How could they joyfully throw it all away. They could do it because they have something *better* and *lasting*. What is this possession? It is what we have talked about for a year.

- They have Jesus' victory over death so no matter what happens in this life they have an eternity with Christ that nobody can take away, not an eternity apart from Christ from which nobody can save them.

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38-39

- They have the purification of their conscience. No more guilt for their sin.

How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! Hebrews 9:14

- They went from objects of God's wrath, but through Christ, becoming the supreme objects of God's affections forever.

...were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:3-7

I can picture these Christians coming home and seeing their chariots being driven away, their valued possessions are divided up amongst neighbors and everyone is expecting them to say, "My life is ruined." Instead they say, "That red sports chariot, it was important to me. I worked a lot of overtime and

weekends for it, but now, it isn't that important any more, you can take it if you need it. I have something better in Jesus."

This was the same experience Moses had.

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. Hebrews 11:24-26

Picture Moses growing up with all the pleasures of Pharaoh's household. He chose to turn his back on pleasure now because his eyes were fixed on the greater pleasures that were his in eternity.

### **Is Jesus really better than money, sex and power?**

I know this sounds rather philosophical so let's take a few minutes to break this down practically. Is what we have in Christ better than any earthly possession.

#### **The pleasures of earth are temporary.**

Death will take away all our money, sex and power. If that is what you live for, you are satisfying yourself with something that has a short shelf life. It is like putting quarters into a video game to play it for 3 minutes. It is a lot of money for a really short amount of pleasure. When God is our treasure, enjoyment of him doesn't end at death, it only gets exponentially better and it lasts forever. So all the pleasures of this world are very short lived compared to Jesus.

#### **Net-Worth doesn't create Self-Worth.**

Money is a tool. It is a tool God gives us to allow us to do good. Money also is fleeting and deceptive. Too often we use our net worth to boost our self worth. Neither of them last. God is the one who provides for our needs

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 1 Timothy 6:17

#### **Sex is only a nibble of a greater delight.**

Is God better than sex? Let me give you a quick thought. In heaven, as far as we can tell from Scripture, there is no sex. The joy and intimacy of marital sexuality is a nibble of a much greater pleasure that awaits us. It is the pleasure of relating with God in a closer and even more intimate way than sex can achieve. If the pleasures of heaven are so good it will make sex seem like a yawn. If the pleasures of heaven are that good, you know it has to be pretty amazing.

#### **Our current power is fragile and temporary.**

Power is our responsibility over others. If we lose our earthly power and influence now, that is OK. The earthly power is fragile and temporary. But in



eternity, we rule the new creation under Christ for eternity. Remember, the angels are more powerful now than we are but in eternity, we will judge and rule over them and the new creation. The level of power granted us under Christ is unsurpassed in the universe.

What we have in Christ makes earthly money, sex and power look like yesterdays garbage in comparison. So when we are called to give it up, we can do it joyfully because this world isn't our greatest pleasure. We have something much better through Christ than anything this world has to offer.

## **Conclusion**

Last winter a number of us went someplace warm when the snow was flying. We went on a mission trip to Galveston Texas. It was a a chance to help our brothers and sisters in Christ who are in real need. In Texas we drove past mile after mile of houses ripped from their foundations. We walked through homes that were gutted to stop the spread of mold. It was unforgettable. Piles of earthly treasures, now destroyed, littered the sidewalks.

The visual impact of hurricane Katrina on homes and property was unforgettable, but mingling with people who lived through the disaster was even more memorable. Some of the people we met had their hope and lives destroyed. Katrina washed away what they lived for, what they valued. Others we met had a different way of looking at the storm. For them, it swept away the things they used to live for. But in the midst of destroyed earthly lives, they could finally see the value and beauty of the real treasure they had in Jesus. A treasure that is better than anything the world has to offer, a treasure that could never be washed away.

They understood something that is hard for us to understand. There can be joy in losing when you have something better.

## Hebrews 11:1-3 – Faith Is...

Sign Title: Faith Is

September 20, 2009

This morning, I want you to join me in leaving for a vacation. We get up early and drive to the airport in Minneapolis. We park the car, get in the airport and have coffee and a donut while waiting to board our flight. We get on the plane, the engines whine, we zip down the runway at over 100 mph and at the last moment, before we hit the steel fence, the tail dips down and the plane soars into the sky. We are on our way.

None of that sounds risky but take the time to think about it. We just bought a cup of coffee from a lady we never met. Who knows what she put in our drink. She doesn't even know much about the coffee she sold us. We know nothing about the donut we put in our mouth or where the ingredients came from.

How about the plane? Did we inspect the engine? Check the fuel? Did we meet the pilot? With sealed cabin doors, we couldn't even see the pilot. Do you know anything about the people on board the plane with you? Can we trust them? When was the last time the plane was serviced? We know nothing about any of these important details, yet we go on the trip without a worry. We happily and confidently live by faith. We do it every day.

A business takes a check based on good faith there is money in the account. You bring your vehicle to a mechanic for repair but you never see him repair it, he gives you a bill for parts and labor and in good faith you pay it, assuming they replaced only what needed to be repaired.

Just as we need faith to survive physically, the Bible tells us if we are going to please God, we need to exercise faith spiritually.

This last year, the book of Hebrews has taught us God can be trusted; it is worth placing our faith in him. What God has done for us through Christ is better than anything this world has to offer. That is why we could leave off last week with a really amazing verse.

...you joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. Hebrews 10:34

With Christ, we can face loss in life and still have joy because we know we have a better possession beyond the grave that we can't lose. If we don't realize that with Christ we have something better in eternity than anything in this world can offer, we will constantly be sad every time we lose something in this world on account of Christ..

You know the motto. Live life to the fullest because you only go around once. Wrong! This life is just a brief time of preparation for an eternity of something better with Christ, a possession that is better and lasting. It is only

when we understand that in eternity we have something better coming our way through Christ that we have the power to accept loss joyfully.

The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Romans 8:18

The whole book of Hebrews is telling us that what God has done for us through Jesus is better than anything this world has to offer. There is a much greater spiritual reality and that is what we live for. We live for more than what our eyes can see.

Living for more than we can see isn't easy. It takes faith to believe God's Word is true and to believe God will make good on what he says. In Hebrews 11, the writer of Hebrews is going to teach us how live by faith. He is going to do it by looking at examples of great men and women of faith but here in the first few verses of Hebrews 11 he gives us a pocket sized explanation of faith. So when we leave this morning I want to know God is more reliable than the woman you bought your cup of coffee from this morning.

Hebrews 11:1-3

**Faith is... Evidence of God in my life.**

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Hebrews 11:1

Verse 1 gives us a two-fold definition of faith. It is being *sure* of what we hope for and *certain* of what we do not see. We are going to look at both parts of this definition but I want you to know there is a lot more here than meets the eye. The word *sure* and the word *certain* in the Greeks are very unusual words. Let's look at them.

I want to start with the word *certain*. Faith is being certain of what we do not see. Older translations like the King James use the word *proof* or *evidence*. So they say, faith is the evidence of what we do not see. The problem is that doesn't sound like it makes any sense. How could faith be the evidence of what I don't see about God? My faith needs evidence to see, it doesn't sound right to say my faith is evidence of what I don't see. Sounds pretty backwards. So while a good translation says, My faith is evidence of what I do not see, it just doesn't seem to make sense to say that. I want evidence to have faith, not my faith is my evidence. What should we do?

I noticed something this week that I think will help unravel this mystery. Look at verse 3. It is an illustration of what the faith God gives us does in our life.

By faith we (can) understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. Hebrews 11:3

Do you see the connection? Verse 1 says "our faith is the evidence of God, something that isn't seen". The ability to have faith in God is a God given ability. Verse 3 says, "our faith, gives us the ability to understand that the world was created by the word of God." My faith in God is part of the evidence God is

in my life and one of the byproducts of the presence of faith in my life is that I can perceive that the world did not evolve (it wasn't made out of things that are visible) but was fashioned by the very word of God.

Let me explain it this way. You know what this is like when we watch the Discovery channel or the National Geographic channel. The commentator on the TV program says, over millions of years, the blob called earth, created oceans and land. Green slime formed. The slime grew a brain and eyeballs to become a fish. In the next million years, by chance the fish went through punctuated equilibrium and developed feathers and could fly. It goes on and on until we have human beings. Everything is getting better, over millions of years animals get more complex, organized and sophisticated. The commentator says, "What is seen was made out of things visible." As Christians, everything in our being wants the commentator on the program to take a drug test because we are sure he couldn't pass. How could he miss it. Doesn't he see that God made all this? How can you look at the eyeball and say it evolved? How can the National Geographic guy say this with a straight face? Why can't he see it? The heavens declare the glory of God. God made it all. God spoke it. No matter how much you tell me I evolved and am an overdeveloped ape, I just can't buy it. I know it is not true.

How can the guy on the TV be so confident about his evolution and we are in the church saying, how can you NOT see it? Verse 3 is an illustration of verse 1. The rock solid conviction that God is the one who made the world by his word is a conviction that can only happen by God given faith. Our ability to perceive the reality of God is a God given ability. This is not faith in faith but faith that God exists, that he loves us and that he is real. We didn't see God creating this world by his word but we are convinced it is true. That is why we are convinced this world was made by God and his word. That is what happens when God gives us faith.

Let me give you an analogy. A few years ago one of the rages was hidden 3-D images in a picture. These are pieces of art that on one level are one thing but if you stared at them long enough or were able to un-focus your eyes in just the right way, a whole different image appeared off the paper. It might be a kangaroo or a lamb or a face that if you could look at it right, would be there. Remember what it was like when you shared one of those 3-D pictures with your friends. Some people were looking at it saying, "How can you not see the face in that picture?" Others were looking at the same picture and they just couldn't see it. People were looking at the same picture but some people could see something more. That is what it is like for God's creation. We all look at the same creation but God has given Christians faith in him, that is the ability to sense his presence and interaction in our lives. We perceive what others can't perceive, we can perceive God's fingerprints over everything he made.

So faith in God is evidence of the reality existence of God. Franklin Graham said faith in God in our life happens in the same way a turtle gets to the top of a fence post. The only way it gets there is if somebody puts it there. If you

have faith in Christ this morning and have confidence in the existence of the unseen world and can perceive the fingerprints of God all over the universe, that is all part of the evidence of God in your life because without God, you couldn't perceive any of those things.

**Faith is... the ability to live for more than I can see.**

**Now faith is sure of what we hope for...**

Remember, we learned that the word *sure*, like the word *certain*, has more to it in the Greek than meets the eye. Some translations say *assurance* other older translations say *substance*. The idea in the Greek is that our faith, which is given to us from God, provides the ability we need to live our lives in regard to eternity. Our faith, which is a gift from God, gives us the ability to make choices in this life that are in line with the reality that there is a next life.

Think of our faith like the bones of the body. Our bones support our body when there is nothing on the outside holding it up. For example, if I extend my arm out, what is holding it up? Nothing that you can see, it is held up by the unseen bones we can't see. So is our faith, which is a gift from God, giving us the ability to extend our lives in such a way that we will receive no support from this world...

For example, on July 4<sup>th</sup> we took our Count Me in offering in an attempt to retire the church mortgage and over \$192,000 came in. The reaction of some people in the community might have been, "that is a church with a lot of rich people that have so much money they are comfortable giving it away." That isn't the truth. The truth is that prior to the offering we learned not to lay up our treasure on earth where moth and rust corrupt and thieves break in and steal but to lay up our treasure in heaven where thieves do not steal and moth and rust does not destroy.

We have faith in God, which is a gift from God, giving us the ability to see there is a life beyond this life and we can relocate our treasure from earth to heaven. Instead we are putting our resources in a retirement plan that will pay dividends for eternity, not just for this life.

We have the ability to see beyond the moment and even beyond this life so we can live for eternity.

Christian high school students, you have the ability to live for more than high school and for even more than this life. Your friends who do not know Christ do not have that ability. Remember, faith is the ability to live for more than I can see. Think of faith like spiritual night vision goggles. Because of your faith, you can perceive things about reality, your friends can't. In school, everyone wants to be popular but you have the ability to perceive that putting a smile on the face of God is more important than putting a smile on the face of your friends. In school, everyone's hope is to win a state championship or even a national championship. As a Christian teenager that is important to you but your faith gives you the ability to see that more important than standing on a state championship podium is

standing before the judgment seat of Christ where we will receive our reward for eternity based on how we competed for Christ in this life. You can perceive that reality, your friends can't. In high school, everyone thinks our identity is found in the stuff we buy but our faith gives us the ability to perceive that it doesn't matter what you own, it doesn't matter who your boyfriend or girlfriend is, what matters is who you are on the inside as we stand before God.

As Christian adults, our faith gives us the ability to perceive the same thing about reality. We don't need a big this, a fast that or a shiny whatever. What is really valuable is our life with God and before God. Faith gives us the ability to perceive the spiritual reality that is more real and lasting than physical reality.

### **Faith is the funnel through which all of God's blessings flow**

**For by it the people of old received their commendation. Hebrews 11:2**

When we exercise our faith and live for what we know is true in the spiritual reality instead of what looks comfortable in earthly reality, those are moments when the window of opportunity opens for God to commend us.

On just about every page of the Bible we find this being played out. Those who know God perceive a reality that many others can't see or if they can see it, they are not willing to live as if it is true.

Daniel refused to stop praying to God even though he knew he could be thrown to the lions. He was thrown to the lions but what was it? An opportunity for God to come to the rescue. David, in faith, believes that God will still be true to his word about conquering the Promised Land and he fights Goliath. It was an opportunity for God to come to the rescue, Shadrack, Meshack and Abednago will not bow to Nebuchadnezzar's idol because they perceive the heavenly reality is greater than the earthly reality. It was the opportunity for God to come to the rescue. When Christ is in us, we can perceive the greatness of spiritual reality is greater than what we see with our physical eyes and when we choose to live for the unseen reality, God loves to come to our rescue. That is the sweet spot of faith in action.

**And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Hebrews 11:6**

Let me share from my heart. All week long I meet Christians who can sense spiritual reality but they look at life with the physical eyes of their head, not their spiritual eyes of faith in their heart. They are afraid to live like spiritual reality is greater than physical reality. They are afraid God can not be trusted to come to their rescue. In doing that, you take away some of the most amazing moments in your life when you deny God his chance to come to your rescue and give you a story about how God did it.

### **Conclusion**

Tomorrow when you go buy your coffee and eat your donut and we have enough faith to trust people we have never met to give us food to eat, know that

we can have even better faith in a God we cannot see. He gives us the ability to live for him and when we do, that is the funnel through which all of his blessings flow.



## Hebrews 11:4-6 – What Does Faith Look Like?

Sign Title: What Does Faith Look Like?

September 27, 2009

Last week we began studying Hebrews 11 and what the Bible calls *faith*. Faith is a big thing in the Bible. The noun is used 243 times, the verb 249 times and the adjective 67 times. It is one of the most common words in the entire New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 13:13, Paul talks about some of the greatest things there are and he says, and now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But what does he say is the greatest? Love. In the context of relationships, the greatest thing that exists is love. When it comes to the future, the greatest thing that exists is hope but the greatest thing as it comes to us, our eternity and our relationship to God is what? Faith. Love and hope won't get you to heaven, only faith in Christ will.

Faith is not a part of the Christian life, it is the whole enchilada. Every day of our life with Christ is a day lived by faith. Every day we have to trust God. We have to believe what God says in his word is true and we have to have the faith to follow it, even when we think we know better. If everything God said was always the easy thing to do or the expedient thing to do, why would we need faith? We wouldn't be living a life of faith, we would be living a life of sight.

Last week, we learned that if we have faith in Christ, that faith isn't something we conjured up, it is a gift from God. Even our ability to have faith in Christ is a gift from Christ. But, while Christ gives us our faith, that doesn't mean that we are to just sit on our hands look at the ceiling and whistle. God gives us our faith but it is our responsibility to exercise our faith and grow it. Think of faith like a muscle. The more we exercise it, the stronger it will become.

So while God is responsible for our faith, developing our faith is our responsibility.

Let me give you an illustration. Having wrestled for years, I spent a lot of time trying to develop my muscles in those hard core muscle head gyms; the kind of places that none of us would call *family friendly*. When you walk around these muscle-head gyms, there are always pictures on the wall. What are they pictures of? Potbellied middle aged men? No. Are they pictures of overworked accountants with their families around them on the beach? No. The walls are covered with pictures of darkly tanned Mr. Olympia looking men who are smeared with baby oil. These men have muscles bulging out of every part of their body, including their earlobes. The walls also have pictures of strange looking women who could crush a normal man with their bare hands. Why do they put these pictures on the walls? So the people working out will look at them and say, "Some day, I want to be just like that!" As you can see, I never achieved that goal.

Chapter 11 of Hebrews is like one of those muscle-head gyms. It is called the hall of faith. It is filled with pictures of people who are heroes of the faith, people we can look at and say, I want to keep developing my faith muscle because some day, I want to be like them.

What makes Hebrews 11 so encouraging is that none of the people in it are extraordinary people. They are all ordinary people like you and me that over the years were able to develop extraordinary faith and life to go with it. The writer of Hebrews gives us these people in the order they appear in the Old Testament. We are going to just look at two of them this morning.

### **Abel - Worshipped by faith**

By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead. Hebrews 11:4

Many of us are familiar with the story of Cain and Abel from Genesis 4. In Genesis 3 Adam and Eve sin and get booted from the Garden of Eden. Shortly after that Eve gives birth to Cain. Later, she gives birth to her second son, Abel. These two boys couldn't have been more different. Abel was a shepherd. Cain was a farmer. The differences went beyond their professions and extended into their spiritual lives.

When Cain was around 130 years old (remember they lived a long time back then, and at 130 you were still feeling like a teenager), both of these brothers brought offerings to God. Abel brought his offerings of meat to God and put it on some kind of crude altar. Cain brought his offering of vegetables from his fields and assembled a salad on an altar. Genesis 4:4-5 says that God looked with favor on Abel's offering but not on Cain's. God accepted Abel's offering but rejected Cain's offering. We don't know how God showed his acceptance. Maybe God sent fire from heaven to burn it up. That happened 5 other times in the Bible.

One brother received the favor that the other one didn't. If anyone has two boys in their family, you will have no trouble imagining what happened next.

Cain was filled with jealousy and anger that Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God and his was not. So he deceives his brother into walking out in a field alone and murders him. You don't need CSI around to figure out who did it. There are only four people and one of them is dead. God identifies Cain as the murderer and sentences him to a vagabond life. When you think about the story, it is amazing how quickly things degrade. Sin enters the world and in one generation you have deceit, jealousy and even murder rearing its ugly head. Sin spreads quickly.

Many Bible scholars make a big deal out of the differences in the types of offerings. One being meat and the other being vegetables as if God doesn't like to eat his vegetables. The problem with that is we are a long way from the Old Covenant under Moses and we just do not know how God told them to worship

so it is difficult to know for certain that one way of worship was right and the other was wrong.

But when we come back to Hebrews 11:4, we learn why Abel's offering was acceptable and Cain's offering wasn't.

**...and without faith it is impossible to please God... Hebrews 11:6**

The point of the story is not that God likes BBQ more than a salad bar. The point is Abel made his offering in faith and Cain didn't. Remember, the only way to please God is by faith.

So here we are, thousands of years later, still looking back on the difference between Cain's offering and Abel's offering when it comes to worship. These brothers are an example of how to worship God and how not to worship God.

Cain gave his offering out of duty. God required, it so he did it. *There God, my worship duties are done for the day. I gave my offering.* You see, Cain's heart wasn't behind the offering. He was going through the motions on the outside but his heart wasn't behind it on the inside.

On the other hand, it says Abel worshipped in faith. Worship wasn't a duty to him, it was a delight for him. His heart wanted to worship. So here is the deal, God accepts our worship not by *what we give* but by *how we give it*. The only way true worship happens is when it flows out of our hearts as we delight in God. Duty worship is nothing more than a big fat zero.

For example, 2 Corinthians 9:7 say *God loves a cheerful giver*. What God loves is not the amount we put in the plate but the thankfulness of the heart behind the offering. Jesus only praised two people's offerings. One was Zacchaeus, the rich man, who repented of his greed and gave half of all he had to the poor; an enormous sum. The other was a widow who gave less than a penny, but it was all she had. Both were commended because their offering flowed out of the thankfulness of their heart to God. It was a delight, not a duty.

So the difference between Abel worship and Cain worship is just as true today. We have all gathered here for worship. We are doing our duty to God on Sunday; yet, what is hidden from view is what is going on in our hearts as we worship. There are Cains and Abels here today. Some of us are here because it is the right thing to do, to go to church. Others are here because we love to be here. We love to talk about God, we love to thank God. Our hearts are saying, *God, after all you have done for me, I love to worship you. God, worshipping you is like breathing, I need it to survive.*

So we have Abels here today. You have come in faith and your worship is flowing out of your love for God because you stand amazed at the undeserved love he has for you. Are you perfect, of course not, but you are seeking God and trusting him and obeying him. You want to praise him and you want God to look at your life and commend you.

Every Sunday churches are also filled with Cains. They are doing their duty. This passage doesn't condemn you and neither do I. But this story offers us a reminder that the only way we can please God when we worship is to worship God in faith, not because we have to, but because we want to.

One of the ways we can tell if we are a Cain or an Abel, duty driven or delight driven is by simply looking at our church attendance. Let's face it, we always find a way to do what we *want to* do, we usually find a way to procrastinate on what we *have to* do. If the joy of your heart is to worship God, be with believers and learn about him, you will find a way to be in church.

I believe that whenever possible, a Christian should be in church on the Lord's day. The truth is that many Christians look at Sunday worship as optional. They plan to miss 20+% of their church's worship services. You say, "Pastor Kurt, you sound like a fanatic. You sound legalistic. This is the modern world. We have a lot going on in our lives. What about vacation? When we are on vacation, surely it is OK to skip church, after all, isn't vacation supposed to be a break from your regular routine?" What are you on vacation from? Your routine or God?

If you peer into your heart and ask yourself. Is what we have in Christ not the greatest joy of my life or am I following Christ to try to manipulate God into accepting the kind of life I want to live. Here is how Jesus said it.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Mark 12:30

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well. Matthew 6:33

### **Enoch - Faith and Rewards**

By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. Hebrews 11:6

Only serious Bible students are familiar with Enoch. He is buried in the genealogies of Genesis 5, but he lived an extraordinary life.

When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away. Genesis 5:21-24

What Enoch is known for is that God took him. Enoch is one of two people in the Bible who never died, the other being Elijah. God just took him to heaven. It was like Enoch was walking along and bang! Major scenery upgrade! No shoes left behind, no hat, the footprints just stopped in the sand and that was it. The point of the story isn't *how* God did it, the point is *why* God did it. Enoch was a man of faith. It says he was a man who walked with God. That is obviously a metaphor, but it is an effective one.

We live in a neighborhood where people go for walks. You see them pushing their strollers, walking their dog or holding hands. When you see people walking together, you don't think, *Oh, there go two enemies*. When you go for a walk with someone, it is a sign of friendship and relationship. When it says Enoch walked with God, it means he lived a life of faith in God with a heart that delighted in being with God.

You want to find something interesting look at the genealogy of Enoch. It was Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech and Noah. Enoch lived 365 years before God took him home. Put that in perspective, if today were his birthday, he would have been 132 years old when the Declaration of Independence was adopted in our country in 1776. I know this seems difficult to imagine, but before the flood, the Bible tells us that people were living a long time. Of course, that worked well to populate the earth.

What was it like when he lived? He just before Noah; those were infamously wicked days. Remember, it wasn't too long after Enoch got his own personal rapture that God chose to hit the reset button on reboot planet earth when he wiped everything out with a worldwide flood.

The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. Genesis 6:5

So it wasn't like Enoch had a lot of moral support around him when it came to living by faith. In fact Jude tells us that Enoch wasn't just sitting home protecting his family from a sinful culture, he was on the streets begging for people to repent.

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." Jude 14-15

So Enoch is begging with people saying, guys, don't think God will continue to ignore this. Don't think that we can flip God off and pretend like he doesn't care and that he will never call us to account. God will judge everyone.

God did come to judge, he hit the reset button and rebooted the earth with the flood. Folks, God will hit the reset button again on the earth, except this time all of his children get the rapture and God will remake everything into the new heavens and the new earth completely without sin

But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men... But in keeping with his promise we are looking

forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. 2 Peter 3:5-7, 13

Here is what we learn from Enoch. The more sinful the society. The more difficult the work environment. The more ungodly the school system,... the greater the opportunity to live by faith. This should encourage those of us who are in some pretty depraved situations. Enoch lived in a society that made a hot Las Vegas night look like a Disney movie. Following Christ and living by faith against that kind of cultural pressure earned Enoch the ultimate reward, an honor that not even Moses and Abraham were given. God took him home. He was rewarded for his faith because he lived as one who pleased God.

Here is the point. When you think of Enoch, remember that we do not serve a God who doesn't notice the sacrifices and pain we go through to honor him in a society that doesn't care about God. God is not a scrooge when it comes to rewarding us for following him when it is hard. When we deny ourselves a pleasure in society because it is against God's will, we are NOT saying we don't want pleasure. We are saying, I want the better pleasure that comes only from the hand of God. God *loves to reward* those who want their pleasures from God's hand.

God will commend us, he will reward us, he loves for us to live by faith. He knows it may cost us. He knows we may lose our popularity, he knows we may lose some of our friends, he knows how hard it can be to live by faith. Some people have even died when they lived by faith. But God is bursting with excitement when we do it and he loves to reward us. The greater the faith we live by, the richer the reward he will lavish on us. Many times those rewards begin in this life, but the real rewards we live for are kept in heaven for us and they last forever.

## Conclusion

One of the sports we enjoy in our home is football. Even Cindy likes to watch it. One player everyone is keeping their eyes on this year is Brett Favre. This isn't just because he is playing for the Vikings. Many of us are watching him because it is hard to believe he is still playing. 18 straight years of not missing a single game. He is 39 years old and while his torn bicep was surgically repaired, he still has a torn rotator cuff and many think he is nursing a cracked rib. But he is still playing. He has started in 269 regular season games. This year he could pass the all-time NFL career record of 282 consecutive games played. This may be his last year. Yes, even the great Brett Favre will come to an end.

Someday, each one of us will have our careers on this earth come to an end and we will stand before God. There will be one thing that will make the difference. It won't be our earthly rewards. It won't be the size of our bank account. It won't be the success of our children. The question will be, did we live by faith. We are saved by faith, we are rewarded in eternity based on living by faith. When it is all said and done, I will not make the NFL hall of fame but I want

to be a member of God's Hall of Fame that begins in Hebrews 11 and is continuing today. How about you?



## Hebrews 11:6 – Why Is It All About Faith?

Sign Title: If God's not on Facebook, where can I find him?

October 4, 2009

How many of us are on Facebook? After continuous “poking” from a few of my friends, I finally broke down and created an account. I haven’t done anything with it, my son David, tells me I am finally with it. Some of us are wondering what is Facebook? Facebook is a social networking web site that helps people stay in contact with their friends and family. On your Facebook page you share about your life and connect with your friends and their life.

Facebook is extremely popular because it is all about relationships. It helps us satisfy our need to connect. Relationships are really important. We are designed for relationships. It is part of our DNA. God created us to be connected. Facebook connects us with people we would usually lose track of. It seems you can find just about anyone on Facebook. There is one person who still hasn’t created an account. One person who we are created to connect to with greater intimacy and satisfaction than any other.

The person we all desperately want to connect with is God. He doesn’t have a Facebook account. How do we connect with God and how does that connection with God become close and personal? That is what we are going to look at this morning. We are studying Hebrews 11 which is about the relationship between faith and our relationship with God.

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.  
Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)

I want you to notice there are two things this verse teaches us about connecting with God: Faith is the only way we can please God and furthermore, what faith that is pleasing to God looks like.

**The *only* way to please God is living by faith.**

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.  
Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)

Living by faith is the only way to please God. It doesn’t say that if we don’t live by faith is it *harder* to please God. It doesn’t say that without faith it *takes longer* to please God. It says that living by faith is the *only* way please God.

Let me clarify something. In our culture, when I say the word faith what many people hear is OK pastor, you are saying, I need to believe in something. That is not what the Bible is talking about. Faith in the Bible is not faith in anything. It is believing in God the father and his son Jesus Christ is who he claimed to be, that is, our only Lord and Savior. The faith we are talking about is everything we learned in the book of Hebrews for the past year. This is not the

faith of Mohammed, it is not the faith of Buddha, it is faith in God the father and his son Jesus Christ as the once for all sacrifice for our sin.

This week I checked out Deepok Chopra's web site and he says that pleasing God involves yoga and meditation. When he talks about faith, it is not Biblical faith. He talks about having faith in yourself. The Bible says, it is not about faith in yourself, but about faith in God. Not any God but the one true God.

This is really important to understand. The object of our faith is not anything we want it to be. It is only faith in Christ that counts for anything. That is the only way to please God.

**Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. Acts 4:12**

So one way we mess this up is to have the wrong object of faith. Instead of focusing on who we trust, we think all that matters is that we trust something. One of the ways we get the object of our faith, our trust, messed up is that instead of placing our faith in Christ, we place it in ourselves. Did you ever wonder what Martin Luther and Deepok Chopra have in common? This is it. Martin Luther and Deepok Chopra both began by placing their faith in themselves. Deepok is still there.

Martin Luther was a brilliant young man on his way to becoming a successful lawyer in Germany, when in a moment of terror, during a lightening storm, he made a vow to become a priest. He began seeking God, and more than anything, he wanted to know God accepted him. How could a sinner, stand before a perfect God? He tried strict asceticism, he abused his body with sleep deprivation and cold and hunger thinking these would make him more acceptable to God. He kept wondering, was he doing enough? When he began teaching the book of Romans he ran across Romans 1:17 and he realized he had it all backwards.

**"The righteous shall live by faith." Romans 1:17 (ESV)**

He realized depriving himself of food and sleeping on a cold stone floor without a blanket didn't make him *any* more acceptable to God. The only way to connect by God is to live by faith.

### **Why is faith the only way?**

If you were to ask the average person on the street if they were going to heaven, many of them would say "Yes". When you ask them why, they will say something like, ... *because I am basically a good person* or ... *because I don't break the 10 commandments*. Here is the problem.

**Our Actions Are Sinful** - The Bible tells us we are not basically good people and that we all break God's commandments. No matter how good we are, none of us are good enough to come before God.

No one is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." Romans 3:10b-12

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 1 John 1:8

For by the works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. Romans 3:20

So obedience to God's commands, while not a wrong thing, can not bring us into a relationship with God because God's laws are to show us how far short we fall, not to make us feel better about ourselves.

When was the last time the police officer pulled you over to pay you money because you were going the right speed? The speed limit signs are not to show us how good we are, they show us how bad we are. That is the purpose of God's law. It is a speed limit sign designed to guilt us down to speed.

**Our Thoughts are Sinful** - It gets worse. The Bible says that even when we get our act together and we aren't sinning, remember God looks at the heart and he knows when we want to speed.

O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. Psalm 139:1-4

So if we think we will obey our way to a perfect God, it is just out of the question.

**Our Motives Are Not Pure** - This is pretty unsettling. Our actions are sinful, our hearts are sinful, even our motives are mixed.

We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. Isaiah 64:6 (ESV)

When I was in college, the younger brother of our team captain was at my weight class. He was a great guy who lived across the hall from me as a freshman. We weren't close, but we were friends. The problem was that he was just as good wrestler as his older brother. I had little chance of beating him and getting a position on the starting lineup. I think it was our sophomore year when in the fall, Keith did not return to school. I heard he was sick and so he wouldn't be in school that fall semester. I felt really bad that he was sick and only later did I learn he had cancer. I am ashamed to admit it, when I heard he wouldn't be in the wrestling room, I had a twinge of excitement even though I felt bad. I had a chance for a position in the varsity lineup. Has anyone ever experienced something like that? You realized your heart was not as pure as you thought it once was. Even our purest motives are mixed?

So the idea that we are basically good people, who can connect with God because of our own moral goodness is tragically flawed. It is impossible to

please God when we live any other way than faith in Jesus Christ as the king of creation and who deserves to be the king of my life.

But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.  
Romans 3:21-22 (NLT)

The question is, do you have a relationship with God? The only way you can please him is by placing your faith in Jesus Christ. There is no other way to connect with God. It doesn't matter how sincere you are. It doesn't matter how devoted you are in worship actions. It doesn't matter how religious we act. Apart from faith, it is impossible to please God.

### How do I draw near to God through faith?

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.  
Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)

Drawing near to God is a big theme in the book of Hebrews. Under the Old Covenant, it was always about distance. It was about God being holy. We are not to back off and keep away. With Christ, it is not about distance from God, it is about intimacy with God. We can draw near. Isn't it great that God wants us in a close relationship with him. Through Christ, God has made it possible to satisfy the deepest longing for intimacy in our heart with him. What kind of faith in Christ draws us close to God.

### I must believe God exists

Faith is about seeing with the eyes of our spirit things that are unseen with the eyes of our flesh. By faith, we believe in God's existence. I can't please God if I don't believe he exists. There are a lot of rational arguments to prove God exists. Some are:

- **Causal Argument** - Everything known in the universe has a cause. Therefore, the universe must have a cause, which can only be God.
- **Beauty and Complexity Argument** - The complexity and beauty of the universe argues for an intelligent designer, creator, and sustainer, which can only be God.
- **Moral Argument** - There is a universe sense of right and wrong and concern for justice shared by humanity. This argues for the existence of a transcendent standard, which can only be God.

Now I want to warn you, none of these arguments will argue anyone into faith. This is why in the debates between an atheist and a Christian, the atheist doesn't walk convinced God exists. Where does faith come from? Faith comes from God.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is a gift of God... Ephesians 2:8 (ESV)

God is the one who enables us to believe and these arguments help overcome some faith barriers and confirm in our heart the faith we feel.

What is important is this verse doesn't stop here. Simply believing in God's existence is not enough to draw us near to God. A recent Gallup poll showed that 95% of American adults believe in God. Yet, it is clear, belief in God's existence is making little difference in the way people live.

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that... James 2:19

You believe in God, so do 95% of Americans and 100% of the demons. Experiencing closeness to God takes more than just belief in God's existence. If belief in his existence is all it took, then Satan and the demons would be fine, because they believe in God. There won't be anyone in heaven who doesn't believe in God's existence but there will be many people in hell who believe in God's existence.

### **I must believe God is a generous rewarder**

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)

Did you realize there is a lot of reward language in the Bible.

[Moses] regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. Hebrews 11:26

Faith that pleases God is faith that believes God's promises about rewards. Some rewards we may receive on earth but the real rewards come in eternity. Faith that believes the sacrifices I make now for Christ I can make joyfully because I will be rewarded in eternity is faith that is pleasing to God. It is faith that draws us near to God.

See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. Isaiah 41:10

For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. Matthew 16:27

since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Colossians 3:24

Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 1 Corinthians 9:25

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. 2 Corinthians 5:10

But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value. If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames. 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 (NLT)

God wants us to know he is a generous and rewarding God. God will reward every act of service offered to Him and for Him. Don't think in terms of payment, think in terms of rewards. God doesn't owe us anything, but he loves to reward us for living to honor him.

If we really believed this, wouldn't we be more willing to give up things in this life to gain for the next? Faith is taking God at his word that anything we give up for Christ now is not really giving up. What we give up now we will gain even more in the end. Jesus told a parable that went like this...

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Matthew 13:44

This is the Beverly Hillbillies parable. Think about it. If you knew there were massive oil reserves in a field priced at \$20,000 an acre, wouldn't you sell everything you had to buy as much of the field as you could and we would be happy to do it. We wouldn't be giving up just for the sake of giving up but we are giving up to gain something even better in the end. There is nothing new about this. We live a lot of our lives this way.

- A student gives up 4 years of their life to gain a college degree, which in the end is gain for the rest of their life.
- An athlete disciplines her body to gain a trophy.
- A man or a woman gives up independence for marriage believing that in the end it will be gain.
- A couple gives up financial security to have and raise children believing that in the end it will be a worth it.

Faith that pleases God is faith that gladly gives up comfort and security. Knowing God will not only make up the loss but will generously reward us for every sacrifice we make for Christ, down to even giving a cup of cold water in the name of Jesus.

Since faith that draws near to God is faith that lives not for rewarding ourselves now but for the day when we will be rewarded in eternity, how close do you feel to God? Are we living to be rewarded by God in his time or are we more interested in rewarding ourselves in our own time.

### **Earnestly Seek Him**

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)

The devil believes God exists. Cults believe God will give eternal rewards but God given faith has something more to it. We experience God not just by believing he exists, not just by living for his reward but by desperately wanting to be close to him with our hearts. Wanting intimacy with God and earnestly seeking it is where Satan's faith can't make it. Satan believes God exists. Satan knows God is a rewarder who loves to honor those who honor him. But Satan has no love for God.

A Christian is not someone who simply believes God exists and believes God rewards. If that is what you think it means to be a Christian, congratulations, you have the same set of beliefs as the devil. Satan affirms everything we believe but Satan has no affection for God. He hates God. Faith that pleases God doesn't just affirm truths but it wants God more than anything else this world has to offer.

Remember the feelings when you were first dating and the feelings of affection and connection? Real God given faith is like that. It is filled with that heat, drive, and passion that says, I want to know God deeper and to love God more. Obedience to God doesn't come out of obligation but out of love for what God has done for us. You know what a heart that earnestly seeks God looks like?

**My soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. Psalm 63:1**

May God continually stir up in us heat and drive to know our God.



## Hebrews 11:7-12 – Faith works in the dark.

Sign Title: Faith - It works in the dark

October 11, 2009

It is 10:00 at night. You are watching television with your family as a winter storm is howling outside. You hear the snap of a tree and the power is knocked out. (Turn off house lights) You are left in complete darkness. Your wife says to you, honey, There is a flashlight in the laundry room in the back of the cabinet over the washer; trust me, it is there. You start feeling your way down the hall to the laundry room trying to remember where the chairs are and if the matchbox cars that your son was playing with are still on the floor.

The laundry room is not your area of expertise but you are trying to be the fatherly hero so you begin feeling through the cabinet for that flashlight. You keep feeling, no flashlight. What does your wife say? Keep looking! More feeling and still no flashlight. You start wondering, maybe she was wrong, maybe the flashlight isn't in the cabinet but what can you do? It is pitch dark and you can't even see your hand in front of your face. You have no choice but to trust her word.

This is not just a little story, it is a picture of the what often happens in our spiritual life. God turns off the lights and we have nothing left to trust but his word.

We are in Hebrews 11. This morning we are looking at Noah and Abraham, people where God shut off the lights in their life and they had nothing left but to trust God's voice.

### Noah - Faith is obeying God.

By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. Hebrews 11:7

The story of Noah and the flood is given in Genesis 6-8. People always talk about Noah and the flood but what is really amazing is not the flood but Noah's faith, his obedience to God's voice for a long time before the flood began. Let's quickly recall the story. The situation on earth was grim. Genesis 6:12 tells us man's wickedness had reached unprecedented levels. God decided to wipe mankind off the face of planet earth. How was he going to do it? A flood.

There was one exceptional character in this wicked world. His name was Noah. The Bible says he was a man of righteousness and a man of faith. God told Noah to build a boat so large that his family and a sampling of the animals could be saved from the flood. God gave Noah all the details for this ship. It was 1 ½ football fields long, 75 feet wide and 3 stories high. The total space was over 100,000 square feet. Where was he going to build this ark? Noah lived

between the Tigris and Euphrates, he is 100's of miles away from the nearest body of water. God told him to build the ark in his backyard!

Remember, Noah wasn't saying to himself *Hey, I'm a biblical character, my life will be a good story for kids flannel graph.* Noah was just a normal person like you and me. So let's imagine God spoke to you this week and said, I want you to spend the next 125 years of your life building a boat, bigger than a football field, with no power tools so that in the year 2135 you can save your family from a world-wide catastrophic flood. What would you do?

Most of us would say, *God, I think I ate some bad pizza because I thought I heard you tell me to build a mega boat in my backyard, with my own money, using my own 401K plan and it will only take me 125 years. Are you crazy!* I think most of us would have a hard time obeying God. Many scientists believe at this time the earth was covered with a vapor canopy and that it hadn't rained yet. So the idea of rain was something Noah didn't understand. Do you hear how unreasonable God was? Can you picture how in the dark Noah was about how this was all going to work out? What does it say? *Even though he was warned about events not yet seen, in reverent fear, he constructed the ark.*

Noah said, if God says it, even though it doesn't make sense to me, I am willing to believe it is true. People are going to laugh at me for 125 years. People are going to call me the village idiot, my kids are going to be laughed at, I am going to lose my friends over this.... but I fear God more than I fear losing my friends so even though he was in the dark on what a worldwide flood even looked like, he obeyed, even when it didn't make sense.

Folks, that is what faith looks like in real life. Obeying God's Word, even when it makes absolutely no sense.

You may be here this morning and you are saying, "I married the wrong person, they don't treat me right, they don't meet my emotional needs, my friends tell me I have every right to get out of this relationship." Those are the words of our friends and the words of our emotions but what does God say, "

**"I hate divorce." Malachi 2:16**

**They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery." Matthew 19:7-9**

Holy fear says, I believe what God says to be true about the sanctity of marriage and God says work through it, not work out of it. Throwing in the towel is saying, God, raising Christ from the dead was not too hard for you. Splitting the Red Sea for an entire nation to walk across on dry land was a small thing for you. Feeding 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fishes was a simple thing for you but healing my marriage, that is beyond what you can do.

Why does God put us in a marriage that is hard? Many times it is to teach us to obey God's Word, even when it isn't easy and doesn't seem reasonable. Many times it isn't about God fixing the other person or God changing the circumstance. It is about us learning to obey God like Noah, even when it makes no sense.

**No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame. Psalm 25:3**

There is going to be nobody who says, "That was a really dumb idea, I trust God, he failed me. God never came through." Faith means, even when I am in the dark about how God can work this out, I will obey him and trust that what he says is right, even if it takes a long time for God to prove himself right. Like 125 years. Faith is obeying God even when he leaves us in the dark about how it will ever work out.

**Abraham - Faith is waiting on God.**

**By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. Hebrews 11:8**

Abraham is the supreme example of faith in the Bible. He was a great man. To this day Christianity, Judaism, and Islam revere him. When you've been dead 4,000 years and three billion people still revere you, you were a great man. Let me quickly review his story from Genesis 12. Abraham lived in the ancient city of Ur. It was the New York City of its day. One day God spoke to Abraham and gave him a command and a promise. The command was to leave his hometown and set off on a journey. But God didn't tell him where to go. The promise was that God would bless him, give him land to call his own, and give him descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore.

Genesis 12:4 tells us how things started out: So Abraham left... Like Noah, he obeyed God even when it didn't make any sense. But for Abraham, faith didn't just involve obeying God when it made no earthly sense, but it also involved waiting on God when it appears God went on vacation.

**By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. Hebrews 11:9-10**

Abraham got to the Promised Land that God promised him but he never owned it. In fact, it wasn't until he bought the field of Machpelah near Hebron as a family burial plot that he owned any land at all. For decades he lived in the Promised Land. Even though God promised him it would all be his, *nothing* happened. It was like God went on vacation and was not returning Abraham's voice messages. Abraham lived in a tent. Picture Abraham living in one of those pop up trailers in the local Promised Land KOA camp ground. He didn't own a thing, he was a full time squatter. NOTHING happened to show him God was

keeping his promise. That would have really been hard. Knowing God promised you the land but saw absolutely no progress for years!

How was he able to do it? How did he keep his faith in God? How could he keep trusting God when he saw nothing? He kept looking forward. He looked forward to his eternal home. He realized the goal of life wasn't getting everything perfect now but the goal of life is about having all our desires met in heaven by God. There is a little play on words here. It says Abraham lived in a tent. A tent is a temporary place, but he was looking forward to a city in heaven with foundations. He was looking forward to a permanent place. Abraham understood that fulfillment of the land promise would only be partial and temporary like a tent. Abraham was looking forward to his home in heaven where it was permanent and better.

Friends, realize every good thing God gives us in this life is only temporary (tent like). You ask God for healing, he may give it now but each one of us will get sick again. The great fulfillment is in heaven where we will never be sick again. No cold, no swine flu, that is what we look forward to.

You are a young adult and you ask God for a spouse and he gives you a spouse and you have great satisfaction in that relationship. But here is the news, one of you will die. One of you will leave the other alone. How do we get through the times of aloneness? Realize that when we get to heaven, we will never have to face the times of aloneness again. That is what we look forward to.

Something else I think we should notice here is that all of God's plans are not completed in our lifetime. We usually think that what God is up to begins and ends with us and many times what God is up to is only using us as one link in the chain of something greater than us that God is up to. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, three generations of tent people in the Promised Land, waiting for God to keep his promise when finally they go down to Egypt for food to survive. After Abraham dies, for the 400 years they are in Egypt, the people multiply like rabbits into an entire nation. Then Abraham becomes the father of not just Jews but Christians, because the Bible says that Abraham is the father of all those who are saved by faith. The book of Hebrews later tells us that those who have gone before us are watching us from heaven and can see what is happening on planet earth. Can you picture Abraham in heaven saying, "God, you kept your promise better than I could have imagined!" but see he was only the first link of the chain of what God is doing.

Friends, keep this perspective, we may only be one link in what God is doing. High schoolers, be faithful to Christ now, what God is doing in your life now many not be obvious until you have grandchildren. We may die and never understand what God was up to until we view it from the vantage point of eternity. We live in a microwave world where everything is cooked, eaten and discarded in 20 minutes, but God doesn't work that way. His plans are often much longer term. The only way to be sure God is working His plan is to live by faith, trusting God's word and trusting God while we are waiting.

By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. Hebrews 11:11-12

God promised Abraham that from him a nation would come. Abraham thought, *Great, let's get started*. But it didn't start. In fact, Abraham and Sarah blew past the age for bearing children - by decades. Imagine yourself in their place. God told you a nation is going to come from you. He said you would have descendants like the sand on the seashore. Year after year, decade after decade, NOTHING. I imagine that would make their love life a little weird. How would you respond? Would anyone here get disappointed with God? Anyone here get angry? Bitter? At what point do you begin to call God a liar? How about when you are approaching 100?

Let's think about this for a moment. Sarah is 90. Abraham is nearly 100. Do we have any 90+ year old women here today? Would you stand? What would you do if God came to you and said, *You're going to have a baby?* There is a little humor here. It says that not only was Sarah worn out but Abraham was as good as dead. It's not happening with Abraham either.

Here is the fun part. Verse 11 says that Abraham *considered him faithful who had made the promise*. Abraham believed God would still be faithful to his word even though according to Abraham's watch, God was running late. Faith means we believe God will keep his promise even though it seems way late in coming. Faith believes God is reliable and he will keep his word but he is using his own watch and will keep his promise, in his time. Faith has many times where God leaves us in the dark about what he is doing.

Doesn't it seem like God leaves us in the dark a lot? The Christian life has a lot more waiting than moving, a lot more red lights than green. Do you have calendar issues with God? Calendar issues are when you think something should have happened in your life but it hasn't

- Maybe, like Abraham, you think God should have given you children by now but it hasn't happened.
- Perhaps, you are waiting for the heart of your child to turn back to God and it hasn't happened.
- Maybe, you are unemployed or underemployed and you are frustrated with God. God, why are you keeping me down?
- Maybe you are angry with God because you are sick and it just keeps going on and on and he hasn't made you well. God, I have asked you to heal me so I can be healthy like my friends but it is like you aren't listening.
- Maybe you have calendar issues with God because you are looking for a spouse and God hasn't brought the right person into your life yet. You are saying, God, the pickings are getting pretty slim. You better act fast!

Anyone here have calendar issues with God? What should we do with our calendar issues? In faith, wait on God to fulfill those desires in his time. He may fulfill them in this life. Like Abraham, he may make us wait a really long time, so that when he comes to the rescue he will do it in such a way that there is no question he is the one who did it. He may not fulfill those desires in this life, he may have us wait until the next.

I think we expect too much from this world. Did God ever promise us good health and happy kids and a wonderful marriage? No. He promises that in this world we will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world.

One of the reasons I think God may have us wait a long time for his good gifts is because he is preparing us to handle those gifts. The reason God made Abraham and Sarah wait until they were as good as dead before he gave them a child was to grow their faith, not to destroy their faith. He was making them spiritually ready to receive what he had determined he was going to do all along. Can you imagine how strong their faith was after Isaac was born? Can you imagine how many times the story of Isaac's birth was told around the dining room table? Can you imagine the spiritual foundation that gave Isaac when he had calendar issues with God in his life? God had a different calendar that didn't seem to make much sense to Abraham and Sarah, but from God's perspective, it was exactly the right calendar to give Abraham and Sarah a story to remind Isaac that God is faithful, even when it is way past time. It was the calendar they needed so we can read their story and know God is still faithful even when we have calendar issues with him and he leaves us in the dark about what he is doing.

Can you see your life in the lives of Noah and Abraham? These men had to exercise faith when all they had was God's word when they were left in the dark about what God was up to in their lives. Noah obeyed God's word, even when it made no earthly sense, Abraham kept waiting on God's word, even when God seemed long overdue. Neither of them knew what God was up to for a LONG time. He left them in the dark. It was only later when they realized God knew exactly what he was up to.

## Conclusion

Friends, the Christian life is a life of faith. A lot of our spiritual life is obeying God and waiting on God when he leaves us in the dark. When he leaves us in the dark don't rationalize God's Word away. Don't take matters into our own hands and think we know better than he does. We are to simply do what God tells us to do, even when it doesn't *seem* to be the easiest, smartest or most convenient thing to do. If what God tells us to do was easy, smart and convenient, I guess the Christian life wouldn't be called a life of faith.

A lot of the Christian life involves obeying and waiting in the dark. We need to trust in God's timetable, not ours. If we miss this we will spend our life disappointed. There are a lot of young people disappointed with God because he didn't give them instant success. A lot of men disappointed with God because

God didn't give them an instant wife. A lot of women disappointed with God because God didn't give them the perfect husband. There are a lot of parents disappointed because God didn't give them instant Godly kids. A lot of sick questioning God's love because he didn't give them a quick recovery. A lot of poor angry at God because he didn't give them instant help.

A lot of our Christian life is obeying and waiting in the dark. Noah obeyed God's Words for 125 years building what looked to be a foolish building project. Abraham waited till he was over 100 and was as good as dead so God could teach him that he will keep his promise, but on his timetable.

Where are you this morning? Anybody groping around in the dark? Keep obeying even when it looks foolish, keep waiting even when it seems God has forgotten. That's when faith works best, in the dark.



## Hebrews 11:13-22 – Transforming Faith

Sign Title: Transforming Faith

October 18, 2009

Does anyone recognize this photo? It was taken by Norman Rockwell and is called *Closing the Summer Cottage*. It was on exhibit in New York's Grand Central Terminal from 1950 to 1990. Many people consider it more than just a picture of a family and a cottage. Many consider it a picture of the American Dream. An American Dream that is becoming harder to obtain. This year we saw the pop of the real estate bubble, the largest shrinkage of gross national product in 30 years and record setting levels of unemployment. President Barack Obama called 2009, "The year the American Dream went in Reverse."



James Adams coined the phrase "The American Dream" in his 1931 book, The Epic of America. It is the dream that we can achieve a "better, richer, happier" life. It is the dream that our children will be "better, richer and happier" than their parents.

While there is nothing wrong with desiring financial success or wanting our children to be more successful than we are, as we look at Hebrews 11, we will discover that the "American Dream" may not be how we want to define success for our children's future.

### Hebrews 11:13-22

When my children were young, they had toys called transformers. These were plastic trucks or cars that had hinges in them so they could be folded into the shape of a robot. This morning we will learn three ways that our faith in Christ transforms us into people that are completely different from what others expect us to be.

### Faith transforms my desires.

In our study of Hebrews 11 we are learning the faith works in real life by looking at different heroes of faith in the Old Testament. When we get to v.13-16, we take a little break from this list of people for the writer of Hebrews to tie off his list of faith heroes.

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. Hebrews 11:13

Last week we studied Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob. He says they all died in faith. What does that mean? It means they received some of the promises God made to them, but not most of the promises. They died without getting everything God promised them. Remember the promise to Abraham involved the Promised Land and descendants as numerous as the stars in the

sky and sand on the seashore. When he died, he didn't have the land and as for descendants, he only had one son and he had to wait until he was as good as dead to get him.

When he says this, the writer of Hebrews is talking about something most Christians in America don't like to talk about. Don't expect God to fulfill all of his promises to you in this life. The promises of God for his children are not mainly for this world and this life. Some are, but most of them are not. God has given us many good gifts in this life through Christ and they are nothing more than a whiff of his goodness to build our appetite for better things yet to come. It is like driving by Burger King during the lunch hour. The smell makes you want to go in and buy a Whopper. The promises God made to Abraham and even the promises God makes to us in Christ will never be completely unpacked in this life.

What Old Testament saints did was see past Canaan to the Promised Land and past the earthly Jerusalem to the city of God. They saw that these earthly things were just object lessons pointing to the eternal rest of God and to a city with foundations that God was preparing for them. (F.F. Bruce)

The Old Testament saints understood that any amount of fulfillment God gave them of his promises on earth was nothing more than a savoring of the aroma of what God would do for them in heaven. God, it smells good, I can't wait till dinner is served.

He says *they saw the things promised but greeted them from afar*. He is describing it like when we drive to a city. If you have driven to Chicago you know it is a long drive. When do you start to get excited and know you are almost there? When you can begin to see the Sears tower on the skyline in the distance. Honey, no more stopping for bathroom breaks, we are close! I can see the city! Your eyes fix on the city in the distance. When God fulfilled his promises to the Old Testament saints, they knew a Promised Land on earth was nothing more than the fuzzy distant picture of a Promised Home they would have in heaven.

The same is true for us. We get all bent out of shape when we suffer, when life is hard or when God doesn't send us the spouse we want or the job we want or we find ourselves sick but not getting healthy.

**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,...** Ephesians 1:3

What will God give us? Every spiritual blessing. Where will he give it to us? In heaven!

When we know that the good things God gives us in this life, are nothing more than the sweet aroma of the great things to come in heaven, how does that change the way we look at earthly life? This world is not our destination. We are just passing through. It is like when you are on a road trip to Florida and you stop in North Carolina at a Denny's for dinner and get a hotel room for the night.

Our family doesn't even bother to fully unpack the car, we just take one or two bags into the hotel. We don't unpack a moving truck because we are just passing through.

Look at how this road trip mindset is everywhere.

"I am an alien and a stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead." Genesis 23:4 (Abraham was just passing through)

"And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years..." Genesis 47:9 (ESV) (Jacob is just passing through)

"Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; hold not your peace at my tears! For I am a sojourner with you, a guest, like all my fathers. Psalm 39:12 (ESV) (David was just passing through. Amazingly, David is in the Promised Land but he *still* considers himself to be just passing through!)

Not even the coming of Christ brings us everything God promises to give us. The coming of Christ puts God's promises to us on visible footing because we don't look forward in faith to what God will do to restore a relationship with him but now we look back on what God has done. It is much easier to have faith on money in the bank than money someone promises to put in the bank. But as followers of Christ, we are still just passing through.

"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, Philippians 3:20 (Paul says we are just passing through)

"Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 1 Peter 2:11 (Peter says we are just passing through)

So the point is that a life of faith is a life that realizes not all, but most of what God has for us will not be experienced in this life.

...were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it...Ephesians 1:13b-14

Since this world is not our home and we are just passing through, it will change the way we think, feel about life. It will change the goal of what we want out of life. Expect to be out of sync with everyone else when you are living for a treasure in heaven and everyone else thinks their earthly life is all they have to live for.

If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Hebrews 11:15-16a

The writer of Hebrews knows it is hard for people. This may be a big piece for us to swallow without chewing on it for a while so he helps us reason this through. If the Old Testament heroes were just living for an earthly piece of ground, they would have gone after it. If they were thinking about the city of Ur they came from, they could have returned, but they didn't. Why not? They had a desire for a better country, a heavenly one.

We are learning ways faith transforms our life. The writer of Hebrews teaches us that faith transforms our desires. Faith considers this world and what it offers, then faith considers the promises of God and what God offers and faith desires one over the other. Faith changes the desires of our heart from getting everything in this world now to anticipating and looking forward to everything we have in Christ for eternity. Faith changes our desires from buying it all now, having it all now, living as if all we get is now to having a better appetite for pleasure and knowing the real treasures and pleasures are found in our inheritance with Christ and they are yet to come.

Listen to me closely. Many people believe that saving faith simply believes Christ died for our sins. But saving faith will always transform our desires from the source of pleasure being cars, boat, houses and sex in this world to the spiritual blessings God promises to give us in eternity. Faith transforms our desires. Those who know God are so gripped by God that nothing short of being with him in heaven can satisfy.

The American dream is a better, richer and happier life now, the Christian dream looks forward to a better, richer and happier life with Christ for eternity that is better than anything this life can offer.

Before we leave looking at how faith transforms our desires, look with me at verse 16.

**Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. Hebrews 11:16b**

God is not ashamed to be called their God. This is powerful language. The idea that God could be ashamed to be our God really gets me. I don't want God to turn red in the face and say, "I am ashamed to be called Kurt Trucksess' God." or "I am ashamed to call Faith E Free, my church." I want God to be proud of us. What would make God proud of us? It isn't that we have to be perfect people. Abraham lied on two occasions; Sarah laughed at God's promise; Isaac had parenting issues and a bad marriage; Jacob was a schemer and a thief. They were not perfect people. Why was God not ashamed to be called their God? The writer of Hebrews gives us two reasons: one is front and one behind. The reason at the back end of verse 16 is that he has prepared a city for them. The reason at the front end is that *they have a desire for that city*. God made a city in heaven for them and that is what they wanted. God is proud of them because of it.

Think about this for a moment. Do you want God to be unashamed of you? Do you want God to be proud of you? What should we do? Some great feat of faith like Mother Teresa? Memorize the Bible word for word forwards and backwards? No, the simple answer is: Desire him! Desire the city God has made for you more than the city man has made for you. Desire what heaven has to offer more than anything this earth has to offer. Desire God!

**Faith transforms our worries.**

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. Hebrews 11:17-19

Time doesn't allow a complete retelling of the story of Abraham sacrificing Isaac but Genesis 22 tells us that after all those years of waiting for Isaac to be born as the son God promised, God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on an altar. Here we have a problem. The promise of God and the command of God don't fit together. If God promised Abraham's descendants would be through Isaac, what are we doing killing the guy? Imagine the anxiety we would have. Can you imagine how we would start to rationalize it? God, you can't do that! I waited over 100 years for my kids, you aren't going to take him away. Genesis 22 tells us this is not the way Abraham handled the stress and anxiety. Faith transformed the way he worried. Genesis 22 tells us he set out for Mt. Moriah to execute his son. As his faith grew he learned he could follow God's commands and God would still keep his promise, even if there was no way he could figure out how it worked. Look at what Abraham says when he gets to the mountain and it is just Abraham and Isaac heading up the mountain and Abraham knows he is climbing Mt. Moriah to sacrifice his son.

"Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you." Genesis 22:5

We will come back? How is that going to happen. Dead people don't come back! How could Abraham say this? He figured it wasn't his problem. His job was to obey God and let God handle the details of how it would work out.

Abraham was about to bring down the knife when God intervenes and says, Stop! *Now I know you fear me*, which is another way of saying, *I now know you love me more than your son.*

Abraham realized it wasn't his job to worry. It wasn't his job to make things work out. His job was simply to obey God and let God take care of the results. Faith transformed the way Abraham worried about those crisis moments. He didn't worry. Abraham know it was God's job to keep his promise. It was God's job to sustain Isaac's life. Abraham only had to obey, not rationalize.

You see God knows the crisis moments he puts us in. They are not crisis' to him, they are crisis's to us. The reason he puts us in crisis moments is to test us.

How do we react when God puts us in a test? I have talked with people where their boss asks them to cook the books and they are afraid to refuse doing it. If they refuse, they will get fired. So what! God knows it! Why worry about it? It is a test to see what we love, our job or our God. If you lose your job, God knows we need to eat, let him take care of it.

I talked with someone a few months ago who didn't feel they could tithe because they wouldn't have enough money left. What would you say to them? Your tithe is your test. If your income was reduced by 10% would you die? No, then give. Our job is to honor God because he is the desire of our heart. Let God work out the details.

I find our kids are playing more and more sports on Sunday. Jimmy has to be in Sunday sports because I want Jimmy to be a superstar in high school. What does little Jimmy need? A basketball scholarship or passionate love for God that was fed, weeded and cared for in church every Sunday? What will last for eternity? It is a test. How do we pass the test? Just obey God, have him as the real desire of your heart and don't worry about it. Let God iron it out from there especially when it doesn't make sense.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Matthew 6:33-34

**Faith transforms our hopes for the future.**

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones. Hebrews 11:20-22

Picture this. Isaac blesses Jacob, Jacob blesses Joseph's sons, Joseph gives directions about his bones. What are each of these guys doing in faith? In faith they are telling their children with confidence about what is important for their future. What did they want their children to have? Was it a college education? Was it four years on high school varsity? Was it a good spouse? Was it an early start on their 401(k) plan? Faith transformed their hopes for their children's future. Their hope was not about them experiencing the American dream. They wanted their children to know God was more desirable than anything on this earth. They wanted their children to know they were in God's hands and they had nothing to worry about when they desired God and obeyed God, even when he doesn't make sense.

Parents, this is a challenge for us. How are we blessing our children for the future? What are we telling our kids is the most important things in their life for success? School, a job, college? None of those things are bad but when our kids leave the home and they leave this church there is only one thing that matters. We want our kids transformed by Christ.

One of the most vital ministries in the church is the children's and youth ministry. I want to say a special thank you to everyone who serves Christ in Awana, youth group and Sunday School. While those ministries are great, when we stand before the Lord, whose responsibility is it for training our children? Ours.

When I was a teenager our church had those preprinted bulletin covers. There was one that really caught my attention. I liked it so much I put the bulletin cover over my bureau at home when I was a teenager. The cover was a picture of a Sun dial and it had these words on it. *Only one life t'will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last.*

Brothers and sisters, it won't be long until our kids are out of the house. Are we teaching them to live for the American dream or has faith transformed us?

Closing Prayer

If you were encouraged in Christ this morning, join us again next week. Bring a friend with you.



## Hebrews 11:23-27 – Choosing Something Better

Sign Title: Choosing Something Better

October 25, 2009

Moses! Even 3,000 years later it's a name that carries weight. Nowhere is that more true than among Jews where Moses is up there with Abraham as one of the most revered men and prophets of all time. Moses was providentially saved from death as a child. He grew up in Pharaoh's palace. He spent 40 years in the desert. He led Israel out of their bondage. He announced the ten plagues. He parted the Red Sea. He destroyed Egypt's army. Manna came from heaven to feed the people under his leadership. He provided water during the desert wanderings. He was involved in the giving of the law and the Mosaic covenant. He wrote the first 5 books of the Old Testament.

Jesus talked about him often. He is mentioned 39 times in the Gospels. He appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Michelangelo sculpted him. Charlton Heston portrayed him. And in 1998 DreamWorks made millions off him with the animated film *The Prince of Egypt*. Wouldn't you say that if you've been dead for 3,000 years and the story of your life still packs theaters, you lived a special life?

We are working our way through Hebrews 11, a chapter known as the hall of faith. You can guess who we are talking about this morning. Let's read about him.

### Hebrews 11:23-27

Ancient Egypt was one of the greatest and wealthiest civilizations of all time. This was the time when the pyramids were constructed. The ruler of Egypt was known as Pharaoh and Pharaohs ruled Egypt for 3,000 years. They ruled with absolute authority.

Imagine being Pharaoh. You are the head of the wealthiest nation on earth. You have complete authority to do whatever you want, whenever you want. Everyone around you thinks you're a god. Sounds like the way most fathers are treated when they come home from work.

Imagine being Moses. You are the son of Pharaoh's daughter and privileged to grow up in the court of Pharaoh. It means privileges and comforts of which you and I have never dreamed. Since the line of the Pharaoh was passed through the family, there were scenarios where Moses could have found himself as the Pharaoh of Egypt. That's how Moses grew up. He was a prince in the court of Pharaoh. It was a life most men can't stretch their imaginations to dream of. It made the lifestyles of the rich and famous look like low income housing.

Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action. Acts 7:22

This is what makes Moses' choices so unbelievable. What would you expect the richest, smartest, best-connected thirty year old man in Egypt to do? We are going to find out in a few moments but first let's see why he did it.

**because he was looking ahead to his reward... he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. Hebrews 11:26-27**

Moses made some radical choices for two reasons. First of all, he saw a much bigger picture. He weighed earthly satisfactions compared to eternal joy and chose the eternal joy. He lived for eternal rewards. Second, it says he saw him who is invisible. Who is the Him? From the context of Hebrews it's clearly Christ. This doesn't mean he saw some kind of supernatural hologram. The word *saw* means perceived with his mind's eye. It means that by faith, he saw in the fulfillment of God's promises, there would be a coming deliverer; a future Savior. He didn't know much but he knew enough to see he was coming and to trust Him and love him. Focusing on Christ and living for an eternal reward is what gave him the strength to persevere through one of the hardest leadership challenges of all time, leading a million grumpy, murmuring Israelites for 40 years in the desert. Could you imagine the complaint list? He looked ahead to a reward and stayed at it because he could perceive Christ.

That is why he made some radical choices in life. Where were the radical choices? Let's find out.

### **Moses chose humility over status.**

**By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Hebrew 10:24**

To have a life of privilege where every door is opened before him because he was part of Pharaoh's family, and then to refuse the privileges of that title, why would anyone do this? Why would he identify himself as an Israelite in Egypt? That was to identify yourself as a slave. This is like German nobility choosing to become a Jew during the Holocaust. Why would he do it?

This doesn't sound too amazing until we think about how important status is to us. Loss of status is one of the sharpest pains unemployed men and women are facing. They went from managing a department, giving orders and making decisions to sitting at home and even the dog doesn't come when called. Some people become suicidal because it is so painful to lose your status in society.

Moses chose to lose his status. He gave up his title because identifying himself as a son of Christ was worth more than being called a son of Pharaoh. We all face this tension. It isn't easy being a Christian. Sometimes people will look down on us. What are we to do? Look past the temporary discomfort of being identified as a Christian to an eternal time when being identified with Jesus will be the greatest thing possible. In other words, when the temporary value of being admired by our peers is more valuable to us than the glorious value of Christ's admiration, we will always live for what people think of us.

The prince of Egypt became a slave by faith. By faith he made some radical choices.

### **Moses chose pain over pleasure.**

**He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. Hebrews 10:25**

Let me make something clear. Being rich or having power or influence is not a sin. Other names in the Hall of Faith had all those things. It is just that Moses knew what God's will was for his life. We get a see this when he killed the Egyptian that was mistreating the Israelite. He knew God had called him to help. So for Moses to remain in the comforts of the palace while his people suffered would have been sin for him.

Moses saw past the pleasures of the palace. He realized the pleasures of sin were all fleeting. The principle is universally true. Sin is always temporarily more pleasurable than obedience. You name the temptation, I will show you how that is the case. Lying over truth, greed over generosity, immorality over purity, hate over love. In the short term, sin is always more pleasurable, but it is only pleasurable for the moment. Then it bites with all the venom and ferocity of a snake, and won't let go.

You see guys on the beer commercials during the football games drinking, laughing and saying... this is the life! They forget to show you the guy puking his brains out with his head over a toilet bowl in a dirty public rest room. They don't show him abusing his wife and becoming the terror of his family. Adultery is glorified in the media as soft music plays and the camera slides along curves under a sheet. What they don't show you is the devastation it causes the family and the heart break on the children. Sin will always be pleasurable for the first moment but it is insane for the long-run. Not just for this life but especially for the next.

I know this morning some of us are struggling with sin. We are in love with the goose bumps that comes with the allure of sin and you find yourself going back to it again and again and you are hating yourself for doing it. I don't want to oversimplify your struggle and fail to empathize with you but let me give you the bottom line. God doesn't want you to give up on pleasure. God wants you to live for a better pleasure. Satan tells us that we need sin to have fun.

God isn't anti-pleasure; he is anti-illegitimate and temporary pleasure. In other words, God wants us to enjoy maximum pleasure, the kind of pleasure that sinful pleasures, by definition, can not provide. Faith is to choose pleasure addiction. It is not an addiction to the lesser pleasures of sin but the greater pleasures that only God can provide.

Our battle is to believe that pleasure within Gods will and timing are always better than the pleasures that come in our will and our timing by gratifying sinful desires. It takes faith to do this. First, it takes faith to believe God's pleasures are worth the wait. Christian teenagers and young adults, this is what

you need. Not less desire for pleasure, but a desire for more pleasures. A desire for pleasure that is so strong that pre-marital sex isn't appealing because you know the pleasure of marital sex is worth the wait.

Moses walked away from the pleasure capital of the ancient world, the palaces of Egypt, not because he didn't want pleasure, he just knew he wouldn't be satisfied with pleasures lesser than the ones God would provide. Moses wanted the pleasures that only God can provide in his time and according to his will here on earth and the pleasures he would have for all time as a reward in heaven. So Moses faith led him to make radical choices.

### **Moses chose poverty over treasure.**

**He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. Hebrews 10:29**

Moses chose poverty over treasure. In our materialistic world, this might be Moses' most radical choice. I tried to explain some of the fabulous wealth of Egypt earlier. It is hard to comprehend the wealth of a Pharaoh. It is best seen in the personal monuments they built for themselves called pyramids.

Pyramids served two basic functions, preparation and exaltation. The tombs were burial sites into which they placed everything the dead Pharaoh would need in the afterlife. There was never a culture more obsessed with the afterlife than the Egyptians. You need a body in the next life, which is why they are still famous for their mummification process to maintain the body for the next life. Why did King Tut have all that wealth and possessions in his tomb? They believed it would provide him with what he would want in the next life. They would seal the tombs with boats, clothes, food, money and women. Everything a Pharaoh might want in the next life.

The tombs were not just for preparation, they were also for exaltation. The size of the tombs boggles the mind. It is like standing next to a man made mountain. The Great Pyramid has 2.3 million blocks with the average block weighing in at 2.5 tons. They still don't know how they built them. These tombs were huge tributes to a Pharaoh's greatness. The cost was incalculable.

Moses walked away from all that wealth. It was very un-American of him. If pleasure addicts are hedonists, treasure addicts are materialists. They find value in earthly possessions. They measure themselves by what they have. Moses had it *all* but he turned his back on it. Why? He was looking ahead to his reward.

Just like Moses was living for better pleasures, he was living for better treasures. Treasures better than anything this world could offer, the reward that God would provide him in eternity.

This is the great irony of Moses. Here he is in the most afterlife consumed culture of all time and Moses was living for the afterlife in a totally different way. The whole pyramid/mummy thing didn't work for him. That isn't living for the afterlife.

Imagine with me that you were able to go to the King Tut exhibit. You were able to see his throne and gold sandals and gold fans. You can see the gold bowls from which he ate. Finally you get a chance to see the great boy Pharaoh, King Tut himself. Do you know what he looks like? Dead. According to the Bible, eternity is not a place of pleasure.

Imagine with me that you could get up close and personal with Moses in heaven. Imagine what it is like because everyone wants to meet him. Imagine the glory and honor given him by God. Who was the foolish one? Moses or King Tut?

Moses' story speaks to us powerfully today. We are a pleasure and treasure addicted society without the wisdom to pursue pleasure and treasures that we get to keep and enjoy for eternity. Moses saw past earthly status, pleasure and treasure and he went after status in God's eyes with pleasures and treasures for eternity.

Moses' life challenges us to live for things better than this world can offer. It is not wrong to desire a successful business. It is not wrong to want to retire financially secure. This morning, I challenge you to live for something better than this world can offer. To do that, you will need to turn your back on seeking status, pleasure and treasure in this world. Choose, in faith, to live for the next. Of course, people will think you are crazy. They thought Moses was crazy.

Teenagers. You have your whole life in front of you. What do you want to live for? It isn't wrong to dream of being married, having a comfortable house and decent salary. You are young. You can make choices now that will have powerful results later. Is God calling you to be a missionary and take the gospel around the world? Is God calling you to be a pastor? We are rapidly approaching a post Christian culture, the gospel is in your hand for your generation. If you give yourself to telling the good news of the gospel, I can't even begin to imagine what God would do with you.

Retirement age friends. There are not many laps left on the track of life. People tell you that since you have finally arrived it is time to pamper yourself. You worked hard, now enjoy yourself. How does that fly with the example of Moses? I take my hat off to Pastor Chris who preceded me and is now working on how to take your generation, financially independent people who can go anywhere and do anything, to put you on the front line of ministry making radical choices of faith.

Henry Martyn was born in 1781. At the age of 16 he earned the title of *senior wrangler* in Cambridge. A *wrangler* in England was the solving of complex math problems. At 16 he was the best mathematician of Cambridge. He intended to go into law school until he heard Charles Simeon speaking on the power of a single life for God. He was telling the story of William Carey. In faith, Henry made some radical choices. He gave up on the status and wealth that would come with being one of the brightest lawyers of his day, and decided to become a missionary.

At age 25, he arrived in India. Henry wasn't just gifted in mathematics but he was a brilliant linguist. In 3 years he understood 3 languages and translated the New Testament into Hindustani, Urdu and Persian. He also translated the Psalms into Persian and the book of Common Prayer. Within four years of arriving in India, he had translated the New Testament into the local language and planted a church. He left for Arabia where he planned to translate the New Testament into Arabic. While on his travel, he was overcome with a plague and died at age 31. To this day, his New Testament in Persian, which he did for the modern day Iraq, is the one of the best and clearest translations of the New Testament in Iraq. The work of his life is still making a difference.

When people in England heard that he died, many of them thought, "What a shame. A brilliant life gone to waste." Did his life go to waste or did he choose something better?

## Hebrews – Why does God let me suffer? - Hebrews 11:29-38

Sign Title: Why does God let me suffer?

November 8, 2009

It's called *The Religion that Kills*. Dr. Seth Asser gazed at row after row of small head stones marking the graves of children not far from the end of the Oregon Trail. The sad part is that most of those children could have lived, but their parents wouldn't allow them to receive medical care. Why would loving parents deny their children basic medical care? As Christian Scientists, they believed their children would be healed if they simply mustered enough faith. As row after row of headstones testify, faith didn't come to their rescue. What a horrifying feeling of guilt for those parents to live with.

It is not just the Christian Scientists of our nations colonial era who believed faith is the key to health. Today the airwaves and cable channels are packed with health and wealth preachers who tell us faith is the key that unlocks health, wealth, and prosperity. If we don't have health, wealth and prosperity, it is because there is something wrong with our faith. If life is good, God is blessing you because of your faith. If life is bad, it is your own fault because your faith is weak.

It is not just Christian Scientists and health-wealth preachers who are caught in the under-tow of the faith to success syndrome. Let's be honest, haven't we subconsciously bought into it as well?

This morning we are in a passage of Hebrews that, like the morning sun, will burn away the fog of confusion about what kind of life faith guarantees.

### Hebrews 11:29-38

This morning I want to stay on a higher level and just look at five observations from Scripture about the way faith works in life.

### **By Faith God sometimes saves his people from suffering.**

Verses 29-35 give us a list of miraculous ways God stepped into history to save his children. For example, God divided the Red Sea so the Israelites could walk across a dry sea bed but when the Egyptians tried to follow, they were drowned. Imagine the faith it took to walk into a hole in the Red Sea with the water walled up on both sides. Some people think the Red Sea wasn't deep and this wasn't much of a miracle but that isn't what the Bible tells us. It tells us the Israelites went into the Red Sea as a powerful act of faith. They knew it was crazy to walk between walls of water that were miraculously held back, yet, in faith they entered the sea. The sea must have been deep because when the



water returned it was enough to wash away an entire Egyptian army. They were never seen again. By faith the walls of Jericho came tumbling down without an Israelite even putting his hand on them. Jericho was an ancient military fortress that guarded the entrance to the Promised Land. Imagine President Obama telling us to walk around Baghdad shouting at it and blowing trumpets because God told him the buildings would collapse on the seventh day. It took a lot of faith to try that military maneuver. By faith the mouths of lions were shut. This is a reference to Daniel in the lions den. By faith the fury of flames were quenched. That is a reference to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego being thrown into Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace. By faith, the widow's son at Zarephath was raised from the dead. When God's people exercised faith and trusted God to meet their needs, many times God came to their rescue in a miraculous way. The Bible is full of examples where God's people exercise faith in him to come to their rescue, and sometimes he does it in a miraculous way. God hasn't changed his character, he still works to save his people today. I believe he can and occasionally will save us in a miraculous way. What is the key to God operating this way? It always begins when God's people exercise faith in Him. When they obey him even though it isn't easy and it may cost them dearly.

**And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith. Matthew 13:58**

Faith is always the pre-requisite for God coming to our rescue in a miraculous way.

As I looked at this list of ways God intervened to rescue his children, I noticed that some of these miracles are of a different sort. They are *Miracles of Providence*. What I mean is they are God working in an equally miraculous but less obvious way. They are God working behind the scenes to save his children. God works with this invisible hand called providence, just like he works with his visible hand of the miraculous.

For example, by faith, Barak fought against a Canaanite army that had 900 chariots (today's equivalent of M1 Abraham tanks). How did he win? A perfectly timed downpour left the chariots stuck in the mud. Easy pickings for Barak and his army. Rahab didn't perish because she providentially heard of the power of God and providentially she had the chance to host the Jewish spies who came to her door to hide them from the soldiers trying to ferret them out in the city. It was a miracle where God put the right people together at the right time. It was a miracle of providence. It is God's invisible hand at work. Elijah escaped the sword of Jezebel. It was the providential movement of God's hand that kept the Jezebel's head hunters from finding him. In all these cases God is the one who worked behind the scenes to save his people. They were miracles done by the invisible, not the visible hand of God who came to the rescue.

The point is, God works through faith to do miracles and acts of providence and bring practical, real help to his people. I love when God comes to the rescue this way. You love when God comes to the rescue this way. When we know someone is diagnosed with cancer, in faith we pray God will come to our rescue in this way. Many times, he does... but... *sometimes he doesn't*. Why?

### **By faith God sometimes sustains his people in suffering.**

This is the point of verses 35-38. Let's put it this way, faith in God is no guarantee we will experience comfort, security and happiness. The agony and torture God's children endured in verses 35-38 came about *because of their faith was good*, not because their faith was lacking. Sometimes God doesn't choose to remove us from hard times but instead he uses our faith to sustain us in the hard times. Faith then becomes not the means of rescue from hard times but it becomes the means by which we survive the hard times.

Look at verse 33. The writer of Hebrews is coming to a crescendo. He lists name after name of those rescued by faith and then without skipping a beat he starts talking about those who weren't rescued by faith but they were sustained in torture.

...quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Hebrews 11:34-35

In other words, God's people experienced suffering and torture not because their faith failed but rather God allowed them to experience suffering because *God was pleased with their faith!* Their faith was so ripe they understood that if God chose to let them suffer and be sustained in suffering through their faith rather than rescue them by faith, that is OK. If they suffered well for Christ, the result would be a better resurrection and a greater reward in eternity. God can, and does, move his visible hand in miracles and his invisible hand in providence to save his people,... but not always.

Let's look at some examples of this in action. Compare v.34 to v.37.

...and escaped the edge of the sword;... Hebrews 11:34

...they were put to death by the sword. Hebrews 11:37

So in one instance by faith people escaped the edge of the sword, and in another instance by faith they died by the sword.

It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. Acts 12:1-2

But the next verse tells how Peter was arrested for the same purpose, but God intervened and miraculously delivered Peter. God allowed James to die by faith. Peter escaped by faith.

Understand that sometimes the suffering God sustains his children through by faith in not just the inconvenience of being laughed at in a party. Sometimes he allows his children to go through horrific suffering.

They were stoned; they were sawed in two; Hebrews 11:37

I remember reading this as a kid and wanting to grab my stomach because this thought was so repulsive. I still feel that way today. Tradition says this is the way the prophet Isaiah died. Imagine how awful it would feel to have death in front of you and to know a person is devising a way for your death to be as horrifying as they can conceive. That has happened, it is happening and it will continue to happen. God could stop that from happening to his people, but many times instead of freeing his people because of their faith, he sustains his children through their suffering by means of their faith.

Horrific suffering for God was fresh in the mind of the Christians to whom the author of Hebrews is writing to. During the inter-testamental period, the 400 year period when the Old Testament ended till when Christ came, Alexander the Great conquered world. He was fanatical about Greek culture and he forced Greek culture upon the Jews. The book of Macabees tells how the Jews rebelled temporarily re-instated sacrifices in the temple as a result, they were brutally tortured and killed, not rescued. So the idea of suffering for faith was fresh in the mind of the Jews reading this letter.

**Faith is not a health and wealth secret.**

It is a great relief to know there is a higher explanation for our suffering in life than a lack of faith. Wouldn't it be horrible to be a parent watching your child die and believe the reason your child was dying was because you didn't have enough faith.

When a Christians brother or sister is suffering, what should we say to them? Certainly not,...

“Have faith and God will heal you”

rather

“Trust in God, whether God chooses to heal you by faith or God chooses to sustain us in our suffering through faith, know God takes care of those who trust him in faith. To live is Christ, to die is gain.”

Ultimately, it is God who decides when and how we will die. We are immortal until he chooses to take us home. He has his purposes, but like Job, many times they are hidden from us. Faith means we believe they are good.

**Faith believes being the object of God’s affection is better than what life can give and what death can take.**

Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Hebrews 11:35

Imagine with me you are a Christian in Iraq. You are arrested for reading your Bible and attending a prayer meeting. In the middle of the night the secret police arrest you and bring you to be water boarded. They force gallons of water into your stomach, they chain you flat on the floor placing a sheet of plywood on your chest. Three to nine men walking and bounce on you applying hundreds of pounds of pressure on your water logged organs stretching your organs.

What does faith believe in the moment of torture? That if God loved me, he would get me out of this? If I just had enough faith, God would rescue me? NO! Faith believes there is a resurrection coming. The miracle of the resurrection is even better than the miracle of escape. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, that was an incredible miracle but it wasn’t Jesus’ best miracle because Lazarus died again. An even better miracle that every Christian will experience, is not being resurrected to live again in this world but being saved in death to live forever with Christ on the new heaven and earth.

Faith believes what we have as Christians through Christ is better than *anything* we could have in this life apart from him. Being water-board tortured to death in Iraq but having Christ is better than being Bill Gates and living a without Jesus. Faith says what I have in God is better than anything I could have in life. Faith says Christ is better than my job, better than my family, better than my retirement plans. Faith says whether God handles me kindly and rescues me from adversity or if God chooses to sustain me by faith through the terrors, I will still love him because being the object of God’s affections through Jesus is better than anything this world could offer to me or anything this world can take away from me. If by faith God works miraculously to save us from suffering, we will praise him. If God chooses to let us go through physical suffering, loss of status, financial crisis or emotional tragedies we will still praise him because we have Christ, something better than whatever this world takes away.

**Those who suffer or die for Christ are God’s gift to the world.**

They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— the world was not worthy of them. Hebrews 11:37-38b

Why would God choose not to save us from suffering for his glory? Why would God choose instead to sustain us by faith in suffering. What is his purpose? How does it bring fame to his name through our life? It says those who are destitute, abused, rejected, cultural rejects for their faith in Christ are people the world is not worthy of. Why would the world not be worthy of these people? Listen closely.

When God's precious children suffer for their faith and he sustains them in their suffering because they know God has something better in eternity laid up for them, God uses their life to give the world a message.

Being the object of God's affection through Christ is more precious to me than anything this world can offer, even life itself. Turn..., turn... and believe.

[YouTube - Girl Burned in Orissa](#)

## Hebrews 12:1 - Don't Give Up!

Sign Title: Don't Give Up!

January 2, 2010

Today, people are throwing in the towel at record levels. They are giving up on their marriages, they walk away from a job that wasn't what they expected it to be. This week, some of us made new years resolutions that we already gave up on.

It is much easier to make a commitment, than it is to live it out. Can I get an Amen to that? Let's choose to be different. Turn to your neighbor and say, "I'm not giving up."

Why is it so hard to finish what we start? I thought of some reasons we can all identify with.

**Isolation** - It is hard to keep a commitment when we are the only one holding ourselves accountable. I work out in the morning at the YMCA and sometimes the only thing that gets me out of bed is knowing my lifting partner will be there. He holds me accountable. When we allow ourselves to be isolated from the encouragement of others, we have a tough time keeping our commitments. That is true in our fitness programs, it is true in our Bible reading plans, it is true in our struggles with sin. If you are struggling with sin, one of the quickest ways to wipe out sin's burning desire is to find a Christian accountability partner. The best way to keep and not give up a commitment to purity is to not try and do it alone.

**Complications** - It is hard to finish what we start when life gets complicated. Unexpected phone calls can push our commitments to the side. How many times do we plan to spend more time with our spouse or our children but things got too busy so we just gave up.

**People** - Sometimes people make us want to give up. This happens all the time in marriages. The wife plans a surprise candle lit dinner with a special meal, soft music and the kids are at the babysitters but her husband calls at the last minute to say he has to work late and won't be home for a few more hours. Frustrating!

People are not just giving up on relationships, fitness programs, and new years resolutions but many people are giving up on God. Either because they allow themselves to become isolated from the church, the complications of life crowd out affections for Christ and time with Christ or sometimes they let the disappointment of people turn into disappointment with God.

For many of us the way we give up on God is not by completely walking away from Christ but by letting the warmth of our heart towards Christ's love for us grow cool.

We become like the middle aged man whose wife called into the radio talk show saying she was worried her husband didn't love her any more. They were still married but he stopped telling her he loved her, he stopped romancing her, he stopped spending time with her, she was just there. The problem with sharing this on the radio talk show was that her husband was listening to the radio

program. When he came home he said to her, “I told you I loved you when we were married and if it ever changes, I will let you know.”

He hadn't given up on the marriage, but he had walked away from the joy of the relationship in the marriage. Many Christians give up on God this way. They give up on the joy of our life with Christ.

How do we keep from giving up? That is what we are going to learn this morning.

We are back in the book of Hebrews after our Christmas series. When we left we had just finished chapter 11. It is called the great chapter of faith because it is stacked with spiritual heroes, Christians who faced audacious challenges to their faith but they pressed on. They didn't give up. They didn't grow cold. It was Moses turning his back on the treasures of Egypt because he knew that in the long run there was greater enjoyment for eternity with God than being the son of Pharaoh. It was Noah building an ark for 100 years while enduring the mocking of his friends and neighbors, no place close to a body of water. It was Abraham leaving his comfortable life in Ur to spend a life being led to a new land but never seeing it while on earth.

The writer of Hebrews stacks chapter 11 with true stories that are intended to inspire us not to give up, to let the joy of Christ in our life stay hot even when we go through a hard time for a long time.

**Hebrews 12:1**

In this text we have three steps to making it in the Christians life and not giving up or fizzling out on our spiritual joy when life gets tough.

**I can make it because I have home court advantage.**

**Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses... Hebrews 12:1**

Who are these witnesses? For sure, they are the witnesses of Hebrews 11. These witnesses got it done, they finished strong in spite of tough opposition. The picture here is of a stadium. It is like the Monday night football game between the Vikings and Bears. We are playing on the field of life and we are surrounded by spectators. The difference between these spectators and those who watch Monday night football is that Monday night football spectators have never played the game. The spectators surrounding us are all former players for Christ on the field of life.

Who are they? I believe he is talking about more than the saints of Hebrews 11. I believe he is talking about all the saints throughout history. That means your grandparents, if they knew Christ, are cheering you on. That means the apostle Paul, the Christians of the middle ages, they are all looking on cheering for you. Those who died for Jesus are cheering you on. Even the author of Hebrews is cheering us on. That is incredibly encouraging. It is like a cross country meet with all the parents cheering their kids on as they run for the



finish line. Knowing people are rooting for you makes a big difference. We are not alone.

Some scholars don't think these saints can see us. Some reason that if the saints could see us they would be grieved by our sin and since there is no grief in heaven, the saints cannot be watching. So the scholars think this cloud of witnesses doesn't mean they are watching us but it is more like we are looking at the high school sports trophy case. These heroes are featured as having made it because they didn't give up and throw in the towel but lived by faith.

Which one do I think it is? The trophy case or the stadium? I personally think the stadium analogy is right but I may be wrong. Even if I am wrong and it is a trophy case listing, the Bible says a record is being kept of our righteous choices and our sinful choices and nothing is truly secret. We will give an account of our choices before God.

The idea that there are believers who have gone before me who are a cloud of witnesses fires me up. Can you imagine Moses watching us this morning and cheering us on? Can you imagine Daniel rooting in the stands? It reminds me of a high school basketball game. One of the best things is home court advantage. When the people in the stands are our heroes and everyone is rooting for us to win, it makes a difference.

When life is tough, when living by faith is tough, when you are tempted to let your love for Christ grow cold, picture the stands. They are filled with people who are cheering their hardest for you to live with everything you have for Jesus. You are not isolated. You are not alone. We have ultimate home court advantage.

**I can make it if I get rid of distractions.**

...let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely... Hebrews 12:1

What do preachers say we should do whenever we see the word *therefore* in the Bible? They say, "when you see the word therefore, you have to see what it is there for." That is good advice but there is more here than meets the eye. This *therefore* is a special therefore. It is not the regular word *therefore*. It is a special word that is only used twice in the entire NT. It is a *super therefore*. So we better turbo check the context because this is a really important application. Because we are playing in the Superbowl of life for Jesus and our heroes are watching, here is how we compete.

Lay aside every weight. The picture here is of an ancient running event. If you have done any running, you know how important it is to get stripped down if you are going to make it. Runners need to get rid of anything that will slow them down. They cut body fat, they wear special ultra-lite shoes. In the ancient world, the athletes stripped away *every weight, they competed naked!* If you have seen some of our modern running events, our athletes are close to naked when they compete, thank goodness for spandex.

The writer of Hebrews says that if we are going to make it in our faith and not give up or fizzle out, get out of our lives everything that slows down our passionate pursuit of the joy found in Jesus. He tells us there are two kinds of things that will cause us to flame out for Jesus over the years. One is called a weight the other is called sin.

### **Drop the weights.**

A spiritual weight is something that is not necessarily wrong. The Bible doesn't say it is wrong but it slows us down. In a moment, some of you will say, "Pastor Kurt, you are such a legalist, the Bible doesn't say I can't do that." You are right. The question we are asking is not, "Is it wrong, but is it helpful to our joy in Jesus?" "Is it pouring cold water on the fire of God's love in my heart?" What are things in our life that are spiritual weights?

**Entertainment Choices** - Go into Mr. Movies and you know that 75% of the movies on the shelf Christians shouldn't watch. Why can't we watch it?

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.  
Philippians 4:8

What happens? The next morning our mind is gurgling up the sludge of in the movies we watched the night before. The scenes keep rolling on the big screen of our mind.

Of course, there are entertainment choices that are wrong but are they helpful? Maybe you are a Discovery Channel addict. There is good stuff on Discovery but is watching 3 hours of television a night a good use of our time? Pastor, we have no time for family conversation, I have no time with my spouse, I am too busy to read a good Christian book. Turn off the TV! It isn't wrong but too much is unhelpful and slows us down.

**Sports** - I love sports. I love wrestling, I love to support my children in their competition. Maybe you have a favorite team that consumes you. Sports are not wrong, the writer of Hebrews is using sports analogies because they were popular then just like they are now, but too much can consume us and destroy our competition in the the real event, pursuing the joy of Christ.

**Financial Goals** - Some of us are squirreling away the cash and working extra hours. That is a good thing but it is an all consuming thing that doesn't leave you open to serving God by loving others and your family?

**Relationships** - It might be a boyfriend or a girlfriend or even a spouse that weigh you down. Sometimes we can become so tied to one person that our life orbits around that person and we are consumed with them. The joy of a relationship is a gift from God but it can consume us to the point where we think of and pursue nothing else. Not a wrong choice but an unhelpful choice..

**Substances** - My father in laws famous words to me when he came home from the bar was, "You know Jesus tipped his elbow." The Bible doesn't say

drinking is wrong, it doesn't say smoking is wrong. They are not wise choices. They are weights that slow us down, cut our life short and consume our time. Remember, "Not wrong, but a poor choice."

**Frittering** - Frittering is my own word for what happens to our time and our life when we don't take control of it but we let it take control of us. There will always be something to do, some need to be met, some program to be watched. Far too often we let life control us, we don't try to control it. We become reactive, not proactive. If someone wants to compete in a race, they plan times to train, they don't just assume it will happen.

### **Get rid of the sins that cling?**

In the ancient world, people wore long-flowing robes. They were great for walking around, everyone is comfortable in their bath robe, but they weren't the kind of things you wanted to take a sprint in. If you run in a robe you know the robe wraps itself around your legs binding you up, it clings to you. This is the picture he gives us. Get rid of the sin which can so easily wrap itself around us and trip us up.

What sin is this? I think it is different for each of us. Each of us has particular sins that we easily fall into. For some who are successful, it is pride. For others who are more sensual, it is the sin of lust. For others it is the sin of materialism when we go to the mall. Each of us has particular sins that cling to us like burrs from a bush. All we need to do is rub up against the sin and it sticks to us. Each of us has some regular sins we battle with. The writer of Hebrews says, if we are going to make it and not give up, we need to take the sins that cling seriously and be done with them, steer away from them, not toy with them. Over time they will eventually make us fall or throw in the towel.

**Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. 1 Corinthians 9:24**

As I was talking this morning, I know the Holy Spirit was working on some of our hearts. What is the distraction that pulls you away from Christ? What is the sin that so easily clings to your life. This morning make the choice to be done with distractions and run all out for the joy found in Jesus. Some people may be able to handle things in moderation but others of us can't handle it in moderation, it is a distraction because it consumes us, it easily clings to us. It is not a matter of what your friends and neighbors do, it is a matter of what is distracting and sinful for you and your family.

**I can make it because I know the Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint.**

**... and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,... Hebrews 12:1**

Who has participated in a cross country event or some kind of foot race? It isn't easy. It is constantly pushing yourself. If you think the Christian life is easy, you have the wrong picture. It is not a jog in the park. It is a run and a race. The word for race used here is the word, *agon*. It is where we get the word *agony*. An *agon* was a long distance marathon where your legs were about

ready to collapse, your lungs felt like they would explode and your mouth was filled with cotton. Welcome to the Christian life.

Coming to Christ doesn't make our problems go away. We come to Christ and our problems are just beginning. In the weeks to come we will learn reasons why God brings difficulties into our life and how it is all for his glory and to increase our joy in him. For now, just get the picture of what the Christian life is like. The Christian life is not a sprint, it is not a walk in the park, it will be long and hard. There will be tears, it will involve pain. If you don't know that, you will give up in the first mile.

Since our spiritual lives are like a marathon, how are we to run? It says, we are to run with *endurance*. The word *endurance* is an interesting word because it literally means *the ability to remain under pressure*. It means, don't give up when it gets hard. If you have been to the YMCA and you are running on the treadmill and you start off by telling yourself you will run 30 minutes, the first 10 minutes aren't bad but by about 22 you just want to quit. The Christian life often involves long periods of time when you just wish things would end. God may allow the pain of a disease in our life for years, we may find ourselves unemployed for a long time. We may go through 4 terrible years in high school.

Why does God allow us to go through long periods of pain? I think one of the reasons God allows long periods of pain is because long difficulties produce lasting character changes.

Earlier we talked about things we can control. We can lay aside the weights that slow us down and the sins that so easily cling to us but we cannot control the race marked out for us. God marks it out, our job is to run it well.

God may have marked out for us a race that involves suffering and pain. That is a race that provides us with more opportunity to give him glory and for us to bask in the joy of our relationship with God when everything else is devoid of happiness.

I know some of us this morning, are going through very tough times. I take my hat off to some of you who are suffering so well and finding your joy in Jesus. While I don't want to diminish the reality of the pain in your heart or your body. I want to provide perspective.

There are many others who are running a race God marked out for them that is tougher than the one you are on. According to a study release a few weeks ago, 70% of the world's population cannot worship freely.<sup>4</sup>

This past week, I read the story of 70 Christians who gathered in Iran for a Christmas service. The police showed up, arrested the two pastors and disbanded the group. The two pastors, Kambiz Saghaee and Ali Keshvar-Doost, have not been heard from since. All because they gathered to thank God for Jesus.

---

<sup>4</sup> Copyright 2009 The Associated Press

## Conclusion

Some of us are here this morning and we came ready to throw in the towel. We are tired of the agony of Christian marathon, we are weighed down with distractions in life that pull us away from our joy in Christ. Our legs are tangled with the sins of our particular weaknesses. We think we can hold them at arms length; just enough to enjoy them but not close enough to be destroyed by them. Don't give up! Run!

I know you are tired, I know you are weary but lift your eyes to the stands. Moses is leaning forward in his seat, Daniel is coming to his feet for you. Esther says, "You were born for such a time as this." David is cupping his hands around his mouth to cheer for you. Gideon has his eyes fixed on you, though you are weak, God is what you need to be mighty.

Turn to your neighbor and say, "I won't give up!"

## Hebrews 12:2-3 - The Joy of Jesus

Sign Title: The Joy of Jesus

January 10, 2010

Who watched the Orange Bowl? Iowa stunned Georgia Tech. This year's Iowa football team matched the school record for victories and is the highest ranking Iowa football team since 1960. If you enjoy Iowa sports, this week's Iowa victory was one of the greatest moments in Iowa athletic history. What did it take for Iowa football to become that good? For most of the players it involved a lifetime of preparation.

What kept them motivated during those long hours of practice? What kept them disciplined to learn the plays, work out with weights, and punish their bodies to become the best they can be? For many, it was the dream of a trophy.

There are masses of Christians competing in the game of life and they have no idea what they are competing for. They have no incentive to turn away from sin, no prize that inspires them to risk living by faith. As Christians, is there a prize we are reaching for at the finish line? Is it the respect of others; is it avoiding hell; is it a good family life. If you are living the Christian life with any of those as your goals, you probably won't make it to the end. It will take a much greater prize to sustain love for Christ in our darkest moments. Is there a greater prize? If so, what is it? This morning, we will find the answer to those questions.

Last week, we returned to the book of Hebrews and picked up where we left off; in the beginning of chapter 12. We learned the Christian life is a race, not a sprint, but a long-distance marathon. In Greek the Christian life is called an *agon* race. That is where we get our word, agony. The Christian life is the Hawaii Iron-man triathlon of the soul. The Christian life will have many times when we are under long-term pressure.

Last week we learned that to run the Christian life successfully, we need to get rid of every weight that slows us down. Weights not overtly sinful, they are poor choices that will slow us down in our run for Jesus. Weights can be entertainment we watch, sports we live for or the substances we put into our body. Weights can be good things taken to excess.

The other things we need to discard in our run for Jesus are the sins that so easily cling to us. Those are sins we are naturally prone to. For each of us, they are different. These are the sins that easily trip us up.

This morning, we are looking at a third important action we must take to live the Christian life successfully. That is, we have to know what we are running for at the finish line.

Hebrews 12:2-3

**Fix Your Eyes on Jesus**

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus...

The word *fix* is a very interesting Greek word. It is an athletic word. It means to not allow yourself to get distracted by anything around you. It means keeping your eyes singularly focused on one thing.

As I studied, I was reminded of the 1988 Olympics where Canadian, Ben Johnson, beat Carl Lewis, the American, in the 50 yard dash for the Olympic Gold. Ben Johnson was later disqualified for using steroids. Before the steroid controversy surfaced, commentators were talking about something else; Carl Lewis's head. About  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way through the 50 yard dash, Carl Lewis turns and watches Ben Johnson pass him. If you were in high school track, what is the one thing they told you not to do during the race? Don't take your eyes off the finish line! Looking anywhere else will slow you down. This is what the writer of Hebrews tells us, during our race of faith, fix our eyes on Jesus. He is at the finish line. Don't allow yourself to be distracted by anything else.

As we run toward him, what do we see? We see him waiting at the finish line with open arms for us. We see the look in his eye that is longing for the moment we fall into his arms. What could be better than fixing our eyes on Jesus?

**Fix my eyes on Jesus because of who he is.**

...fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith,...

Jesus is the *author* and *perfecter* of our faith. These words are very important to help us understand Jesus identity. The word *author* is sometimes translated *pioneer*, *originator* or *forerunner*. It means *someone who blazes the trail for others to follow*. I like to describe it as using a knife. If we have a big watermelon and we are going to cut it, there is only one way the knife works. It won't cut the watermelon sideways, it won't cut the watermelon upside down. To cut the watermelon we use the leading edge, the cutting edge; when we use it, the rest of the knife can easily follow. This what Jesus is. He is the pioneer of faith. He blazed the trail of faith for us to follow. So Christ is not just the focus of our faith at the finish line but he is the original man who lived a life of faith.

**He was tempted in all things, just as we are, yet was without sin. Hebrews 4:15**

For example, in Matthew 4, we find Jesus tempted in the wilderness by Satan, he is really hungry after 40 days without food and wants a Big Mac. Satan tempts him to use his divine powers to turn stones into bread. What does Jesus say?

**Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Matthew 4:4**

In other words, Jesus says, I am hungry but my Father still wants me in the wilderness without food. My father knows what I need and when it is right for me to have it. My Father says no Big Macs yet. Pleasing his father was more important than using his abilities to satisfy the urges of his body. Faith is trusting God knows what we need and when we need it. When we choose short cuts to satisfy our desires, we are not living by faith.



For example, maybe we can't find the right person to marry who loves Jesus. We meet someone we really enjoy but their heart isn't in love with Christ. What do we tell God? Can't you fix her? When we utter those words, we say, God, satisfying my appetite is more important than waiting for you to provide what is good and what I need in your time. That is not living by faith. Faith is saying, I believe God knows what I need, when I need it. He will provide the right person in his time. I won't compromise.

Not only is Jesus the *author* of living by faith, he is the *perfecter*. That means he is the one who lived the life of faith perfectly. One of the things exciting about sports is that no competition is perfect, there is always room for improvement. Ben Johnson won the gold medal in the 50 yard dash in the 1980's but Usain Bolt beat his time. People are constantly getting better. Jordan improved on Magic Johnson, Tiger Woods improved on Jack Nicklaus. When it comes to living the Christian life, the Christian life has already seen its greatest faith performance. Jesus batted 1,000. Jesus is the perfect example of faith. Jesus ran first and he ran best. So of all the heroes of Hebrews 11, Jesus tops all of them; he is the one to follow.

That sounds spiritual, "Follow Jesus", but what does it mean? It means study the film of his life so we can see what living by faith looks like. How do you forgive when someone has hurt you? Look at Jesus. How do you handle being mocked for Christ? Look at Jesus. How do we suffer in faith? Look at Jesus. Let's make two observations about the way he ran.

### **Fix my eyes on Jesus because of what he did**

...who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame,...

In a moment, we will come back to this phrase, *for the joy set before him* but for now I want to focus on the example of faith he gave us to follow.

He *endured the cross*. That is the same word we studied last week. It means *the ability to remain under pressure*. Christ remained under the pressure of the cross, even to the point of death. The difference between Jesus and anyone else who died on a cross is that Jesus could have instantly come down from the cross whenever he wanted. He fashioned the world, busting off a cross would be easy. He didn't. He remained under the pressure. I probably don't need to go into the physiological pressure of death on a cross in the ancient world. It was one of the cruelest means of death ever conceived by man. In fact, they coined a new word to convey the kind of pain that came from death on a cross, it was called *excruciating* pain, literally the pain of the cross. Christ chose to remain under this pressure.

Maybe even more agonizing than the physical portion of the cross was his being made sin for us. The spiritual agony of God the Son when he was made sin and the Father turned his back on the son was even more agonizing. Jesus chose to be made sin for me, Kurt Trucksess. He chose to be made sin for you.

Not only was he made sin, for me, and he chose to endure it, but he scorned its shame. What does that mean? To scorn something is to not think much of it. Dying on the cross was shameful. The ultimate humiliation was hanging naked before others. Imagine losing control of your bodily functions, struggling to breath, and dying slowly. Socially, death on a cross meant to face mocking and jeers from those around you. For the pure and holy son of God to become sin for us is shocking. How could he do such a thing? The shame was enormous but he scorned it, it wasn't that big of a deal! Why not? It was nothing when compared with the prize at the end. What was the prize that made him think nothing of excruciating pain and shame?

### **Fix my eyes on Jesus because of why he did it**

...who for the joy set before him... sat down at the right hand of the throne of God...

Why did Jesus do it? Jesus did it for joy! Jesus did it to experience the ultimate happiness! Imagine it this way. I am going to work in the morning and I come to my son, David, and ask him to mow the lawn, pull the weeds and trim around the house before I get home. When I come home, the house looks amazing. I grab my son, give him a hug and tell him how proud I am. He gets joy from my joy at his completing the task. Take this up to a much higher level. Imagine the joy the son experiences when he completes the task God the father set before him. The task of securing a redeemed race of humanity, the task of breaking Satan's grip, of canceling the power of sin, and of Christ reattaining the right to rule creating by wresting it from the hands of Satan. This is the joy set before Christ. The joy is so great, it makes death on a cross seem like nothing in comparison to the joy.

I think when we get to heaven we will find Jesus is the happiest person there because the joy given him by the father was so great that nobody could possibly be happier in heaven than Jesus.

The writer of Hebrews tells us to fix our eyes on Jesus as we run. Here is Jesus at the finish line experiencing super happiness while we are busy running in pain. Why would we fix our eye on Jesus?

Our prize for not giving up is Jesus and the ultimate joy that Jesus has from the father will flood into our lives from Jesus when we reach the finish.

What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ. Philippians 3:8

For Paul, all other treasures in this world are nothing when compared to gaining Christ. Why? There is no greater joy to be found than gaining Christ. The joy of Christ, will become our joy.

we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 1 John 3:2

Picture eternity as complete and perfect fellowship with Christ forever. Our relationship with Jesus, who is the ultimate joy, will be the most delightful

thing we can experience. Ephesians says that even the closest and most satisfying moments of a marriage, even the fulfillment of sexual intimacy is only a shadow of the joy we will experience with Christ. *Having Christ is better than having sex.*

The joy of our children is nothing compared to the joy of having Jesus. To see Jesus, to talk with Jesus, to admire Jesus, to have great intimacy with Jesus will satisfy longings inside of us we never even knew existed. The joy of having Jesus, will never go away, it will never fade. Every day in heaven will be better than the last.

If you were to invite someone to come to Christ today, why would you say they should come to Christ? So they can avoid hell? So their problems will go away? Because it will heal their marriage? These are some of the reasons we give to our friends when we tell them they should come to Jesus. They are not untrue reasons, but they don't motivate. In the deepest level of our being, we are motivated by *pleasure*.

The prize of freedom from hell is not enough to keep us from giving up on Christ in tough times, the prize of social acceptability is not enough to keep the faith, the prize of healthy relationships or a healthy marriage is not enough to keep us running. The only prize that is strong enough to motivate us to run the race of faith all the way to the end is knowing pleasure beyond our wildest dreams awaits us at the finish line when we fall into the hands of Jesus.

So we fix our eyes on Jesus for the joy that is found only in him. This is how we can endure the race of faith, which is hard and long. We fix our eyes on the joy at the finish line which makes anything we are suffering now look like nothing in comparison.

We think joy is sex, it is marriage, it is gold medals, it is a prosperous career. Those are nothing but shadows of real joy that is found with Christ.

We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased. C.S. Lewis

### **Dwell on Jesus**

Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Hebrews 10:3

Many times life is tough. We are single and we want to be married but God just doesn't bring the right person into our life and we go to bed in emotional pain. Our business is in the dumps so we wake up in the middle of the night not knowing how to pay the bills. Our health is failing, our spirit is breaking. How do we make it?

Consider Jesus. The word *consider* means to think about, to dwell on. Keep the life of Jesus and the joy of Jesus in our thoughts all the time. Study the tape of Jesus' life and learn how to make it through.

Studying the gospel is like watching the movie *Remember the Titans* before playing the state championship football game. It inspires us to make it. Jesus made it to the end and his life was really hard, so can I.

Why do we consider Jesus? *So that we may not grow weary or faint hearted.* That is an athletic term for what happened in a long distance race when a runner would grow weary, get discouraged and finally, from mental and physical exhaustion, collapse.

If this morning, if you are living the Christian life for anything other than the immeasurable joy that is found at the finish line, you won't make it.

You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. Psalm 16:11

### Conclusion

In 1952 Florence Chadwick stepped into the waters of the Pacific Ocean off Catalina Island determined to swim to the shore of the mainland of California. The weather was foggy and she could hardly see the boats accompanying her. She swam for fifteen hours. When she begged to be taken out of the water, her mother urged her to keep trying. Finally, physically and emotionally exhausted, she stopped swimming and was pulled from the water. It wasn't until she was on the boat that she discovered she was less than a half-mile from shore.

At a news conference the next day she said, "I think if I could have seen the shore, I would have made it." For us, the shore is Jesus, and the incredible joy found in him when we fall into his arms at the finish line. Life is tough, we won't make it unless we are running for the Joy found in Jesus.

## Hebrews 12:4-11 - Understanding God's Discipline

Sign Title: Understanding God's Discipline

January 17, 2010

We have studied Hebrews for a long time and I am sensing you like this book. I am sensing we are a church that is becoming seriously fired up for Jesus. Is anybody else sensing that?

- When we were in Hebrews 2 and it told us not to drift away from Jesus, I felt you took that seriously and we don't want to drift away. Is that true?
- When Hebrews 4 told us to hold fast to our confession of faith, I believe you really want to do that. Do you want to hold on to your confession of Christ?
- When Hebrews 6 said it is time to leave the elementary teachings of Christ and go on to maturity, I could tell you were hungry for maturity. Am I right?
- When Hebrews 7-10 talked about the new covenant and how we are no longer under law but under grace and we learned what it means to be a new covenant Christian, I sensed you were excited about it. Is that true?
- When Hebrews 10 said we should stir one another up to love and good works, I felt like you really wanted to stir one another up. Is that true?
- When Hebrews 11 gave us examples of people who walked by faith and when Hebrews 12 gave us the example of Jesus and says, don't walk but run the race of faith, I sensed you went home and pulled out your track shoes. Was I right?

We are here this morning hungry to follow Jesus, psyched up for the race of faith but there is a problem. Most of us are ready to run but you say, "Pastor, I can't run right now. My life is a mess. My kids have the flu. I have this nasty rash. My husband came down with shingles. My business is in the tank. My kids are failing in school.

I am fired up for Jesus, and ready to run but I have all this stuff in my life that is messing me up and slowing me down. If I could just get rid of all this turbulence, then I could *really* fix my eyes on Jesus.

Wake up call. Maybe all the turbulence in your life is there for a reason. Maybe God even put it there to teach you how to fix your eyes on Jesus.

The title of this morning's message is "Understanding the Discipline of the Lord." If you are going to get anyplace spiritually you **MUST** understand God's discipline. I know people who have been following Christ for years and they don't understand this and it is a major handicap in their walk with Christ.

Sometimes when I am studying, I sense we are about to hit a major breakthrough for our congregation. This week it was clear to me that this message will be a spiritual break-through for many us.

Pray, asking for God to prepare hearts.

## Hebrews 12:4-11

We will study this passage through the lens of 5 questions.

### What is the discipline of the Lord?

There should be no question this passage is all about God's discipline. The word discipline is used 7 times. What kind of discipline are we talking about? The word in the Greek is very specific, it is child rearing discipline. It is the idea of guiding or correcting a child to mold their behavior and turn them away from disaster. Discipline is not a fun thing, but it is always a positive thing.

Discipline of God = A painful circumstance allowed by God to change our conduct and character.

### Discipline is not punishment.

I see this all the time. Christians going through life and they really screw up. They rebel against God. Maybe they don't report all their taxes or they are students being sexually intimate before marriage or they start blowing off church. All of a sudden something bad happens in their life and what do they say? "God is punishing me." Is God punishing them? Are they experiencing God's wrath toward their sin? No! If they have trusted Christ, God is not punishing them. Christ died on the cross for their sin. He completely absorbed God's wrath for the sins of their past, present and future. When life falls apart after we sin, that isn't God's punishment for our sin, it is God's fatherly discipline that is intended to turn us away from further sin, not pay us back for previous sin. There is a big difference here. When someone who doesn't have forgiveness of sin through Christ goes through a hard time in life, their difficulties are bite size samples of God's wrath. A wrath that will be fully unleashed upon them in an unmitigated way for eternity. Here on earth, troubles for them is like jostling a coffee cup, little bits of God's wrath spills into their life. For those without Christ, foretastes of God's wrath leave them bitter. But if we know Christ, God's wrath is fully absorbed through Jesus, God may use the very same circumstances but they are put into our life for a different outcome. They are there to discipline us like a father does a child. They are to make us better, not bitter.

### God's discipline is aimed at the heart, not just the life.

Know what God is after. He is all about making a change in our hearts. His desire is that we treasure him more and we have the joy of the greater affections and deeper delights of Christ as the pleasure of our heart. God is after changing our heart to enjoy greater things. Most discipline we see is aimed at changing behavior.

If you are in school and somebody goes through your locker and steals something, when they are caught, they are disciplined. What is the aim of the discipline, to change the behavior, to keep them from stealing again. God's aim is much deeper. He doesn't just want us to not steal but he wants to change our desires to realize material things never satisfy. God goes much deeper. So as

we talk about how God disciplines and what he is after, remember, he is after the heart.

### **There is a difference between discipline and consequences.**

There is a difference between God's discipline and our consequences. I hear far too many people say, "God is disciplining me" when in reality, they made the problem and they are reaping the results of their choices. A teenager that is sleeping around and he comes home with a STD may think God is disciplining them. The truth is the STD is a consequence of sleeping around. I hear this sometimes from people who are out of work. They say the job market is tough, they lost their last job and they can't get a new one, God is disciplining them. They forget to say they were fired from their last job because of a poor work ethic and nobody will hire them because they don't have positive references. Those are consequences, not discipline.

Sometimes people have a heart attack in their 50's and they think it is God's discipline when in reality it was the 10 donuts and 12 cheeseburgers they eat a week. It is a consequence.

The reason I am making a big deal out of this is because the way you handle a consequence of sin vs. the way you handle God's discipline is very different. If you are suffering the consequences of your own sin the way to handle it is to repent. It is to get down on your knees, confess your sin to God, confess your sin to the ones you sinned against and ask their forgiveness. It is to do everything we can to make it right, to ask God to forgive and restore.

If the Lord is disciplining me, it is a painful circumstance allowed by God that *I didn't bring on myself*. There may be things I need to repent of, but they do not come from the painful circumstance I am suffering through. Maybe you have a lifelong disease that you didn't bring on yourself, you can't repent of it, but it is part of the discipline of the Lord in your life.

The reason I make a big deal of this is because we really stink when it comes to accepting personal responsibility for many of our problems. We chalk it all up to the discipline of the Lord. Many of us would be helped by saying, "God, what did I do to bring this disaster about?" I know this can get complicated because sometimes consequences and discipline get mixed together. Sometimes people lose their job as a consequence of their own sin but the paperwork for their unemployment compensation gets lost in the mail and they had nothing to do with that. Consequences and discipline can mix together. So repent of the stuff we can repent of. The stuff that is out of our control, realize it is discipline from the hand of God.

### **Who does God discipline?**

**And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Hebrews 12:5**

We live in a society that is totally against the idea of using pain to modify behavior. This is because some people went way over the top with punishment



so our society has swung to the other side. No pain, no punishment. If a parent causes their child pain they are considered bad parents or even worse. I did a quick google on child spanking and one of my top hits from [www.askdrsears.com](http://www.askdrsears.com) said, "Children from spanking families are more likely to use acts of aggression." I guess Dr. Sears believes spanking will make your kid into a cage fighter. I learned in Massachusetts a man was charged with assault with a deadly weapon for spanking his son. It is illegal to spank your child in Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Croatia, Cyprus, Latvia, Italy, Israel, Germany and Austria.

Our culture may be against any discipline that involves pain but God is not.

**Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death. Proverbs 19:18**

**He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him. Proverbs 13:24**

Folks we live in a world that is uncomfortable with the idea that pain can produce good things but God is *not* uncomfortable with that idea. He is very comfortable with the idea of using pain when it comes to God rearing us. Didn't we just read this?

**For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. Hebrews 12:6**

**Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Revelation 3:19**

God disciplines his children. Without question, God will put painful circumstances in our life, that are not of our own doing, and he puts them there to refine our conduct and our character. He does this because we are his children. He says, "have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons!" The people he is writing to in Rome were facing difficult times in their lives and some of them were wondering why it wasn't smooth sailing once they came to Christ.

Remember, we talked about this two weeks ago when I said, that as a Christian our life may get harder rather than easier. He says, it is because you are now sons. God's going to discipline you like the rest of the family. How could you forget this? The reason he is so incredulous that they lost site of this is because this passage from Proverbs 3 is the most commonly quoted OT passage in the entire NT. He can't believe they missed this not just because of its *prominence* in the early church but because of its *importance*.

**Discipline from God will be part of my life.**

**God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? Hebrew 12:7**

You need to understand this. If you don't, you will think that every time a disaster or wipeout comes into your life that isn't your own doing, it happened because God hates you. Wrong! It happened because God loves you. When

the difficulties happen it isn't because God abandoned you but rather God is showing up big time and he is working on us and his intention is to bring good out of it.

**If I am left undisciplined; it is because I am not God's child.**

If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Hebrews 12:8

You and I know some people who have sailed along in their life completely smoothly for years and they have never had any trouble. Everything seems to work out perfectly for them. If that is your life, you may need to check and see if you are part of the family. God *promises* you will have trouble. We will not have trouble all the time but we will have trouble. If you are God's child, God promises it will happen at times in your life. Be prepared for it.

**Why does God discipline?**

**God disciplines out of love.**

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. Hebrews 12:6

This is so encouraging. When our life falls apart through no fault of our own, what is the first thing we say? "God, don't you love me!" This text reminds us, God loves us and it is *because* he loves us that he is choosing to discipline us. When God disciplines, understand that all of the feelings of his heart toward you are love, not wrath or punishment. God watches us suffer pain when he disciplines us and he doesn't enjoy it, he hurts with us. It is just like an earthly father who disciplines his child. It is not fun but it is done out of love.

The NIV says *God punishes every son he receives*. I don't like that translation because of what we learned earlier. God's wrath against us is completely quenched through Christ. I like the way the ESV translates the word as chastise, which carries the idea of correction. What is God trying to accomplish in his discipline of us?

**God disciplines for our good and holiness.**

he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. Hebrews 12:10b

Here is another great encouragement. Not only is all of God's discipline coming from God's love but it is for our good. This is a great promise. Every bit of discipline we endure from God is crafted from his hand to make us better, not worse. Sometimes we experience God's hand of discipline and we think God has set out to ruin our life, to ruin our future, to snuff out everything. Not true! The discipline God chooses to use on us is *always* for our good. Every difficulty placed into our life by God is there to make us more useful for him.

It is also for our holiness. Now I need to do some corrective stuff here because when we think of holiness, we think of purity or sterility like a hospital operating room. That doesn't sound fun. Sin sounds much more fun than holiness. Actually, the exact opposite is true. We learned last week that holiness

is a heart fully devoted to loving Jesus. The more captivated we are in our love for Jesus, the holier we are. Who is the happiest person in heaven? Jesus. The more captivated by Jesus we become, the holier we become, the happier we become.

When we read that God disciplines us for our good and holiness, substitute the word happiness for holiness. God disciplines us for our happiness that we may learn to find our joy in Jesus, the most satisfying pleasure of all.

So toss out the idea that God's discipline is there to ruin your life. God disciplines us out of love, for our good, that we may enjoy the greatest pleasures.

### **God's discipline can be reactive or proactive.**

This is an important distinction. It is comfortable for us to think of God's reactive discipline. We think of David's sin with Bathsheba in the Old Testament. God disciplined him and took away the life of the child that was conceived through their adulterous union. David was disciplined by God not just with the death of that child but with a turbulent home from that point forward. His sons Amnon and Absalom caused him immense trouble. What did David say about God's discipline?

**It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees. Psalm 119:71**

Sometimes God is so gracious to us that he doesn't discipline us *after* we sin, but he allows adversity into our life *before* we sin. Paul is a good example. In 2 Corinthians 12 he talks about the exceedingly great revelations given him from God. He talks about visions and revelations he received when he was caught up to the third heaven. If anybody had a right to be boastful about how special they were, it was Paul. None of us can say we were caught up to heaven. I don't know anyone here given exceedingly great visions and revelations from God like Paul. In short, Paul was a candidate for a major case of pride. Before he could fall victim to it, God gave him a thorn in the flesh. The Bible doesn't tell us exactly what that thorn was but we know it was humbling. Paul asked God three times to take it away but God said to him, "my grace is sufficient because my power is made perfect in weakness."

God used preventative discipline on Paul to keep him humble and avoid conceit. There is no difference today. I hear people ask God to use them powerfully in their generation. I pray they are used powerfully but make sure you understand, *before God uses you powerfully, he will hurt you deeply*. It is much better to undergo God's preventative discipline than to endure God's corrective discipline. To help seal great men and women from the lethal virus of pride, God will often wound them deeply before putting his hand upon their lives and doing something significant. Great men and women of God walk with a limp.

### **How can I respond wrong to God's discipline?**

#### **Don't regard God's discipline lightly.**

**My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,... Hebrews 12:5**

Regard lightly means to think of little value, to not think of it as an inconvenience or unimportant. When God is disciplining us our tendency is to say, "God, why do we have to go through this? Can't we just get it over with and move on? God, this is really stupid and it is cramping my schedule." The writer of Hebrews says that is the wrong way to handle God's discipline. Handle discipline with hope saying, "God, I know you love me, I know your plans are good, I know your intention is to bring me to greater levels of holiness and happiness, thank you for disciplining me. Help me to learn what you want to teach me.

Remember, if God is disciplining you, his motives and discipline are for our good. Don't screw it up by blowing it off and not being teachable. What happens when a kid doesn't learn from discipline? You discipline them again but next time you use a larger stick. I hope nobody is dumb enough to try and see what happens when God gets out a bigger stick.

### **Don't grow weary while reprov'd.**

**...nor be weary when reprov'd by him. Hebrews 12:5**

God's discipline is not microwavable. When God disciplines us, 9 times out of 10, it is not over with in a month. Some of his discipline lasts years, some of it may last a lifetime. When God disciplines, it is usually a long-term thing. While does God do it that way? It takes a lot of pressure over a long time to make a lasting change in our character. One of the great obstacles to learning from God's discipline is giving up while enduring it.

Maybe you are a single adult and you do not think you can go any farther without having someone from the opposite sex in your life. There are people you know are interested in you. They don't have Christ at the center of their affections. They are nice people you enjoy hanging around with them and everything in your gut is wanting to move the relationship further. You are saying to God in your prayers, why haven't you brought the right person into my life. Somebody who can be my best friend, who loves Jesus and loves me. Guess what, you are under God's discipline. The pressure is part of the process of preparing you before he can bring that person into your life. Maybe the reason that person isn't in your life is because he is still preparing them for you. Trust me, you wouldn't want them until God is done changing their character.

So don't throw in the towel while being disciplined. What will probably happen if we give up? God may need to start the educational process all over again.

### **How can I respond right to God's discipline?**

#### **Set my mind to endure.**

**It is for discipline you have to endure... Hebrews 12:7**

Here is the word we have seen the last 3 weeks, it means the ability to remain under pressure. When God disciplines you, don't start by complaining, don't start by whining. Can we feel frustrated, yes. At times can we be angry,

yes. Can we pour our unfiltered feelings to God letting him know how we feel, of course. But the one thing we must set our mind to is endurance. Say, “God, I didn’t ask for this, but you know all about it. You put it in my life for a reason. I want to endure this as long as you deem it necessary in my life. Not a moment longer but also not a moment less. I know it is by endurance of this that you change my character.”

### **Set my mind to respect God’s perfect discipline.**

Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, Hebrews 12:9-10

If we respected our earthly fathers with their imperfect discipline, we need to respect our heavenly father and his perfect discipline. When we discipline our children at home, there is the discussion of what is the appropriate discipline to use with our children. Would taking away the Wii be the right discipline? Would telling them they can’t go to a friends house for a week be the right discipline? It is hard to come up with the right form of discipline. The right form of discipline is different for each child. Some kids you just need to look at them cross eyed, others need more drastic measures. Here we find out that while earthly fathers disciplined in a way that *seemed* best to them, our heavenly father, disciplines in a way that *is* best for us.

We often feel God’s discipline is too harsh or too long. God looks at us and says, “You are more hard-headed than you think you are. I know my discipline seems severe but my discipline is the perfect discipline to correct you or to shape you the way I need you to be.” The right way to respond is to thank God that his discipline is perfect.

### **Look forward to great results.**

For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Hebrews 12:11

Being farmers we understand this. It is hard work getting the crop in the ground. It is hard work spraying for bugs and weeds. The great part is the fall when you get the harvest. Farmers endure the pain on the front end to get the payoff on the back end.

As we are going through times of discipline, the way to endure it is to keep your eyes on the final product. Keep our eyes on how incredibly Godly we will become if we endure the discipline to the end. Nothing else will get us there.

### **Conclusion**

Before I close in prayer, I want to leave us with one final thought. I know a number of us are in times of pain through no fault of our own. A number of us are under either God’s proactive or reactive discipline. To say that God doesn’t care about what you are facing or to be angry with God is chaffing under his discipline. If God calls his discipline, loving, good and the perfect fit for us, who are we to

say it is anything else? To call God callous or to shake our fist at him is evil. I want us to begin by repenting of that now. I want us to begin by telling God that you know he is loving. You may not understand what he is doing, you can not even conceive of the good he will bring out of the discipline he has you under, but in faith you are trusting his goodness.

You are not the parent, he is. I think what God wants most from us this morning is to submit to him, to trust he is doing something good, and for us to rest in his love for us.

Prayer

## Hebrews 12:12-17 - Failing God's Discipline

Sign Title: Failing God's Discipline

February 7, 2010

It is good to be back after a week of 70 degree weather during our mission trip in New Orleans. Last week I had sunburn while the rest of our church body suffered in the snow. I won't take any more time to torture you with stories of warm weather because we have a lot to cover today.

Before I left, three weeks ago, we were talking about a topic that changes everything about the way we look at trials and difficulties in the Christian life. The topic was *Understanding God's Discipline*. Every one of us is going through it or will go through it. Last time we learned some really important things. We learned that God's discipline is *always* intended for our good. We learned that to respond rightly, we must set our mind to endure God's discipline, not escape it. While going through it we need to ask God what he is trying to teach us. This morning we will continue to look at God's discipline but before we do I have some questions.

- Why is it that some Christians go through tough times and even though life is hard, during the discipline they become more loving, generous, gentle and kind; while other believers become harsh, negative, griping, and sour?
- What happened to that Godly woman who came to church for years. We know that she and her husband didn't have the easiest marriage; but for years, she soldiered on, trusting God. Now she is having an affair with her boss and she ditched her marriage and kids. Where did that come from?
- What is the deal with that kid who grew up in church. He went to AWANA. He went to youth group but when he went to college, things didn't go well. He has completely turned against God. He wants nothing to do with God. When you talk to him about getting on his knees and crying out to God, he looks at you like you are completely out of touch with reality.

This morning we are going to answer these questions and learn why some Christians crumble under discipline while other Christians thrive. Why is it that God's discipline purifies some Christians while it putrefies others? The title of this morning's message is "How to Avoid Failing the Lord's Discipline." This morning we will learn how to avoid being crushed like a tin can when we are under God's refining pressure.

Hebrews 12:12-17



This text gives us what I call the “Spiral of Spiritual Failure.” The writer of Hebrews gives us the steps Christians follow when they fail God’s discipline and crumple under the pressure.

**God’s discipline can lead to discouragement**

**Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees,... Hebrews 12:12**

This is a passage many people misunderstand. One of the reasons it is misunderstood is because it is filled with idioms, many of them coming from the Septuagint.

**An idiom is a word or phrase that has a figurative, not a literal, meaning.**

For example, if I said someone *kicked the bucket*. What does it mean? They died. It is figurative, not literal.

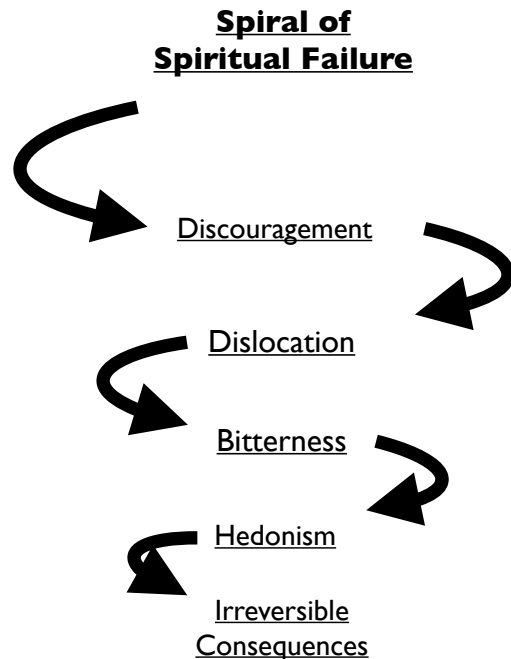
When it says *lift up drooping hands and strengthen weak knees*. It is not saying to wrap Ace bandages on our joints. This is an idiom for saying, “Don’t be discouraged.” It comes from Isaiah 35:3. In Isaiah’s time, the people of Israel went through a difficult season. They endured bad kings; false prophets and some generally disobedient fellow Israelites. They were discouraged because life was tough sledding. Isaiah, like a coach on the sidelines of a basketball game, tells them to lift their hands and strengthen their knees. You can do it! Get the hands up, get the arms moving, don’t be discouraged. Isaiah says, to ancient Israel, “In the tough time, look at the finish line.” Just as Isaiah encouraged the ancient people of God to focus on God’s coming deliverance, the writer of Hebrews says, don’t let yourself get discouraged. You can make it. Think of the finish line. Next week we will look at the finish line of Mt. Zion.

Do you think God wants to discourage us when we go through discipline? No! God loves us. Every act of discipline is intended for our good. The first mistake we can make is thinking God’s discipline isn’t for our good and God wants to discourage us. The truth is that while discipline is hard, God promises us we will be better for it in the end. That is a promise!

The second mistake we can make is to allow our discouragement to spread to others.

**...and make straight paths for your feet... Hebrews 12:12**

The literal translation of this verse is *make straight wheel paths for your feet*. Here is another idiom. Picture it this way. How many of us have gone for a walk on the road after one of our snow storms? When we walk the road, we try



to follow the tracks left by someones wheels. The wheels smooth out the rough, bumpy, icy parts so we can walk on a smooth path. What would happen if the driver we followed was a really bad driver and was all over the road? It would be a real bummer of a path to follow.

The phrase *make straight paths for our feet* is an idiom for *be a good example for others to follow*.

Remember this whole section is how to endure the discipline of the Lord. When God disciplines us, don't get discouraged. He is not trying to ruin our life but he is shaping us for our spiritual good. Watch how we handle it because other Christians around us are watching and learning how to handle God's discipline. When we get discouraged, we infect others with spiritual discouragement.

When a couple is going through a difficult marriage and they decide to throw in the towel with divorce, they don't do it alone. Inevitably, I hear of one or two other couples doing the same thing. What happens. The example of one failing marriage further discourages those who are struggling in their own marriage.

It can go the other way. I have shared this story before but it is good enough to repeat. We had a family in our church in Michigan where the wife came down with MS. Over the years, she became a bitter, unsightly, irritable person to be around. But her husband single-handedly held the family together for years. He worked, raised their son, did the cooking, cleaning and laundry with little to no support from her. When young couples came into my office complaining how tough their mate was to live with and they wanted to throw in the towel, I told them about my friend whose wife had MS. You hold your marital difficulties next to theirs. If they can make it, so can I. What an example of marital encouragement.

When you start to feel overwhelmed and discouraged because you are enduring God's discipline, rivet this truth to your brain. God loves me. What he allows into my life is *always* intended for my good, it is *always* intended to produce holiness, which is true happiness. In the middle of the discipline, it doesn't feel that way. We have to tell ourselves *what we know is true, not what we feel is true*. If we don't, we will take the next step down the Spiral of Spiritual Failure.

### **Discouragement can lead to dislocation**

**...so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Hebrews 12:13**

This is more serious than discouragement. This is going from a few Ace Bandages and some athletic tape to a season ending injury. If you are involved in athletics, you know how this works. If you play basketball and twist your ankle, most sane people will not continue to play the game because they are walking with a limp. If they keep playing, they will seriously injure it.

There are other Christians around us who are undergoing God's discipline and they are limping because of it. They are frustrated at why things are not working out the way they planned. They are questioning God's motives. They are questioning God's goodness and as their brothers and sisters in Christ, if we become discouraged when we go through God's discipline, we can turn their spiritual ankle sprain into a break.

The writer of Hebrews gives us some practical instructions of what turning a limp into a dislocation looks like.

**Strive for peace with everyone... Hebrews 12:14**

When we are under God's discipline, most of us don't want to be social. We are irritable. When people do things that get under our skin we fly off the handle easier. We like to vent our frustration on people. We get angry at the people we love for screwing things up.

- I should have never asked them to teach my Faith University class, they never do anything right.
- You would think they would be more caring and at least given me a call at a time like this.
- Every Sunday they walk in to church late and they don't control their children.
- I can't believe they didn't even consider asking me to serve on that team. I am more gifted than the people they have on it.

What does it say? Strive for peace. It isn't *keep peace*. It isn't *I hope there is peace* but the word is strive. It means pursue peace in the community with passion. Yes, we are irritable when we are under God's discipline and we may struggle with discouragement but don't let discouragement lead you to the next step and rip apart relationships. Passionately pursue peace.

The other relationship that will be torn apart when we move from discouragement to dislocation is our relationship with God.

**and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. Hebrews 12:14**

Sometimes people misunderstand this. Is it saying that if we are not holy enough, we won't see the Lord? No! We are saved by Christ. Holiness is not what saves us *but* if we know God because of Jesus Christ, we will have a hunger for holiness. As we become more and more like Christ, the holiness of Christ's character becomes the appetite of our soul.

The problem is that when we are undergoing the Lord's discipline and we move from discouragement to dislocation, we start feeling sorry for ourselves. Rather than finding joy in holiness, we start to find joy in sin. Why do we do that? Remember that sin always has this description. *Short term satisfaction with long term pain*. Holiness is about deeper, richer, better satisfaction but it is almost always delayed.

How many of us have undergone a period of the Lord's discipline that is painful. You started feeling sorry for yourself and rather than seeking the joy of holiness in the future, the satisfaction of sin, which comes in an instant, looks much more gratifying.

We know what we can find on the internet that is only a mouse click away. We know what is in the upper channels of our cable guide that can be ours with just a little channel surfing. Sin is exchanging the richer, better, God satisfying joy of holiness, for a candy coated Habanero. It tastes sweet for an instant but it burns forever once it is finally enjoyed.

### [Dislocation can lead to bitterness](#)

**See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; Hebrews 12:15**

If you are wondering why some Christians become so bitter when they experience God's discipline, here is the answer. *See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God.* In the original, *fails to obtain* means to be lacking. It is like making a recipe without one of the important ingredients. What is this important ingredient? God's grace in my life. The Christian life is a life of grace. It is all about getting what we don't deserve. We can't earn God's love. We can't earn forgiveness of sin. God loves us, even when we deserve nothing but his wrath, Jesus died for us to not just forgive us of sin but to make us the object of God's unprecedented affection for all eternity. We don't deserve any of it! As Christians, we are so graced by God that when we perspire, we should sweat grace toward others.

Matthew 18 tells us the parable of the unmerciful servant, someone who *failed to obtain the grace of God.* One man owed his master 10,000 talents. That is the equivalent of an unattainable amount, like the national debt. His master completely forgave him of everything. Yet, that same servant, who was forgiven an amount like the national debt, found a friend who owed him 100 denari, that is like \$5 for a hamburger. He began choking him and demanded he pay him. While the first servant experienced incredible grace, he was lacking that key ingredient in his relationship with others. Jesus says to us, if I have forgiven you of the innumerable sins you have committed against me, who are you to not forgive others the small sins they commit against you.

This is what it means to lack the grace of God in our life. When being disciplined by God, discouragement can lead to dislocation of our relationship with God and other people. This leads to bitterness which is lacking the ingredient of grace coming through in our relationships with others. We become the anti-type of Christ in our church.

This ungraciousness doesn't just affect us, but like every other stage of this spiral, it affects others. It says, see to it that no "root of bitterness" springs up among you. For years I read this and misunderstood it. I thought it was a warning against being human horseradish. Beware lest a bitter person be in your midst. This is actually referring to Deuteronomy 29:17-20

Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the Lord our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.' This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike. The Lord will not be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the Lord and his jealousy will smoke against that man, and the curses written in this book will settle upon him, and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven. Deuteronomy 29:17-20

A person who is missing the grace of God becomes a bitter person toward God and they will infect others in the church. Graceless Christians bear bitter fruit and poison Christ's church. Descending the spiral of spiritual failure while being disciplined by God will damage more than yourself, it will damage your church family and your home family. How did God say he will deal with someone who becomes bitter toward God?

**"It will lead to the sweeping away of the moist and dry alike."**

Simply put, one persons failing to endure and mature through God's discipline, leads them to a graceless and bitter life that will bring consequences to an entire church body. Bitterness and gracelessness is that destructive towards the spiritual life of others.

### **Bitterness leads to earthly hedonism**

**...that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. Hebrews 12:16-17**

Now I know what the Bible scholars amongst us are thinking. You have read the Bible and you know about Esau, but one thing you don't remember is his being involved in sexual immorality. If you look in the Bible, you won't find it. Some scholars point out that in some obscure rabbinic literature they claim Esau was a sexually immoral person. I think we are walking down the wrong path if we need some obscure rabbinic literature to try understanding this.

It says *see to it that no one is sexually immoral or unholy*. There is something about sexual immorality and unholiness that characterized Esau's life.

**Sexual immorality is living for quick-fix physical pleasure.**

I have yet to meet someone who grew up saying, "I can't wait to have an affair and break my spouses heart. I can't wait to get married and tell my wife on our wedding night that she is only the 27<sup>th</sup> different person I have experienced intimacy with before the wedding day." Nobody starts out wanting to be immoral. What happens is we find ourselves under the pressure and the temptation gets bigger and looks better and more satisfying and we start talking ourselves into it by saying, "Having sex now is better than saying no and having it where God

designed it to be later.” A sexually immoral person is someone who lives to satisfy their sexual desires in the moment.

The word *unholy* is an interesting word in the Greek. It is not the usual word for holy with the word *not* in front of it.

**Unholiness here means living for *worldly passions*.**

It is, “I see it, I want it, I have to buy it.” It is, “I am living for the weekend and my next beer. I don’t care about the future.”

See to it that you don’t follow this cycle one more step where missing God’s grace, turns you into a bitter root that turns you into a earthly hedonist that can live for nothing more than their next pleasure. A hedonist has no long term perspective. Whatever brings them pleasure for the moment, that is what they are after.

The example of a pleasure seeking hedonist is Esau. He has to be one of the most nearsighted guys around. He is a hairy dude featured on the cover of Outdoorsman Magazine holding the rack on a buck while his brother Jacob is the GQ guy who is reading Good Housekeeping magazine. Esau comes in from a hunt and he is hungry. Anybody ever been in one of those times when you are so hungry that if somebody tried to keep you away from the fridge you would hurt them? That is Esau. His brother offers him some chunky noodle soup if he will just give up his birthright. Esau lives for the pleasure of the moment. Who cares about the birthright and double the inheritance from a wealthy father if he can have soup *right now!*

**Earthly hedonism leads to irreversible consequences.**

**For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.  
Hebrews 12:17**

I know some of you are already asking the question, “Does this mean Esau is not in heaven?” While earlier passages in Hebrews warn us of the spiritual dangers of apostasy, this doesn’t say Esau isn’t in heaven. It says he suffered irreversible consequences. There are irreversible consequences if we reach the bottom of the Spiral of Spiritual Failure. I don’t know what the consequence would be for your life but I know it will not be pretty.

If this morning, you are undergoing God’s discipline and you find yourself some place on this cycle, get off today. Resolve to trust God and his character in the adversity, even though it makes no sense. Know everything God allows into your lives is intended to become a platform for your spiritual good.

Let’s look at the Spiral of Spiritual Failure again. When disciplined by God we can become discouraged and become a bad example for others to follow. Discouragement leads to dislocation where our discouragement breaks down our relationships with other Christians and our desire for holiness and intimacy with



God. Dislocation in our relationship with God leads to graceless in our character where we become a poisonous bitter root in the church. Bitterness leads to earthly hedonism where all we desire is the pleasure of the moment and we have no long-term perspective looking forward to the kingdom of God. Hedonism leads to irreversible spiritual consequences.

## Conclusion

Understanding God's discipline, and that we can fail it is very important. Before we close this morning, I want to answer some of the questions you have on God's discipline. This Wednesday, I sent a video camera around the church to hear the questions you have.

### **When God is disciplining me, I feel so beaten down. Is that a common feeling?**

Yes! The writer of Hebrews knows that. He says, "Don't feel that way. Go with what you know to be true, not what it feels like at the moment." We know God loves us and what he allows in our life has the intent and potential of producing great spiritual good.

### **What should I do when I think God has brought discipline in my life?**

First, I would seek God's face in prayer. Spend time seeking him and reading his word. Secondly, watch for The Spiral of Spiritual Failure. As we learned last time we were in Hebrews, God's discipline is not microwavable. It takes times. Third, ask God what he is trying to change in your life. Is it your character? Is it your compassion? Is it your care for people? Seek God on this.

### **What if God is disciplining me**





**and I am not sure what he is trying to teach me?**

This is more common than you think. As we seek God, what the Lord is working on will eventually rise to the surface. You may find that you only realize what God was working on in your life when you get to the end of your trial.



## Hebrews 12:18-24 - Mt. Zion, a Climb Worth the View

Sign Title: Mt. Zion, a Climb Worth the View

February 14, 2010

I want to tell you about something that really irritates me. You may not agree with me on this one but this is the way I feel. When I was younger this didn't bother me as much but as I have grown older, this really irritates me. It feels like sand in my pants when I come back from the beach. Now I have you wondering what it is. What is it? Lack of respect! Today people don't have respect for those in authority.

You don't like the President, you throw your shoes at him. No respect for his authority. I don't care if we don't like our president, we need to respect our president.

It really annoys me when children don't respect their teachers or parents. When I was a youth pastor, I had one 15 year old kid who called his father by his first name. He would look at his father and say, "Fred, I'm going out with my friends tonight so I will be back late." It just caused me to come unglued. He is not Fred, he is your father, give him the respect he deserves.

Wives disrespect their husband's position of authority over them. Husbands disrespect their wives by not exercising loving leadership over them.

Christians in the church disrespect their pastors position of spiritual authority. It bugs me.

It really bugs me when I see disrespect. You don't have to agree with everything someone in authority over you does, but we have to respect them.

Where does all this disrespect come from? I think it all stems from a disrespect we have toward God. There are a lot of people today who don't give God much respect. They say that when they get a chance to talk to Him, they are going to give him a piece of their mind because they are sure they could do a better job of running their lives and the universe than he does. Right, get a grip! Do you realize all the complexities of this world ranging from cosmic events to the bacteriological events in our own body? We have no idea what is going on. One of the smartest things we can do is button our lip and give God some respect. If we are ever going to restore respect into our relationships with one another, it can only begin when we restore a healthy respect for God.

This morning we will learn two sides of God's character that will help us cultivate our respect for God.

### Hebrews 12:18-24

This passage talks about two mountains. The first one isn't named but as soon as the writer of Hebrews started talking everyone knew what he was talking about.

## Mt. Sinai - God's Consuming holiness

It was Mt. Sinai, where God came down and revealed his holiness and gave the Ten Commandments to Moses. Let me show you a picture of it. It extends 6,800 feet above the desert. This is one seriously rough, barren place. Not a shrub anywhere. God chose to reveal his holiness to his people here in the wilderness. God came down to this place and the people were terrified when he showed up. When God came down on Mt. Sinai, nobody tried to tell him how he should act or what he should do, they shook in fear and gave him respect.



This part of Hebrews is actually a brief summary of Exodus 19 + 20. I would like to read that to you.

And the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever."

...the Lord said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments and be ready for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, 'Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain."... On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. ... Exodus 19:10-18

Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die." Exodus 20:18-19

Get the picture. God is not some kind of old man in a white coat. He is holy. He is filled with glory. He lives in unapproachable light. Nobody can see God and live. God's holy, you are not, back away from the mountain or die. Later in this passage it says our God is a consuming fire. Think of the movie Back Draft. This is God. Like it or not. His nature has not changed, his standards are unreachable, his wrath is unavoidable.

Even Moses trembled. He was not a wimp. This is the Moses that killed an Egyptian when he was younger. This is the Moses who walked up to Pharaoh, the most powerful ruler in the ancient world and told him to let free labor force of slaves go or else things were going to get ugly. Moses is not a pansy, he is a guy with guts and he is trembling before God.

Amazingly, it was not the sight the people feared most, it was the words.

a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given. Hebrews 12:19-20

The people got the message. Not only is God's holiness terrifying but what he asks from us is more than we can handle.

You see, we either willingly give God the respect he deserves in this life or we will give it unwillingly in the next. People are passing into eternity every day thinking all is well and instead they meet the eternal, mountain shattering, consuming fire of God. Israel felt that terror at Mt. Sinai, millions feel that terror every day as they pass into eternity. The Bible says, "after death comes judgment." It is the end of the race, time to meet the God of Mt. Sinai and see how you measure up to his holiness. Some day, each person in this room will stand before him. What is your plan? You going to tell him you are a nice guy and you helped an old ladie or two cross the street? You think that is going to cut it?

Do you think this is like the Wizard of Oz, where Dorothy discovers the great Oz is really a short bald guy in the back room pulling a few levers? No way! This is the real deal and eternity hangs in the balance. Each one of us will meet him.

Thankfully, we don't *have to* end the story here. Anybody in favor of hearing the rest of the story?

Here is the good news. This same God who has incredible holiness and consuming fire has another side to him filled with mercy and grace.

### **Mt. Zion - Mercy and Grace through Christ**

**But you have come to Mt. Zion...** Hebrews 12:22

Here is a big "But." In fact, this is one of the biggest "Buts" in the NT. This is the strongest word that can be used for contrast in the NT.

There is another mountain. It is Mt. Zion. Mt. Zion comes from the fact that Mt. Zion is the name of one of the hills Jerusalem is built on. In the OT, Jerusalem was the dwelling place of God. The earthly Jerusalem is just a picture of the heavenly Jerusalem where God actually lives. Mt. Zion is heaven itself.

I want you to notice the phrase, "you have come." It is in the perfect tense. That means it is a completed action. It is a done deal. It means this has already happened to you. It is as good as a done deal. It is shipped, we are just waiting for final delivery of heaven. That is a lot better than Mt. Sinai.

This doesn't mean heaven will be where everyone goes. This is talking about a conversion experience. This is talking about those who have made Christ the king in their world. This is talking about a new group of people who were going one way. They were chasing after the God of Mt. Sinai and trying to do their best to follow all the rules, even though they knew they couldn't measure up. They were living in fear. Then they met the God of mercy and grace at Mt. Zion through Christ. Same God, just different part of his character. While God is holy and we are not, he is also loving and merciful. He made a way for us to be holy through his mercy. His son, Jesus Christ, took his father's wrath against our sin so God can be holy and display his wrath against sin yet loving and merciful to us at the same time.

This doesn't mean every one of us will experience the mercy of Mt. Zion. That mercy is only available to those who have turned from trusting in their pursuit of perfection to making a passionate pursuit of Jesus and his perfection, the laser focus of their soul. Has this happened to you? It doesn't matter if your mom has done this, is this your story? If it isn't your story, you don't have the joy of Mt. Zion.

The joy of Mt. Zion is pretty good stuff. Because of Mt. Zion, you can know for sure....

Let's look at what Mt. Zion is like.

### **Innumerable angels in festal gathering**

What is this? Here is the deal, in the Greek it is the word Myrios from which we get our word Myriad. When the Bible was written, the largest number they had a word for was 10,000. Since most people can't count to 10,000, the word Myrios became an expression for an uncountable number.

The largest worship experience I attended was a Promise Keepers conference a few year ago. It was great to have an entire stadium singing praises to God. At one point in the gathering, everyone cheered for Jesus and I thought the roof of the place was going to lift off. My body felt the pressure of the cheers. That worship experience stinks compared to what is taking place in heaven. Where all the redeemed from history are worshipping God and they are backed up with an angelic choir that could fill Super Bowl Stadium 10,000 times. That is exciting.

The angels aren't just hanging out in choir robes. They are in festal gathering. They are wearing party clothes. You thought New Orleans threw a party for the Saints, This is seriously kicking, no more Mt. Sinai, party. Winning the Super Bowl is nothing compared to this.

### **To the assembly of the first-born**

How many people are first-born? You know that because they are all Type A. I couldn't get the third-borns to raise their hands. First-borns are all front and center kind of people. In the NT times, being first-born was an important thing. You had rights and privileges. In Jewish culture you usually received double the

inheritance as first-born. Through Jesus Christ, we are all first-born in heaven. We all have the privileges.

It says this is the assembly of the first-born. That word *assembly* is the word for church. It means called out ones. It means those chosen by God for special privileges. That is us. The ones called out of this world for special privilege in heaven through Jesus Christ.

It says we are *enrolled* in heaven. The Bible says that as Christians, our names are written in a book. It is called The Book of Life.

Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous. Psalm 69:28

The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. Revelation 3:5

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. Revelation 20:12

100 years from now, only one thing will matter. I don't care what trophies you have won. I don't care what you invented or how much money was in your portfolio. If your name is not written in the book of life, nothing else matters. If you don't enroll your kids for spring soccer, they aren't playing. You don't sign your kid up for band, they aren't in it. You don't enroll your name in the book of life, eternity won't be Mt. Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem. You won't be there.

What does it take to enroll? It takes a decision to turn from a love of self and sin and to make what Christ did for us on the cross and his busting out of the tomb the *only* thing we trust for eternity, not one of many things, Jesus is the *only* thing.

### **The spirits of the righteous made perfect**

Most of us have an unclear understanding of death. We grew up learning that those who die apart from Christ go to hell and those who die trusting in Christ, go to heaven. That is only partially true. In fact, at one time, that was completely false.

The Bible says that those who died in the OT, both righteous and unrighteous, went to a place called Hades. This is what we find happening in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. It is only later that those apart from Christ receive their full judgment and are assigned to hell.

Hades was pictured as having two compartments for those who died. A place of torment and a place of comfort also known as Abraham's bosom or paradise. Here is the problem. The NT tells us that when Christians die they go to be with Christ in heaven.

I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. Philippians 1:23



So what is happening? When people die, they go to either of the two compartments of Hades, either a place of comfort or a place of torment, but now when Christians died, they go to heaven. What happened?

The Bible says that when Christ died, he went into the compartment of the righteous in Hades.

**he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. Acts 2:31**

Then he emptied the compartment of the righteous in Hades and brought them with him to heaven.

**Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” Ephesians 4:8**

So when Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12, he writes with the assumption that the OT saints who were in paradise, the compartment of the righteous in Hades, were now taken out of Hades and in heaven with Christ. So Christ took the OT saints to heaven and now, when we die, we go directly to be with Christ in heaven.

The righteous are those who trusted in salvation by faith in a coming redeemer and the way they were made perfect is they were brought to heaven.

### **Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant**

On Mt. Sinai, the people got a covenant they couldn't keep, on Mt. Zion we get a covenant that has already been kept. Jesus kept it for us. Jesus is the centerpiece of heaven. Salvation is when he becomes the centerpiece of our life.

### **The sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel**

What does that mean? Remember who Abel was? Abel was one of the first two children of Adam and Eve. Cain disabled Abel. He killed him. This is what Genesis says God said to Cain after he killed his brother.

**And the Lord said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. Genesis 4:10**

What was his blood saying? “Get'em God!” “Punish him God!” “This wasn't fair God, let him have it!” There is anger and wrath against sin coming from God because of Abel's blood.

There is a different word that is spoken to God through the blood of Jesus. Do you know what it is? “Mercy, grace, love, forgiveness, life, hope.”

### **Conclusion**

What mountain are you on? Is it Mt. Zion, which is all about Jesus. He is the centerpiece of Mt. Zion. Everything gets measured by him there and for everyone who is on Mt. Zion, everything in their life is measured relative to Jesus.



Or are you on Mt. Sinai? On Mt. Sinai, everything is measured by God's holiness compared to our efforts and it doesn't work out too well from there. Is God calling you to make Christ the center of your life? Don't make that choice today to avoid hell, make the choice to gain heaven.

## Hebrews 12:25-29 - The Message You Don't Want To Miss!

Sign Title: The Sermon You Don't Want To Miss!

February 28, 2010

Does anyone feel they get too much junk mail? Those of you who didn't raise your hand obviously would be happy to take some of mine. We live in an information saturated society. Who knows how many trees were killed to put in our mailboxes information about things we never asked for; things we don't want; things we don't need and stuff we don't have money to buy. It is not just the US Postmaster who gives us unwanted messages, at least 25% of every hour of television is commercials. With the advent of email, which is free mail, our inbox is filled with stuff we don't want. We even invented a new term to describe it that is named after a canned meat product. SPAM!

Our information age *forces* us to discard huge volumes of information that we are fed every day. Unfortunately, deleting our emails, we end up throwing away the important information along with the useless information. Some of the information that is squeezed out of our lives during information overload is God's Word.

I titled this morning's sermon, "The message you don't want to miss." That title isn't original to me. It is right out of our text, because the writer of Hebrews literally says, "Of all the messages fed to you, here is a message you don't want to miss." What is this message and why don't we want to miss it? Let's turn to God's Word and find out.

Hebrews 12:25-29

**What is the message we don't want to miss?**

See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. Hebrews 12:25

Who is the one speaking? This takes a little review to find out. Remember where we left off two weeks ago. We learned about the God of two mountains.

**Mt. Sinai** - God showed up in the Old Testament at Mt. Sinai. It wasn't a low stress situation. Mt. Sinai shook. The mountain was covered in smoke and ribbed with veins of lightening. Nobody could touch the mountain because of God's holiness. If man or beast touched the mountain, they were immediately put to death. When God spoke, the ground shook and people trembled in fear. God's voice pierced the air like a trumpet blast. It even made Moses tremble.

What God did on Mt. Sinai was not just provide a *shock and awe* campaign for the Israelites but he also gave them the stipulations of his covenant. A covenant is a contract that stipulates the way two parties will relate to one another. The covenant God gave on Mt. Sinai was incredibly detailed. It was hard to keep. If you want to know how difficult it was to keep, read Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy and try to keep all of it. It was a covenant based on Israel's ability to perform a life of holiness.

How well did Israel do? God hadn't even finished giving the covenant and the people were already busy breaking number one on God's top ten list. The first of the ten commandments God gave to Moses while he was at his summit meeting with God is "You shall have no other God's before me." While God is giving his top ten list, Aaron was making a golden calf for the people to worship. Right out of the box they were breaking the covenant.

Let's be honest. This covenant was never going to work. Because God's top ten list is about the heart, not just actions, we blow it all the time too. This is bad news. This is the only way God says his people can relate to him and it is not working.

**Mt. Zion** - Thankfully that was not the end of the story. God sent his own Son, Jesus Christ, to establish a new covenant.

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the (new) covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Matthew 26:27-28

Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. Hebrews 9:15

The same God of Mt. Sinai, who is holy and pure, and who established the covenant of Mt. Sinai to show us our inability to be holy, is also a God of compassion and love. He created a new covenant, a new way we can relate to him, through Jesus Christ. This covenant is totally different. It is not based on what we do, it is based on what Christ has done.

Here is the point. People from all over the world are putting all kind of options on the table about how they want to relate to God. God looks at our ideas, sweeps his hand across the table throwing all of our schemes on the floor. Then he puts his only two options on the table. The old covenant, do holiness yourself; and the new covenant through Jesus Christ, I have done it all for you.

This is why the writer of Hebrews says, "*Wake up, don't refuse him who is speaking to you.*" In our information overload society, with 50 different options and choices hitting us before lunch, don't blow the new covenant through Christ off. Don't put Jesus in the stack of paper that gets forgotten like last week's mail. God is not going to call back and offer a better deal than he has done through Jesus. Who is the one speaking to us in this verse? Jesus

There is another interesting word in this verse. It is the word *refuse*. Let me define it for you.

**Refuse - Hearing but not heeding.**

The word *refuse* in this verse is the same Greek word used in Romans 5:19 to describe what Adam did when he decided to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden. He *knew* the truth but he *chose* to do his own thing. A literal translation of Romans 5:19 is...

just as many people were made sinners as the result of the fact that one man refused to listen,... Romans 5:19 (Literal translation from Louw & Nida Greek Dictionary of Semantic Domains)

Adam was talking with God. He *heard* the truth but he didn't want to *heed* it. Folks, this is a very dangerous place to be.

The temptation for the original Jews in Rome that the letter of Hebrews was written to was to know Christ is the only way *but* because it might cost them their job to go to church or because saying Christ was the only way publicly was an invitation for trouble, they *hid* their faith. They were tempted to refuse Christ through the way they lived.

The temptation for us is the same thing. Since Christ is the only option on the table, refusing him is acting like Christ isn't that big of a deal.

**Why don't you want to miss this message?**

**The consequences are devastating.**

For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. Hebrews 12:25

He is going back in their memory to what happened *after* Mt. Sinai for the Jewish people.

But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord, none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it. Numbers 14:21-23

Ancient Israel saw God's power through watching him abuse Egypt with plagues. They walked across the Red Sea on dry land. They experienced God's power on Mt. Sinai, but when they left Mt. Sinai and headed for the promised land, they consistently chose to not heed God's Word even though they clearly heard God's Word. As a result, nobody from age 20 or older was allowed to enter the Promised Land. There were over a million bodies buried in the desert because they knew God's covenant but didn't want to keep it.

The writer of Hebrews says this principle is still true. God's children will receive God's discipline if we hear God's Word' but choose not to heed them. Some of the things that worry me today are:

Kids who grow up in the church but, when they get on their own, they become too sophisticated for Jesus. They walk away from him. Where are you going to? There are no other options on the table.

As adults, I am concerned of the busyness of our lives squeezing the greatness of Christ out of our priorities. Our weekends become too full for fellowship in our church, our schedules become too packed and we have no time

for refreshing our souls in God's Word, our priorities become so tilted that we don't share Christ with those we meet.

If the consequences for the rebellious Israelites were steep, the benefits package is out of this world.

### **The benefits are out of this world.**

At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken - this is, things that have been made - in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Hebrews 12:26b-27

The writer of Hebrews goes back to their memory of Mt. Sinai. When God shows up, things shake. They shook at Mt. Sinai, the earth shook at the crucifixion. The earth shook at the resurrection. God is coming back and he promises that when he does, there will be the biggest shaking that has ever taken place. The writer of Hebrews quotes from Haggai 2:6 where God says a time is coming when he will show up and he will not just shake a portion of the earth but he will shake the entire earth and heaven itself.

For these Jewish Christians in Rome, reminding them of the great shakedown brought to mind a whole string of verses.

Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the Lord of hosts in the day of his fierce anger. Isaiah 13:13

The day of the big shake down is a time when God pours out all of his wrath against sin and sinners. Not a fun time.

Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. The Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth quake. But the Lord is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel. Joel 3:14-16

Joel pictures the people of the earth all needing to make a decision because on the day of the Lord, the great shake down, all that will matter is if you are a child of God.

John writes about this day in Revelation 6:12-17

When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from

the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

When God returns for the great shake down, in this shaking of heaven and earth, all of creation as we know it, will be destroyed. God the Father spoke the words and the Son carried out the fashioning of creation. The father planned redemption and the son carried it out. How do you think this great shakedown will take place? The father will speak the word and the Son, will carry it out.

While this is a terrible time for the earth, this is going to be a great time for us. Look what the writer of Hebrews says...

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken....  
Hebrews 12:28b

Here is the good news, when Christ returns and pours out his wrath and everything is shaken and destroyed, the devil; his angels, and those who have followed him in sin are banished to the lake of fire; who makes it through? **We do!**... Jesus is not our judge but our savior. As it says in Psalm 102, someday all of this creation will be discarded like a dirty shirt. There will be a new heaven and the new earth where heaven and earth are united. It will be an unshakable kingdom that can not be destroyed. Who will be the great centerpiece of this new creation beyond Christ? We are, because we are brother and sister of Jesus Christ and we are the grandest demonstration, the very showpieces, of God's underserved mercy and love forever!

Walking away from Jesus is absolutely the most foolish thing we can do. Not only does it result in consequences, but it flushes the greatest benefits package ever created right down the toilet.

This morning, maybe you came here shaken because of work. Too much work, not enough time, and a boss that is stressing you out. It may feel like life is closing in around you. Hey, you will survive the great shakedown!

This morning, if you are struggling to make financial ends meet. Life is a discouragement and you don't see any hope for the future. Newsflash, none of this will survive the shakedown and your retirement package through Jesus is sitting pretty.

This morning, if your body is being shaken because of age or of sickness. Good news, a new body is on the way. It is an unshakable body that will never get sick with no more tears, crying or pain. All because of Jesus.

Who wins in the end? It is impossible to understate the significance of Christ. The only hope for anyones future is because of Jesus.

### **What should I do with this message?**

In the pressure of life where the kids have to get to sports practices, the bills have to be paid, the diapers need to be changed, the school work needs to be completed, don't lose sight of the fact that it is all about Jesus. 100 years from now, all that will matter is what you have done with Jesus. In a world that

says we are bigoted and narrow minded, if we talk about Jesus as the only way, that is not our idea, it is God's. He is the one who chose only one option. The writer of Hebrew tells his audience what they are to do and what we are to do. We are to worship God.

**Gratefulness** - We are to worship God out of a heart filled with thankfulness because he has done it all. We are the object of Christ's affections. We are chosen from eternity to be brothers and sisters of Jesus who is the centerpiece of the new creation. We are deserving of wrath but we are given dizzying levels of mercy and grace. We are the only thing that makes it through to the new heaven and the new earth where heaven and earth are united and God establishes his unshakable kingdom that will last forever.

**Reverence** - When the apostle John had a vision of the resurrected Jesus, he wasn't someone any of us would run up to and give him a slap on the back. His feet were like glowing bronze, his eyes were like flames of fire and his glory was like the noon day sun. Try looking at the radiance of the sun in July. That is what the glory of Jesus is like. We are to worship him with reverence.

**Awe** - Awe means, take your breath away. Standing in amazement. Speechlessness. It means to be filled with so much amazement that we don't even know what to say.

## Conclusion

I wanted to end this morning's message by obeying the Scriptures. I am asking the worship team to come back up so we can sing one final song to Jesus together. Let us sing it with a heart full of gratefulness, reverence and awe for Jesus.

## Revelation song

## Closing Prayer

The message we don't want to miss is you Jesus. Thank you Jesus for offering us a new covenant, help us never to refuse you.

As we go into this week, may this fresh picture of Jesus' love compel our hearts to overflow and share the incredible love you have given through Jesus.



## Hebrews 13:1-3 - Feels Like Family

Sign Title: Why church feels like family

March 7, 2010

We arrived at an exciting part in the book of Hebrews. The rest of the book of Hebrews will have a different feel to it than the earlier portion of this book. Everybody take their thinking caps out and put them on. We are going to Bible school before we get to our text.

New Testament letters, which are most of the books in our Bible beginning with Romans and moving toward the end of the Bible, follow a pattern. The front 80% of these letters are theology, that is the truth about God and Christ. The last 20% is practice, that is real life issues, what it looks like to live as a Christian in the rough and bump of everyday life.

When I was a teenager studying the Bible, I was frustrated with this. Skip the brainy theology stuff and give me the action steps because I am an action oriented guy. I wondered, why is there a clear line in these letters where they shift from God information to practical application? The reason the front  $\frac{3}{4}$  of these letters spend so much time teaching the greatness of Christ is because *it is only when we understand who we are in Jesus that we can live for Jesus.*

Last week, the writer of Hebrews hit his theological grand finale about Jesus. Like a rock band screaming on the electric guitar as they close their concert, the writer of Hebrews closed his theological section about Jesus. This morning the writer of Hebrews shifts gears and gets real practical. That is the gear he stays in until the end of the book.

### Hebrews 13:1-3

I entitled this message, "Feels like Family" because that is what these verses are about. They tell us how to live together in God's family as we keep in mind who we are through Jesus. A defining quality in our family life is the incredible capacity we have for love. This capacity for love comes from our experience of the greatest expression of love known to man, the love of Christ shown to us.

### We love because he first loved us. 1 John 4:19

Our capacity for love also comes from the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Holy Spirit literally pours into us a supernatural capacity to love others.

### God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Romans 5:5

As a church, the capacity we have for love is greater than anyplace else in the world. Turn to your neighbor and say, I have a supernatural capacity to love you.

Everybody wants to be loved. I was watching a television news program on the cult of the hugging saint. Has anybody heard about this? This lady in

India has tens of thousands of people traveling from around the world to her village so she can hug them. I am watching the program thinking how this lady is loving people in her own strength. Imagine what we can do with our supernatural capacity to love through God's strength.

Our text shows us three ways Christ's love propels us to love our brothers and sisters.

### **Christ's family continues loving one another.**

**Let brotherly love continue. Hebrews 13:1**

This word brotherly love is the word *philadelphia*. It is family love. It is the kind of love that takes place in a home. It is the kind of love that happens when people are connected on a deep family level at their DNA.

If you are a kid growing up in your home, you probably don't think about your brother or sister with deep love. Right now, they are probably the most irritating thing in your life, but trust me, when you in the right situation, you will feel totally different about your own flesh and blood.

A few years ago, our boys were at wrestling practice. At the end of practice the team played a game called *King of the Mat*. In this game the lightest two athletes wrestle, the winner stays on the mat and is wrestled by the next heavier man in the room. When it came to Daniel, he did well and won a number of matches and found himself wrestling bigger and bigger kids. Eventually he had to wrestle a boy the same size as his older brother, David. We warned the bigger boy to be careful with Daniel because Daniel was much smaller. He didn't listen. He grabbed Daniel and threw him over his head slamming him on the back of his neck. Daniel was crying in pain. Who do you think the next bigger wrestler was in the room? David, Daniel's brother. David went on the mat to challenge this wrestler and he was mad. There was smoke coming from his nose and fire coming from his mouth. The boy was backing away before the match even started. I will never forget what David said to me when the match was over. He said, "Dad, when he hurt Daniel, he hurt me."

That is the deep family connection we are talking about. As brothers and sisters through Christ, this is the kind of connection we have between us.

This family love between us is one of the evidences God gives us that we are saved.

**We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. 1 John 3:14**

This family love we have for one another is also the way the world realizes that something supernatural has happened in our lives. People look at the church and they don't see everyone from the same socio-economic class, they don't see everyone part of the same ethnic race, they don't see everyone the same age and they just don't understand why everyone gathers together. The only thing that ties the group together is Jesus and the way this love is seen is the way we love one another.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:35

Notice the verb in this short verse. We are to let brotherly love *continue*. We are not to create brotherly love, we are to let what is already in us come out of us. We don't have the capacity to create love for our brothers and sisters but we have the capacity to squelch the love.

Remember what was happening at this time, these were Jewish Christians in Rome undergoing persecution. When you have a bad day at work and come home, how much family love do you feel like showing? Not much! When life is tough, it is hard to love. We have the love for our family but we don't feel like showing that love. We have to choose to show the love. This is not an optional thing. It is a command. When life is tough, *keep loving each other*.

It is not just when life is tough that it is hard to love our family, but it is also when we get close to people that we discover things about them we didn't know about before, things that are irritating. The closer we get to our church family, the greater capacity we have for disappointing one another. It is like a newly wed couple. They can't wait to get married and be together all the time. Then when they finally get married they discover life isn't easy. She can't believe he is so messy and leaves his clothes on the floor. He can't believe she is so insistent on the toilet paper rolling from the top rather than the bottom. He takes 6 minutes to get ready in the morning and he can't understand why it takes her over 60 minutes. She is crying because the dinner is overcooked, he really doesn't care, it is better than anything he could make for himself.

The closer a family gets, the harder it is to love people when you see the irritable side of people. Let's just be honest, as we get closer, you will find things about me that are annoying. You will find things about me that God is still working on. What are we supposed to do when we get close enough to finally see the irritating and unfinished areas of our lives? Should we gossip about it? Should we leave our church in search of a new perfect church home? By the way, if you do, it will only be a year or two in your new church home until you discover they are just as messed up as your old church home. What does it say we are to do? We are to *continue* in brotherly love.

Why do we love each other? *We are a family through Jesus where each one of us is given a supernatural capacity to love.*

**Christ's family doesn't neglect strangers.**

**Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Hebrews 13:2**

The word hospitality is a good word. There is great impact in the original Greek that we miss in our English. The writer of Hebrews just told us to continue loving our brothers. The Greek word for hospitality is literally love of strangers. So we move from continuing to show love for our church family to not neglecting to show love to strangers outside of the church family.

Thanks to incredible success in our country of the hotel and restaurant business, hospitality in our day is not as desperately sought as it was in the ancient world.

In the first century, there were hotels, but nobody wanted to stay there. In a 1<sup>st</sup> century document written by a man named Aristophanes, Aristophanes writes a friend asking which hotel he should stay in when he visits a town. He asks which hotel has the fewest fleas. Plato writes about an innkeeper who kept his guests hostage. Another first century writer, Theophrastus, puts inn keeping on the level of running a brothel.

If you were traveling, the place you wanted to stay was in someones home. Clean bedding and a home cooked meal were invaluable. Love of strangers was an important part of the Christian life in the ancient world.

[seek to show hospitality. Romans 12:13b](#)

[Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. 1 Peter 4:9](#)

If you are a church leader you must show hospitality. It isn't optional. See 1 Tim 3:2; 5:10; Titus 1:8 where hospitality is requirement for church leadership.

Ladies, I know you are freaking out. You are wondering how you can get your house clean for your own family much less for other people. Women, take a chill pill. This is not Martha-Stewart hospitality. This is practical hospitality. This is come over and have burgers and potato salad on paper plates. It is not a 7 course meal where you iron the folds into the napkins before the guests come.

Why does the writer of Hebrews command us not to neglect showing hospitality? Isn't that the way it happens? We don't have a problem with the idea of hospitality, we just never get around to doing it. We neglect it.

Why was it so important for Christians to not neglect hospitality in the ancient world? Hospitality was part of their evangelistic strategy. People who stayed in the home of a Christian left saying, "Those people are the kind of people I want to be." They have a real love in that family like I have never experienced before. Of course their families weren't perfect but they were sharing Jesus by simply living for Jesus in their home.

When we invite people into our home we connect with them in a much deeper way than we could at church. When we are around the dinner table we talk about the normal things of life. We share the love of Christ in our actions, example and words.

The writer of Hebrews puts a little reminder in here from Genesis 18 where he says, "some have entertained angels unaware." This is a reminder of what happened when Abraham showed hospitality to three strangers in Genesis 18. It turned out two of them were angels and one was probably a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. Talk about a surprise guest list!

Has anyone ever thought they entertained angels as possible guests? Some people have experiences like that. According to Scripture, it can and does

happen. We may find ourselves entertaining angels. Before you get carried away with angelic speculations, that isn't the point the writer of Hebrews is making. The point is not the angels. The point is *you never know who you are loving when you show hospitality.*

You may find yourself playing an important role in someones life or them richly blessing you.

Let me give you an example of extreme hospitality I have never forgotten. When I began in seminary in Philadelphia, my first job was as a part time youth worker in a little Mennonite church in Pennsylvania. I was a single guy who was rough around the edges but I did my best to teach handful of kids the Bible each week at church. Each Sunday for over a year, different families in the church grabbed me after the service and either took me to restaurant or invited me over to their home for Sunday dinner. Folks, I loved going to that church. It wasn't the preaching that kept me coming. As a student on a meal plan, I couldn't wait for a good meal on Sunday! I still remember the first Sunday I had to buy my own lunch. It was over a year after I began attending. What a great demonstration of the love of Christ using a knife, fork and spoon.

Since hospitality is so important, I want to get practical about this and exercise it better here in our own Sunday gatherings. One Sunday a month, usually the first Sunday we will be enjoying family meals together. Not only will this give us a chance to have a family meal but it will also give us a chance to rub shoulders with new people in our church and show hospitality to them.

Second, I want to start something new. I would like us to have one to two families a week that come on Sunday looking for new people and planning to invite them to lunch. You can invite them to Pizza Ranch or you can invite them over to your home for a meal, that is your call. If enough people sign up for this a family may only have the chance to do this once or twice a year.

Take out your registration card and look on the back. If you are interested in being a family that takes responsibility for some of the hospitality we show to our Sunday guests, sign up and we will give you a call.

Why do we love strangers? *We are a family through Jesus where each one of us is given a supernatural capacity to love.*

**Christ's family remembers those who suffer.**

**Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. Hebrews 13:3**

We know that nobody has yet died for their faith in Rome but it appears people were suffering. This verse implies some people of the church were arrested for their faith and mistreated. Prisons in the ancient world were not like today. Prisoners didn't get three square meals. There was no cable TV or warm blankets. Prison life was rough. If you needed anything, you didn't get it unless your friends brought it to you. Those who remembered you brought your food,

they brought you clean clothes, they brought you blankets. If people from the outside didn't take care of you, life was not pretty.

It wasn't uncommon for prisoners to go through a great deal of suffering because people on the outside of the prison forgot about them suffering on the inside. After all, when your friend is out of sight, they are out of mind. Christians had a reputation for the incredible care they showed for their Christian brothers and sisters in prison.

In an ancient document called *The Apology of Aristides*, the writer describes how Christians cared for their own in prison.

If they hear that any of their number is imprisoned or oppressed for the name of their Messiah, all of them provide for his needs, and if it is possible that he may be delivered, they deliver him. If there is among them a man who is poor or needy, and they have not an abundance of necessaries, they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food.

Talk about amazing sacrifice for others, it amazes me that people fasted to provide for their brothers and sisters needs in prison. Today, there are not many Christians in our country who are imprisoned for their faith. Our country is an exception. If you look at [www.persecution.com](http://www.persecution.com) or [www.persecution.org](http://www.persecution.org) you will see countless stories of people all over the world suffering in prison for their faith.

The point the writer of Hebrews is making is broader than just those suffering jail time. He says that when our brothers and sisters through Jesus suffer, we empathize with them. We feel their suffering and we help them the way we would want to be helped.

**If one member suffers, all suffer together... 1 Corinthians 12:26**

Let me get practical. Each week a weekly prayer list comes out. Many of the prayer requests are about those in our body going through a difficult time. What a better way to follow this command than to pray through the prayer sheet, to drop some people on the list a brief note of encouragement or to send a brief email letting them know you are praying for them. The family connection between us connects us so close that when one of us suffer, the rest of us feel that suffering and we feel compelled to love them.

Why do we love those who are suffering? *We are a family through Jesus where each one of us is given a supernatural capacity to love.*

## **Conclusion**

Now everyone stand up, turn to the person next to you; give them a high-five and say, "You have a supernatural capacity to love people. This week, go do it!"

## **Prayer**

Father, thank you for loving us when there is nothing about us worth loving. Thank you for giving us a supernatural capacity to love people. I ask that Faith

EFC will become a church where our supernatural capacity to love people is lived out in a tangible way. Amen.



## Hebrews 13:4 - Marriage: Hold It High, Keep It Holy

Sign Title: Marriage: Hold It High, Keep It Holy

March 14, 2010

We have been on a journey through the book of Hebrews. For the last year and a half we enjoyed incredible views of Christ from some high peaks of theology.

Last week we turned a corner in this book. We moved from learning about Christ to the practicalities of living for Christ. Last week we learned about the overwhelming aroma of love that invades and guides our relationships with one another in the church. Where does this love come from? The more we understand the greatness of Christ's love for us, the more Christ's love flows into our lives, the more it overflows from our lives and we express it in our relationships with one another. This love is so strong it has a supernatural quality to it.

This morning we are looking at another practical way Christ changes us. We are moving from our relationships with each other to the most intimate relationship of all, our marriages and sexuality.

Do you know how many Christians I have tried to counsel out of an impending divorce? Do you know how many Christian couples live together before marriage? Do you know how many Christian young people either engage in or plan to engage in pre-marital sex? I have lost track of the number of men I know who struggle with internet pornography. Internet intimacy issues are not just a guy thing but there are plenty of women who are in private chats or on Facebook with men and they are involved in emotional immorality. Their bodies may not touch, their eyes may not see but their hearts are wrapped in infidelity.

Given the size of our church, statistics say there are men in this room who didn't go to bed last night looking at their wife but their eyes were looking at a picture or video of a woman to whom they are not married. Statistics also say there are women in this room who went to bed after connecting emotionally with someone of the opposite sex who is not their spouse.

This may all be normal around us but God says that kind of life isn't his desire for us. That kind of life will rob us of the incredibly good things God desires for us sexually.

**Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. Hebrews 13:4**

My goal is two-fold this morning. We are going to work our way through the text and then I want to give you a practical strategy to live this text.

**Marriage should be honored by all.**

The word honor means highly valued or highly esteemed. It is the opposite of profane which means treating something as common or insignificant. To honor is to hold something as irreplaceable, like your grandmother's 14 carrot

diamond ring. To dishonor is to treat something as common, like a used yogurt container in your recycle bin. It served a purpose but it is easy to throw away once you are done with it. The writer of Hebrews doesn't explain why marriage is to be held high but the rest of the Bible does.

### **God created marriage.**

**For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. Genesis 2:24**

Marriage is the first and most basic unit of society. It is a gift from God. Marriage is God's idea, not ours. Look at the definition of marriage God gives us. It is *one man, one woman, one flesh*. It is not a man and his husband. It is not a woman and her wife. Marriage, as God defines it, is a man and a woman.

In Iowa, I think we need to make this clear. Marriage involves a man and a woman. Our culture can try to define marriage differently but God doesn't. You can put a man and a man together and you can call it many things but you cannot call it a marriage. You can put a woman and a woman together and you can call it many things but you cannot call it a marriage.

When you are the creator of something, you get to define it. God created marriage, he gets to define it. He defines it as one man and one woman. You know where this is going. The redefinition of marriage in our culture is really about trying to remove God as the authority for our lives. If we get to define what marriage looks like instead of what God says it is, we get to remove God as an authority over our lives.

Wikipedia talks about people marrying horses, dogs, dolphins, goats and even a snake. Once we define marriage as we want it to be, where will it stop?

I don't want to be overly political on this issue but as Christians, we need to be on the forefront of standing up for heterosexual union as the definition of marriage in our culture. If we do nothing, who will stand up for it? If we do nothing else, the purity and joy found in Christian marriages should be a testimony to those around us that marriage, as God defines it, is a great joy.

### **Marriage is a picture of deeper realities.**

God loves pictures. The vastness of creation is a picture of the infiniteness of God's power and creativity. Atoms show God's precision, that is why the best clocks are atomic clocks. Creation is filled with pictures of God.

According to Ephesians 5:22-32, marriage is one of God's pictures. Ephesians tells us that a husband's love for his wife is to be a living picture of Christ's love for the church. A wife's love and submission to her husband is to be a living breathing picture of the church's love for and submission to the headship of Christ in our lives. It is all a picture. Since the relationship between Christ and the church is infinitely valuable, the living breathing picture of that relationship is to be honored.

It is not just the marriage relationship that is a living picture of a greater divine reality but sex in marriage is a living picture of a divine reality. What divine reality does sex represent?

**The two shall become one flesh. Genesis 2:24.**

In case this is unclear, this is talking about the sexual union between a husband and wife. While this union is physical, it is much more than that. It is also a union of the heart and soul. Marriage unites a man and woman so close and in so many ways that it is the closest earthly picture we have to the unity between the members of the Godhead. Sex is unity in plurality. Sex is two being one. Sex is a living picture of the oneness in the threeness of the Godhead. To dishonor the living breathing pictures of sex and marriage as God intends it to be is to dishonor the heavenly realities they represent.

For example, divorce would be a picture of the Son breaking up the unity he has with the father. Adultery is painting a picture of the Son finding his satisfaction someplace other than the father. Bad picture. Do you see why marriage and the marriage bed are so important to God and why he doesn't take their desecration lightly?

**The Marriage Bed *Must* Be Kept Pure.**

When the Bible talks about the marriage bed, it is not referring to sleeping. It is talking about the sexual life of a marriage. The bed *is* pure.

### **A Word to Christian Couples**

For Christians, sex takes on an added component, sex in a Christian marriage actually is an act of worship. In a Christian marriage, a husband and wife are to regularly enjoy sex to the glory of God. Sex in a Christian marriage is as holy and God honoring as going to church, prayer or Bible reading. God is honored when we glorify him by the regular passionate enjoyment of marital sex.

I know these are strong statements but the Bible has strong words about the goodness of marital sex. The Bible has an entire book that graphically describes the passions and experiences of marital intimacy, the Song of Solomon. I don't know how Christians got the reputation for being prudish about sex. I don't know why kids grow up in the church thinking sex is a dirty and worldly thing when it is very holy and God honoring, inside of marriage.

Sex is such a powerful and pleasurable gift from God. It is so powerful and pleasurable that God says the only safe place for it to be expressed is within a marriage. Sex is like fire, it works great in the fireplace but build a fire anyplace else in the house and you have a world of trouble. That is why the marital bed is to be kept pure. Any other bed, any other expression of our sexuality, outside of marriage is sin. When the bed isn't pure, we are not honoring the picture marriage was intended to paint.

The world around us recognizes sex as pleasurable and powerful but the world around us doesn't recognize the incredible power of sex to destroy. One publisher of a leading pornographic magazine wrote.

Sex is like a function of the body, a drive which man shares with animals, like eating, drinking and sleeping. It's a physical demand that must be satisfied. If you don't satisfy it, you will have all sorts of neuroses and repressive psychoses. Sex is here to stay; let's forget the prudery that makes us hide from it. Throw away those inhibitions; find a girl who's like minded and let yourself go. (Hebrews, MacArthur, p. 431)

Do you see how the world teaches us to profane sex? People will tell you sex is just a bodily hunger that needs to be satisfied. Having sex is reduced to the same level as eating pizza. Sex is much more than just a physical satisfaction. It is spiritual, emotional, relational. It is multi-dimensional.

The world doesn't get it. People want you to think like you are missing out if you wait till you are married to have sex or if you are married you only express your sexuality in the context of one relationship. If you keep the marriage bed pure they want you to think you are on the losing end of the deal. I beg to differ. The loser is the one for whom sex is reduced to just a physical act and people are discarded like empty cereal boxes. The loser is the person who goes home at night and doesn't have someone who will love them for better or for worse.

### **A Word to Christian Singles**

Christian singles, the Bible talks about the purity of marriage for you too.

**But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality Ephesians 5:3**

When God says NOT EVEN A HINT OF SEX OUTSIDE MARRIAGE it sounds like a a real bummer. It really is not. The marriage bed is to be *kept* pure. In other words, the marriage bed *is* pure and good thing, just *keep* it that way. God is not against sexual intimacy. He is all about it. He loves it, he designed it. He wants it to be a great blessing to you, just reserve it for marriage.

It wasn't too long ago when I was in your position. I know the challenges to purity you face are tremendous. You are not helpless against the tidal wave of sexual pressure you face every day. God is on your side and you have the Holy Spirit helping you. Make it your goal to enter your marriage in purity. Don't make it your goal to enter marriage as a technical virgin, where there is one act you haven't done, but a total virgin.

When we go to Wal-mart to buy something and there is a box on the shelf where the cellophane wrapper is off, the pieces are pulled out of the styrofoam and the part bags are torn open, do you want to buy it? All the pieces are there but it is tampered with. Nobody wants to buy that. Friends, keep the cellophane wrapper on your sexuality. It is the best gift you can give on your wedding night.

Teenagers, let me give you a little more practical advice. The person you are dating right now is probably not the person you will marry. Don't do anything with the person you are dating that will leave you uncomfortable when some day you look into the eyes of your spouse.

When it comes to dating, only date people who are more committed to purity than you are. By the way, that sort of blows out of the water the whole question of, "Is it okay to date non-Christians?"

Why does God set such high standards? God is serious about this.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us that expressing our sexuality outside of the context of marriage is guaranteed to result in the judgment of God.

for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. Hebrews 13:4b

Let me define some words for you:

**Adultery** - unfaithfulness to the marriage vow.

**Sexual Immorality (fornication)** - a broad term for all sexual expressions outside of marriage.

When I was younger, I remember reading verses that talked about sexual immorality and thinking sexual immorality was some kind of sexual perversion. I was just a normal heterosexual teenager who knew one thing in particular was wrong but I wondered how far was too far. Then I studied and learned some Greek and the picture became much clearer. Sexual immorality is sexual expression outside of the context of marriage. Self sexuality, internet sexuality and inappropriate touching are not part of God's desire for us sexually. Engaging in sexual immorality may be an immediate pleasure but it will result in a long term judgment. God's Word says have great sex inside of marriage, have no sex outside of it.

**A word to college age kids struggling to maintain purity.**

Young people, it is hard to go all the way through 8 to 13 years of school and then get married. If God brings the right person into your life, get married, don't live in sin.

But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. 1 Corinthians 7:2

Incidentally, Hebrews 13:4 is not the only verse in Scripture that talks about the incredible importance of marital purity:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10

For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Ephesians 5:5

But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death." Revelation 21:8

Before I close, I want to give you some practical steps to take to protect your marriages, to keep them high, to keep them holy and to avoid the judgment of God.

## **Have a Solid Defense**

### **Do not trust yourself**

Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 1  
Corinthians 10:12

If you are here and you think this message doesn't apply to you and you have heard it all before, wake up. You are exactly the person that needs to hear this message. No one is immune to this temptation. It doesn't matter how smart you are, Solomon, the smartest man to live, was destroyed by sexual sin. It doesn't matter how strong you are, Samson the strongest man to live, was destroyed by sexual sin. Don't trust yourself.

### **Build a fence around your marriage**

There is a saying in England, "Good fences make good neighbors." Set clear boundaries and you won't have regrets. Here are some good relational boundaries I suggest you set up to protect your purity.

- Never be alone with a member of the opposite sex.
- Don't drive alone with a member of the opposite sex.
- Avoid flirtatious or suggestive language, even in jest.
- When an emotional connection is made with someone other than your spouse, get out and get help. Don't rationalize it as something you think you can handle.

### **Consider the consequences of sexual sin.**

Most of us already know the story of David and Bathsheba. He was an incredible man and a mighty warrior. He was also a man who gave in to a few moments of sexual pleasure but it resulted in a lifetime of irreparable damage.

For a few moments of pleasure he:

- Broke the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment and coveted his neighbors wife.
- Broke the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment and stole his neighbor's wife.
- Broke the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment and murdered Uriah.
- The son of his illicit relationship died as a result of his sin.
- He was mocked and scorned by the people of Israel and by Israel's enemies because of his adultery.
- His beautiful daughter Tamar was raped by his son Amnon.
- His son Absalom murdered his son Amnon.
- Absalom hated his Dad and led a national rebellion against David.

- He was betrayed by a resentful former friend, Ahithophel
- Absalom slept with David's harem in view of all Israel.
- Absalom, his son was killed.
- His kingdom was shaken and never regained its former glory.

If David would have paused when he saw Bathsheba and thought for a moment about what those few moments of pleasure would cost him, I don't think he would have given her a second look. We must be convinced in our mind that the pleasure of sin is never worth the consequence that will follow. God will judge the adulterer and the sexually immoral. If we choose to sin, we will suffer.

Does God forgive sexual sin? Of course! Heaven will be filled with people who committed adultery and other sexual sins. Heaven won't be filled with people who haven't repented of those sins. Heaven won't have people who knew better but chose to continue in those sins.

If you are struggling with sexual sins, I beg you, to consider the consequences. Absolutely nothing is worth the heartache that will follow.

### Have an aggressive offense

The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 1 Corinthians 7:3-5

The best defense against sex outside of marriage is the good offense of God honoring delightful sex inside of marriage that includes physical, emotional and spiritual intimacy.

There should be no question that the best and most satisfying love in the world is found between Christians who bond on all levels as their common experience of the Holy Spirit draws them together in a way that couples who do not have Christ in their heart do not know.

To provide regular satisfying sexual intimacy is a responsibility Christians have to their spouse. When couples live out this theology in their bedroom, there is less pull to think about somebody else in another room.

I expect a high level of motivation by couples to go home and apply this portion of the sermon.

### Conclusion

If you are struggling with temptations for intimacy outside of marriage, find a solid Christian friend and ask them to pray with you for strength in this area. The best way to destroy Satan's work in the darkness is to shed a little light on it and talking about your struggle with a close, same sex, brother or sister in Christ.



If you do not have a brother in Christ you can share this with. Seek out the pastors and elders of this church. We are here for you.

There are a number of good books I think you will find helpful. If you go to my web site, [www.kurttrucksess.com](http://www.kurttrucksess.com) and look under ministry articles you will find a list of resources I put together for you that the Holy Spirit will use as tools in this battle.

## Hebrews 13:5-6 – It Is Not What I Have, It Is Who I Have.

Sign Title: it is not what I have, it is who I have.

March 28, 2010

Reach in your wallet and pull out a bill. Turn to Hebrews 13 and put the bill in that page as a bookmark. We will get back to that in a moment.

This week I found some interesting statistics.

- 15% of everything Jesus talked about pertained to how we use our money. He said more about money than he talked about prayer, faith, heaven and hell combined.
- Only 12% of those who claim to be Christians tithe.

Most Christians, especially young or new Christians, do not understand the hand and glove relationship between worship and money. It isn't uncommon for new Christians to carry an insane amount of debt and have all their resources tied up paying off their creditors so they can not afford to give. When you can't give you rob yourself of the blessing of giving and the eternal rewards that could be yours in heaven.

Because the relationship between money and worship is so important, this morning we will look at some practical ways Christ changes the way we look at our money.

### Hebrews 13:5-6

These verse have two commands to obey and two promises of God we can stand on to obey those commands. Let's look at them in that order.

#### Command 1 - Keep my life free from the love of money.

Keep your lives free from the love of money... Hebrews 13:5

Why would the writer of Hebrews say this?

#### My significance comes from Christ worth, not net worth.

This fall, I began working out at the YMCA. One of the things the YMCA weight room has, like most other athletic facilities, are mirrors. They say the reason for mirrors is so you can watch your form but I notice that people watch more than their form; they like to watch themselves. They like to look in the mirror and see if their biceps are bigger or their stomachs are smaller. It is not only wannabe athletes who do this. At home, we all look in the mirror to see if our complexion is clear, our makeup is in place and our hair is combed. We don't leave the house until we like what we see in the mirror.

It is not just the way we look in the mirror that matters, it is who we see in the mirror that matters. Many times we boost our self-worth by our net-worth. The more money we have, the better we feel about ourselves. We use our money to boost our self-esteem so when we look in the mirror we say, "I like what I see!"

There is a problem with this. Boosting your self-worth with your net-worth is a rotten way to live. One reason why is because it is like riding a roller coaster. When our investments are up, our worth is up, when our investments are down, so is our worth. When our house sells for a good profit, we feel good, when we lose money, we feel like a loser.

Another thing that happens when we boost our self-worth with our net-worth is we cultivate the lethal poison of pride. This happens when people do the parking lot check after a party. We look at the cars people drive and we start to rank them. I'm better than they are, they drive a Ford Focus. I can hang around that couple because they drive an Acura. This is a rotten way to live because it skews reality. Jesus warned us about this.

**Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Luke 12:15**

Let's learn what really matters. It is time for a little review; in the book of Hebrews, where did we learn our value comes from? Our value doesn't come from money, it comes from who we are in Christ. We didn't buy God's grace, we didn't earn God's grace, none of us deserves God's grace. Our value comes from who we are through Jesus.

Our wealth or lack of wealth doesn't even compare to what we have in Jesus. Remember what we have learned about our identity in Christ through the book of Hebrews.

- He is the second person of the Trinity.
- He made everything.
- He is superior to every angelic being because he created them.
- He humbled himself to become a man.
- He poured himself fully into a human body and permanently fused humanity with his divinity while not ceasing to be any less God or changing his identity.
- He loves us, died for us and paid for our sin.
- Upon our death, or Christ's return, whatever comes first, we begin to experience what it means to be the focus of God's greatest expression of love toward anything he created.
- We are identified with Christ as the adopted brothers and sisters of the second person of the Godhead.

We can't be any more loved than this. It can't get any better than what we have through Jesus. That is worth something and nothing we have on earth compares to it. It doesn't matter if you make \$20,000 a year or \$200,000, it is nothing in comparison.

Now, on the flip side, the Bible didn't say money is evil. We have to keep it in perspective. Jesus used money. Abraham, the father of Israel was exceedingly wealthy. Job, was exceedingly wealthy. Solomon and David were

wealthy. The Bible does not say a smaller savings account is more Godly than a larger one. The wealthy struggle with loving money, but so do the poor! God is concerned with the attitude we have toward our money not the amount of money we have.

### **Many of life's problems stem from loving money more than God.**

I learned some interesting statistics about money problems. I am sorry to tell you that money does not always make your life better.

- In 90% of divorces, money is cited as a key issue.
- Of men who make minimum wage (\$7.25) 30% commit adultery. By the time a man is earning 3 times that (\$21.75) 70% commit adultery. While I don't think these statistics are right, the principle of the ratio probably is. More money leads to greater infidelity.
- Motives having to do with money and sex account for 99% of the crimes committed in the United States, but those with money as their object outstrip sexual offenses by a ratio of four to one.<sup>5</sup>

In Deuteronomy 17:14-20, the kings of Israel were warned not to accumulate three things; horses, wives and gold. Why? Because wealth and pleasure could so easily become the center of a king's life. Instead, at the inauguration of a king's reign, he was to write, with his own hand, all the words of the law, and to become intimately familiar with them. He was to place himself under the law with no special privileges or rank. He was to be as much a servant of the law as the poorest citizen of the land. The goal was to keep the king from loving money more than loving God. How did this work for King Solomon? He violated all three of these commands and lost the kingdom.

Who do you think has the deepest most satisfying joy in life? The salesman who pays \$500 a night for a fortieth-floor suite and spends his evening in a half-lit smoke filled lounge trying to impress strange women with ten-dollar cocktails, or a man who chooses the Motel 6 by a vacant lot of sunflowers and spends his evening watching the sunset and writing his wife a love letter because he can not afford a cell phone? Many of life's problems stem from loving money when we should be loving God.

### **Loving money will derail my walk with Christ.**

There are a number of stories in Scripture illustrating this. For example, in the book of Joshua, when Israel attacked Ai, Achan valued possessions more than delighting in God. He disobeyed and stole gold bars and a robe for himself. His disobedience affected the success of an entire nation, resulted in the loss of others lives, and earned him a legacy of shame that billions will remember forever.

In the book of Acts, Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property in the early church but valued the appearance of extreme generosity before honesty

---

<sup>5</sup> David E. Neff, "Drunk on Money," *Christianity Today*, April 8, 1988, pg. 15.

before God. They didn't have to give all the money to the church from the property they sold but they told others they did. Their love for money derailed their spiritual lives and earned them a legacy of shame.

Who can forget the one person nobody will name their child after, Judas. He betrayed Christ for thirty pieces of silver. The list could go on and on.

**For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:21**

**Command 2 - Be Content with what I have.**

**...and be content with what you have... Hebrews 13:5**

When I was in college, I had a chance to travel on a few mission trips. One of the most powerful experiences I had on these mission trips was when our team spent time in South America in a field of scrap construction material on the outskirts of Sao Paula Brazil. These were the poor homeless children of the city. They had few clothes and their homes were pieces of corrugated steel and scrap wood strung together into tent-like shelters. Every one on our team felt sick watching the children of this village play with nothing more than mud and garbage. What I found amazing was that the children had smiles.

How could they smile? They didn't have their own bedrooms? There was no PS3, no Wii Fitness for them to use. There was no big screen TV, no cable with HBO, no internet, no designer jeans, how could they be happy? As Americans, we find this hard to believe but hear me when I say it, "Contentment has nothing to do with our material possessions." NOTHING! Jesus said it!

**A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Luke 12:15**

What is one of the most widely viewed television program every year? The Super-Bowl. Just as exciting as the game are the commercials. They cost advertisers over 2 ½ million dollars per 30 second commercial. What is the goal of a commercial? To create discontent! To tell us we need a product to be happy. We think we always need something more to be satisfied. I would be content if:

- I have a spouse (some of you are thinking you would be content if you had a different spouse)
- I had a different house
- I had more money
- I had a flat screen TV
- A new dress, an ipod, a boat, a ferret, just pick your thing!

Let me tell you on the authority of God's Word and the proof of human experience, IT IS A LIE! God is more satisfying than a spouse, a house, a car, and a new dress. Pick your trinket or toy. Be content because happiness does not come from what we have, it comes from who we have.

Our love for money diminishes our capacity to believe this is the case. That's one of the reasons mission trips are so good for us. It freaks us out when we meet people who have nothing and they are happier than we are.

### **Promise 1 - God will NEVER leave us**

Just as the writer of Hebrews gave us two commands to obey, he also gives us two promises we can stand on. These promises make it possible to obey God's commands.

**God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Hebrews 13:5-6**

The writer of Hebrews reaches back into the Old Testament and quotes the same promise God made to Jacob, to Moses and to Joshua but he applies it to us today. God will never leave us; he will never forsake us! The Greek here is a triple negative to add emphasis. God says, I will never, never, never leave you (repeat this after me). He couldn't say it any stronger than he did. We need to know that when anxiety about our future and anxiety about our finances grip us, when the stock market is failing us, who will never fail us? Who will never, never, never leave us? What gives us confidence to face the future, our bank account or the God who will never, never, never leave us and who owns all the money in the world? If we can trust God to handle our soul on the final day, we can trust him to handle our life today.

### **Promise 2 - The Lord is my helper so I won't be afraid.**

**So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? Hebrews 13:6**

Not only will God never leave us but God promises to help us. He is the one who will come to our rescue in the time of need. He is the one who orders circumstances, just like he did for Joseph in the OT. God helped him in his time of need.

In 1956 the phrase "In God We Trust" became the official motto of the United States but it first appeared unofficially during the civil war when Americans realized the future of our nation didn't rest in the value of our money, but in our value of our God. The phrase grew in national importance until 1956 when it was adopted as a motto that should be on all US currency. What matters is not what we have, but who we have.

### **What steps should I take to place my trust in God instead of money?**

#### **Begin a relationship with God through Christ.**

This morning, the ability to trust God more than money can only begin by having a relationship with the God we can trust. That only happens through Jesus Christ. Every one of us needs forgiveness of our sin. The only way we have that is by asking God to apply his son's death on the cross for our sin to be the payment for our sin. When I ask for forgiveness of sin through the death of Christ and I ask Christ to be in control of my life, the Bible says that in that moment, God creates a new heart in me. *A heart whose greatest treasure is*

*God not money.* When that happens, for the first time in our lives we have *the capacity for contentment.*

### **Trust in God's goodness**

The essence of sin is questioning God's goodness. It is saying, I need something God hasn't provided for me so I have to take it into my own hands to get it. It is the same thing that happened in the garden of Eden when Eve decided she wanted the one piece of fruit God didn't provide for her. She questioned God's goodness toward her and took what God hadn't provided and all of humanity lived to regret it. BUT, when we are willing to trust the goodness of God's character, it is OK to not have the things God hasn't given us.

If I truly need something to serve God the way he wants me to, he will provide it! This is how a single man or woman stays content when they are lonely. They believe God is good and in his time, when God knows it is the right time, he will bring Mr. or Mrs. Right into their world. This is how you drive by large houses and new cars without envy. You say to yourself, if I need a house like that to serve God the way he wants me to, nothing will keep God from putting it in my hands. God is good, he will provide exactly what we need to serve him the way he plans for us to serve him. If it isn't something good for us right now, God won't provide it.

### **Remember Christ is the most precious possession**

When we have Christ in our life, we can lose everything and still be content. We have the one thing that matters, the one thing of lasting value that nobody can take away. We can face a diagnosis of cancer, we can face the news that our retirement was lost in a scam, we can face the news that even our spouse or our children are lost and we can still say, God is good. If we have Christ that is all we need.

So when we say, God, I can't be happy without something in my life, we are saying Jesus, you are not enough for me. I need more than you! That is the sin of materialism, the sin of finding our true worth in the limited value of stuff rather than the infinite value of Christ.

### **Conclusion**

Take that new bookmark (your dollar bill) and hold it in your hand. Look at the dollar and say, "It is not what I have." Look at your Bible and say, "It is who I have that matters." Amen.



## Hebrews 13:8-14 - The Breakfast of Champions

Sign Title: The Breakfast of Champions

March 21, 2010

If you were here last week, you know we looked at some very direct Scripture about Christian marriage and sexuality. Every one of us left knowing there is a high bar God has for sexual purity before marriage and fidelity in marriage. Thankfully we know God's high standards in this area are not because he is against our sexuality, rather he is all for it, he created it and he standards give us the best and most satisfying way for us to experience out sexuality for our good and his glory.

There was one thing I didn't cover in last week that we should talk about this morning. What happens when we experience sexual failure? What happens when we sin sexually? What do we do when we wake up one morning and we are overcome with grief and shame because we made sinful sexual choices during the night? If you want to learn the answer, stay tuned because we are going to talk about what to do when we face our sin.

Take your Bibles and turn with me to Hebrews 13. We are going to read verses 8 to 14 together.

Hebrews 13:8-14

**Jesus doesn't change.**

These verse are tightly packed. The writer of Hebrews is stuffing things in this letter before he seals the envelope so he doesn't take the time to develop things but rather he just says them. One of those powerful undeveloped thoughts is verse 8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Hebrews 13:8

That is an amazing statement. What does it mean? Quite simply, take Christ out of that statement and tell me what else you can put in. What else will always be the same? Nothing in life is guaranteed to endure. Everything is in a state of flux. Nations rise and fall. Sky scrapers can be destroyed in minutes. Our guaranteed financial investments vaporize in the stock market are gone in days. No matter how many vitamins we swallow, no matter how hard we exercise, we will all die. We won't last. Even the earth won't last

Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end. Psalm 102:25-27

This statement is huge. Jesus Christ does not just always exist but his character and love do not change. Circumstances don't surprise Jesus. He doesn't overreact because he is surprised by anything. Christ's attitude toward us doesn't change. Christ's love for us doesn't change, even when we have a bad day, even when we have failed everyone around us and we go home at night

feeling like we are a complete failure, Christ's still passionately loves you, Christ's love does not change.

I know some of the smart people are wondering what happened when Christ came to earth. Didn't he change when we took on a human body and was born to Mary. That sounds like a change, but technically, he didn't change.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! Philippians 2:5-8 (NIV)

When it says he did not count his equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing; it doesn't mean he ceased to be who he is, it simply means he humbled himself by pouring the fullness of himself into a human body, a smaller vessel. When Christ came to earth, he did not cease to be fully God, his character and identity did not change, he just humbled himself and voluntarily chose not to exercise his divinity by pouring himself into humanity.

So when Jesus was on earth, what we see in Christ is the eternal, unchangeable character of the Son of God in action. The son we see in the gospels is the way the character of Christ always was and always will be. Christ was compassionate to the woman caught in adultery, he always will be compassionate towards those caught in the web of sexual sin. Jesus had compassion on Peter even after He denied him 3 times. Christ always is filled with forgiveness and second chances towards those who are filled with remorse and repentance for denying him.

The gospels are also filled with portraits of Christ's compassion. He gave the blind man his sight, he fed the 5,000 because he had compassion on their hunger, he turned water into wine at a wedding because he had compassion for a bride and groom on their special day. If this is the way Christ was toward the broken, hurting and wounded then, thank goodness he doesn't change because we know he will be that way toward us today.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. Can you thank Christ with me for that.

### **Strengthened by grace**

Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them. We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. Hebrews 13:9-10

After 12 chapters of rock solid teaching about Christ, the writer of Hebrews warns them not to be carried away by strange teachings about Christ. In other words, there is the Christian faith, but there are variants of the Christian faith that we need to guard against so we aren't carried away by them.

I know that when I say “be on guard against strange teachings about Christ”, you greet that with a yawn. There is no urgency to it. But I have watched many people get carried away by a twisted vision of Jesus that deflated Christ’s greatness and inflated their merits and a twisted vision of Christ literally kills people! Hear me on this, a twisted picture of Jesus is a recipe for eternal condemnation.

The book of Galatians was probably the first letter written by Paul. In it, he wrote to the first church he planted in the city of Galatia. The church started out right, but from what we can tell, a Jewish Christian teacher followed on Paul’s heels arriving in town shortly after he left. The young church started out with the right belief but this teacher added to Jesus. He said, “Paul told you about the greatness of Christ but I want to take you to the next step with Christ. You want to become more like Jesus, he was Jewish, good followers of the Christ follow the Jewish customs, just like Jesus did.”

This sounds reasonable. Jesus followed the Jewish feasts, you should follow them too. Jesus followed the Jewish dietary food laws, why shouldn’t we? The Jews are circumcised, anybody for a church circumcision service for new converts?

When Paul heard his new church was following Jesus *and* following Jewish customs, he wrote them a letter, and this is what he said.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! Galatians 1:6-8 (NIV)

Paul flipped out. He literally says, if anyone is teaching you something beside simple trust in Jesus, if anyone says there is anything you can do to improve your worth to God other than simple trust in Christ, let him go to hell! What would set Paul off like this? The *only* way we have a relationship with God is by God’s grace to us through Christ. There is absolutely nothing we can do to earn it. The moment these Galatians started to add observance of Jewish customs, feasts and holidays into their worship of Christ because it would make them better; they lost their salvation. Any little thing we do or don’t do to make us more deserving before God punctures salvation itself.

But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain. Galatians 4:9-11 (ESV)

Judaism had detailed dietary laws about what you could eat and couldn't eat. One of the main points of the book of Hebrews is the Jewish ceremonial and dietary laws are no longer in effect. They were a shadow, but Christ is the reality they pointed to. Christ is literally called the *telos*. *Telos* means *end* or *fulfillment*. So Christ fulfills the Old Testament Jewish systems so we don't follow them in church anymore because all the Jewish regulations did was point to Christ. Now that we have Christ, why follow them.

by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Ephesians 2:15-18

The only way we have a relationship with God is through our faith in Jesus and to add anything to simple trust in him is not to *improve* our faith but puncture salvation itself.

Today I don't see most people struggling with a desire to add Jewish laws to Jesus. Earlier I said we would talk about what to do when we are overcome by the guilt of our sin. What should we do when we wake up in the morning after spiritual failure? We want to get down on our knees and say, "God, I am sorry, I will try harder. I will skip lunch. I will fast tomorrow, I will read my Bible for 30 minutes every morning this week, I will help at the nursing home. I will, ... I will be better"

The harder we try to be better, the less grace we claim to need. On the mornings after a spiritual failure, don't promise God you will be better. Get down on your knees and thank God for his grace through Christ. The morning after a spiritual failure, the breakfast you need is a fresh wave of understanding of God's grace through Christ for us. *Grace is the breakfast of spiritual champions.*

If you want to be strong in your heart when you are groaning with a sense of sin and failure, before you go to the kitchen to eat food, go to the cross to eat grace.

For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. Hebrews 13:11

This is a veiled reference to the Day of Atonement which we studied earlier in this book. It is the day when all the unintentional sins of the people were symbolically forgiven for that year. According to Leviticus 16, after the blood of the sacrificed bull and goat were taken into the holy of holies to cover the sins of the people, the bodies of the bull and goat were taken outside of the camp and burned. This was different from other Old Testament sacrifices where the sacrificial animals were consumed as food for the priests. The only nourishment anyone received on the Day of Atonement was God's grace for their sin.

As we learned earlier in the book. The day of atonement was the day that pointed to Jesus. He would be the *telos*, of the day of atonement, the once for all final sacrifice for sin. Jesus fulfills the Day of Atonement. All that was offered on the Day of Atonement was forgiveness and grace that the people simply ate through faith. For Jesus, the capstone of the Day of Atonement, all that is offered to us is forgiveness and grace and we eat it through faith.

So when you feel like a failure, when you feel discouraged and hopeless and dirty, don't turn to food, vitamins, sleep, and exercise. Don't turn to promises to God to do better, to try harder, to sacrifice more. Instead go to the altar of grace, it is the breakfast of spiritual champions.

### **From grace to disgrace**

So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Hebrews 13:12-14

One last illustration from the Old Testament. We learned that on the day of Atonement the sacrificed bull and the goat were burned outside of the camp. Outside the camp symbolized the Israelites rejection of their sin. As we look at the phrase "outside the camp" in the Old Testament, we learn that "outside the camp" means rejection by the people, it means disgrace, it means unacceptability.

The writer of Hebrews says that since Jesus suffered and died outside the camp, we are to embrace an "outside of the camp" lifestyle for Jesus. We are to go to Him outside the camp and bear the same disgrace and He bore.

Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. 2 Timothy 3:12

This is a call to boldness in our faith. Many of the Christians this letter was written to would eventually lose their possessions, family and even their life for Jesus. For most of us, the reproach and shame we face for Jesus amounts to minor inconveniences. For Christians in Iraq, Sudan, China and many other counties, the disgrace and shame for following Jesus is real. No matter where we live, an outside of the camp lifestyle for Jesus means we will suffer, no matter where we are.

When Jesus is the magnetic center of our life, we will live in inexplicable and unacceptable ways when other people look at us.

For example, we will give joyfully to the church and to the cause of missions around the world because introducing others to Jesus is important to us in a way that those without Christ can not understand.

Our young people will walk away from comfortable careers for the cause of missions so that the world may know about Jesus, that is living outside the camp.

Christian families will become houses of adoption where the unwanted and unlovely children are given a home, that is a family living outside the camp for Jesus.

### **Conclusion**

Why do we live outside the camp, rather than cultivating our comforts.

For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Hebrews 13:14

It is not that we have rejected the good life, it is that we have our eyes fixed on real life. True life will be on the new heaven and earth where Jesus is in charge. The only reason we will be there is because we ate grace, the breakfast of champions.

### **Prayer**

- Thank God that Jesus's compassion to us does not change.
- Thank God that the breakfast of spiritual champions is grace.
- Thank God that Jesus is so great that when he suffered disgrace, we joyfully identify with him.

## Hebrews 13:7,17-18 – Why I don't like Democracy

Sign Title: Why I don't like democracy.

April 11, 2010

Last week we had a great weekend at the SAMI Center as we celebrated the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If you weren't able to join us, you missed a great party for Jesus. If you want to see what you miss, you can always check out our web site.

This morning, we are back in the book of Hebrews. It is hard to believe, but after a year and a half, we are almost done with the book! After this week, we have one more week in the text of Hebrews. The following week we will have a quick review of the entire book tying the major themes together. That day we will close our service with a party celebrating all we have learned about Christ's love for us through this book. Today we are still in a meat and potatoes teaching section of this book so let's dive in.

I want to begin by telling you, I don't like democracy. Democracy is as American as apple pie and Chevrolet so saying I don't like it is risky business. While democracy may be an acceptable way to run a nation, it is a bad way to run a church. Democracy in the church means that someone with the spiritual maturity of Billy Graham has the same influence as a week-old baby Christian. It just doesn't make sense. Democracy, as a form of government over the church, is not found in the Bible?

Let me push the envelope a bit more and tell you this is a weakness of our denomination. Early Evangelical Free Churches leaned toward democratic rule. That means the church voted on everything. You had a lady in the church lobbying for two-ply toilet tissue while the fiscally conservatives wanted one-ply. The church voted to see what was bought. You laugh, but it is true! The roots of the Free Church denomination come as a break away from the state run church in Europe so our forefathers were ultra suspicious of anyone who had control over them. They wanted to govern themselves so they leaned toward democracy.

What is the pattern of church government shown to us in Scripture? Let me show you some examples.

Paul planted many churches in his missionary journeys. Some of the cities he planted churches in weren't too fond of him. In fact, in the city of Lystra he was stoned. They tried to kill him. If it was me, I probably wouldn't set foot back in Lystra. There are people in the town who want Paul dead and they weren't afraid to put their feelings into actions. While Paul planted a church in Lystra, he never finished setting it up. He never set up the church's leadership. It was so important to Paul that this was set up right, that he was willing to risk his life by returning to Lystra to do it! Notice, Paul didn't tell them to be democratic and figure it out where everyone gets one vote.



they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,... And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. Acts 14:21, 23

It is the same pattern of leadership we see in Crete. Paul left Titus there to appoint elders in the churches, not leave it to democracy.

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you Titus 1:5

The pattern for biblical leadership in the church is a plurality of spiritually mature leaders, who are recognized Godly men who lead the church.

It is not one pope or one pastor who has all the control. The elders are not *made* elders because they represent different factions in the church, they are *recognized* as elders because of their love for Christ and spiritual maturity.

This morning we are talking about how leadership works in the church and we already learned, it is not democracy. I cannot cover everything on this subject but I am sure small groups will have a good time discussing it. Let's look at our key text and jump into learning from it.

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith...Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. Hebrews 13:7,17-18

We are going to break this down into four questions. What is the goal of a spiritual leader? How do spiritual leaders lead? How should a congregation respond to spiritual leadership? What does church leadership look like in Faith EFC?

### **What role do our spiritual leaders play?**

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. Hebrews 13:17

I want us to notice role spiritual leaders play in the church. Spiritual leaders are there for the profit of the people, specifically the souls of the people. When leaders are leading with joy, when things are going as they should, there is profit for the people.

Leaders in the church cannot and must not be there to build their ego. They must not be there because they love power or control. Leaders must not lead because they want to be popular or powerful.

A special leadership temptation occurs as a church grows. As church leadership positions become more prestigious and the church takes on a stronger corporate nature, there is a pull to place those with business leadership

skills in positions that require spiritual leadership. This is very dangerous. The church is not a corporation, it has corporate elements to it but it is Christ's body that must maintain a spiritual focus. This is not to say spiritual and business leadership skills can not be present in the same person, just that one can not replace the other.

A good question for us to ask is, "What does it look like for the spiritual leaders to profit the souls of the people?" To answer that question, we need to broaden our understanding of salvation. Salvation is not just a moment-in-time, it involves life long continuance. We cannot divorce the importance of continuing in Christ from coming to Christ. Look how the book of Hebrews describes continuance as essential for salvation.

**But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. Hebrews 10:39**

It is possible to come to faith in Christ, but then shrink back and be destroyed. Remember the parable of the sower. Some seed grew up and was choked out by the cares of the world, other seed fell away in persecution and trials. In the book of Hebrews salvation is about continuance. It is those who persevere to the end who are saved, not those who start out well but shrink back under pressure. The aim of spiritual leaders as they seek to profit the souls of the people is to help them persevere. The job of the spiritual leaders in the church is to help us persevere in our faith and insure we are fortified in our faith. Spiritual leadership is not just getting people to trust Jesus in the front of their life but about shepherding and encouraging the congregation in the continuance of their spiritual life to the end.

**The one who endures to the end will be saved. Mark 13:13**

So salvation of a soul is not just a point of decision but it is a continual growing spiritual life.

**How are spiritual leaders to lead?**

**Spiritual leaders watch...**

**...for they are keeping watch over your souls... Hebrews 13:17**

The word "watch" here literally means looking over or "they are looking out for your souls". Let me suggest a few things spiritual leaders must watch.

**... the Word of God**

Spiritual leaders are not just men with authority, they are men under authority. The authority they are under is the Word of God. They are to insure the Word is accurately preached and taught in a congregation. They are to insure the word is not watered down so the people are spiritually malnourished. They are to insure the Word is not lopsidedly presented to the congregation. They are to insure the congregation does not capitulate to the pressures of the culture but roots itself in the Word. If the spiritual leaders in a congregation do not do their job, what will happen?

**We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard (the word of God), so that we do not drift away from it. Hebrews 2:1**

A congregation will drift from the Word. Let me share my observations on spiritual drifting. Many churches do not have spiritual leaders who keep their eye on the Word. The spiritual leaders, who are to be the guardians of the Word, either don't know the Word or they are afraid of being mocked for believing the Word, or they are afraid of their church losing members and money.

If one day half this congregation leaves because of a decision the spiritual leaders make that is an unpopular stand for the Word of God against the prevailing culture, "Praise God!" I would rather pastor a church with half the people who are going to heaven than all the people who are going to hell.

**... Jesus**

**Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. Hebrews 12:2**

This is our theme for the entire book of Hebrews. As we are entering the off ramp for the book of Hebrews, I hope you learned this in our year and a half ride through the book. The Bible is all about Jesus. He is the hinge upon which everything turns. Everything in the OT anticipates him. The NT displays him and teaches us how to live in anticipation of his return. Everything is about him and will continue to be about him forever. The only identity and worth we have is because of Jesus.

This is where many spiritual leaders in churches drop the ball. While Jesus is the keynote of Scripture and the church, he becomes the footnote of many church's theology. Spiritual leaders are to insure the church preaches and teaches about Jesus, not pop culture, not modern psychology. We are about Jesus. He is the solution to the problem, not better parenting skills and money management. The focus of a church is Jesus.

**... their lives.**

**Remember those who led you... consider the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. Hebrews 13:7 ...as those who will give an account... Hebrews 13:17**

Let me just tell you right up front that I don't like this verse. I wrestle with it because it is a heavy burden for me and the other leaders of this church to carry. We are to model what a life of faith looks like. None of us lives to ourselves, we live as a model of what it looks like to follow Jesus.

The Bible tells us those who are spiritual leaders are more accountable to God for their behavior than other Christians.

**Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. James 3:1**

Some day, when I stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, the bar of what Christ expects out of me and the other leaders of our church is high. Spiritual and moral failures by church leaders are more serious than spiritual and moral failure of church members.

Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you. 1 Timothy 4:16

The salvation of souls in a congregation, to some extent hangs on the teaching and the life of faith modeled by the spiritual leaders. This is a heavy responsibility.

### ... the people.

It is a given that the spiritual leaders are to watch over the souls of the people. The question is, how do the spiritual leaders do this? Especially in a church like ours, with more than one worship service, it is impossible to know everyone. This is why small groups are an important part of our church. The only way we can know others and be known by others is through small groups.

Spiritual leaders watch the word, they teach us to watch Christ, they watch themselves and they watch us.

Keeping a watch on things is not the only tool spiritual leaders have for nourishing the health of a congregation's soul.

### Spiritual Leaders enjoy Christ.

Let them (the leaders) do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. Hebrews 13:7

Spiritual leaders model the joy of Christ for the profit of the people. That sounds different from other jobs. Spiritual leaders must find joy in Christ to lead for Christ. Spiritual leaders who are indifferent to their joy in Christ are indifferent to the joy of the people they lead because joy in Christ is caught before it is taught.

This may sound strange but I have learned that the most effective I can be as a pastor is to come into the office and before I do anything, I need to just enjoy Christ. I read a chapter from my Bible and from a book or two for no other reason than just to enjoy Christ. Not for preaching, not for teaching but just to tend to the weed that can so easily grow in the garden of my soul. A similar pattern should be true for every spiritual leader. We lead from an overflow of joy, not an underflow.

When knowing God's Word, exploring it and living it is the most satisfying portion of a person's life, the joy is self-evident. It rubs off of the spiritual leader and into the lives of everyone they touch.

### How should a congregation respond to its leaders?

Obey your leaders and submit to them... Hebrews 13:17

This is a very difficult verse to preach on. That is not because it is unclear. It is difficult because it flies in the face of our culture. As Americans we are self-made people. We don't like to submit to anyone, we don't like to obey anyone.

We like to do things our way. We all have rights and nobody can tell us what to do. Culturally, this verse isn't easy.

### **Spiritual leaders can go bad!**

The other part of this verse that makes it difficult to follow is that, at times, church and denominational leaders can go bad. They do not submit to the Word of God or they twist the Word so they can capitulate to cultural pressure.

The Judas factor is not just a one time occurrence. Satan's best attacks against the church are by wolves in sheeps clothing attacking the inside of the church! For example, Paul, in speaking to the elders in Ephesus, warned them that some of the elders in the church would go bad and try to draw people away.

and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Acts 20:30

We have seen this happen some main-line churches. Paul warned this would happen.

Paul warns Timothy what to do when a spiritual leader falls into sin.

Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning. 1 Timothy 5:19-20

In other words, spiritual leaders in a church are not perfect. Do not pay attention to every accusation made against spiritual leaders but, at times, they can be wrong and they can fall into sin. If they sin and repent of their sin when they are made aware of it, we rejoice. If they sin and will not repent, rebuke them publicly because spiritual leadership is a public thing.

None of the things I mentioned negates the clear command of God, *obey and submit to your spiritual leaders*. It puts certain qualifications on it. If a churches or denominations spiritual leadership has left the word of God, if a churches spiritual leadership has its eyes off the profit of the souls of the people; it becomes hard to stay in a church if there is no repentance of the leaders. It becomes hard to obey and submit to leaders who are leading away from God's Word. If there is a struggle to submit and obey the spiritual leaders in a church because they have clearly departed from Scripture, we do not act like Junior High Students and build a camp. We deal with the leaders directly and if necessary we may even need to walk away from the church because we can not, in good conscience, submit to the leadership. When this is done, it must be done respectfully and carefully.

One of the most deleterious things a congregation can do is undermine their leaders or allow someone to spread mistrust and rebellion through a congregation. The Bible says rebellion is like the sin of divination, it is like witchcraft. God doesn't like it one bit. He will chastise an entire congregation for it. Be very careful.

### **A Word on the Leadership at Faith Free.**

I just want to take a moment to tell you about the leadership here at Faith. I want to begin by telling you I am blessed to work with a wonderful Godly staff and lay leaders. None of us are perfect but much of the success of this church, rests on the shoulders of our spiritual leaders.

We have three main boards.

### **The Leadership Board**

The Leadership Board is a group of 9 that meet monthly to focus on the practical and tactical issues of church leadership. They are the deacons of the church. They handle finances, structure and practicalities. I am not the chair of the board, I am a member of it. Members are only allowed to serve two three-year terms before they must take a sabbatical. The congregation entrusts this board with a large measure of authority, but this board brings large decisions to the congregation looking for congregational affirmation of their leadership on significant church issues.

### **The Nomination Board**

Another board is the Nominations Board. This board is composed of men and women whose sole responsibility is to prayerfully consider who to bring before the congregation, individuals they would like to have the congregation affirm, for new members of the Leadership Board. They look for congregational affirmation of those new candidates at our annual meeting. They guard the spiritual gates. Since this is such an important task, it is the sole responsibility of this Board.

### **The Elder Board**

We have an elder team. Unlike many churches, where elders spend their time focusing on the tactical issues of the church, the tactical issues are focused on by the Leadership Board. The elders work with the staff to focus on the shepherding and spiritual health of the congregation. These are Godly men that I am honored to work with.

### **The Staff Team**

As a church, I have the privilege of leading a staff team of Godly men and women on a daily basis. We are privileged to have a staff blessed with competence and Godly character.

### **Conclusion**

I began by telling you why I don't like democracy. It may be OK for a nation, but it is not the pattern of government given us in the Bible for the church. The pattern given is a plurality of spiritually mature individuals giving themselves for the benefit of the souls of the people. Are they open to ideas from the congregation? Of course! Part of spiritual maturity is realizing our need for one another. As the leaders follow Christ, the congregation joyfully submits to their leaders knowing their aim is for the benefit of their souls.

In your sermon insert I have a sheet showing you the leaders in this church. This week, I would ask that at your meal times or family devotions, take the time to pray for our leaders. They have a heavy responsibility before God as they seek to shepherd the flock.



## Hebrews 13:15-25 – Time for Sacrifice and Prayer

Sign Title: Time for Sacrifice and Prayer

April 18, 2010

After 19 months in the book of Hebrews, it is hard to believe this morning is our last portion of text we will study in this book. We began this book in September 2008. I remember telling you this was one of the most difficult books in the Bible. I wondered how this series would go, if you would accept it and if it would change the church. I am happy to say, this series went better than I expected. It accomplished its purpose and re-galvanized our church around our savior, Jesus Christ.

I am particularly thankful for you as a congregation. Many of you came week after week with a learner's heart to discover more about our great savior. You patiently studied the word together and found yourself changed.

I was also changed. This is the longest series I have preached, but it was also my favorite. Week after week I was blessed by God as I prepared for our times together. So with the last bits of the book before us... let's jump in and finish the text!

### Final Words

I want to begin by going to the final words.

I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. Grace be with all of you.  
Hebrews 13:22-25

There is a story about a long-winded preacher. One Sunday he preached past his allotted time (this story is not autobiographical). The congregation was courteous and rather than leaving, they listened to his longer message. Finally, one brave teenager stood to his feet and began to leave. The pastor was perturbed to have someone leaving while he was preaching on such an important topic so right from the pulpit he asked the teenager, "Where are you going?" To which the teenager replied, "To get a haircut." The pastor said, "Why did you schedule a haircut during my sermon." The teenager said, "Pastor, I didn't need a haircut before your sermon!"

Amazingly, after 13 chapters of some of the most heavy duty study on Jesus Christ in the Bible, the writer of Hebrews says, "I have only written you briefly." A literal translation of what he says is,

I encourage you to remember my words of encouragement, for I only wrote you briefly.

I don't know about you but I find those words humorous. This is a brief message? Actually, it is true. For his time in history, the letter of Hebrews is

rather brief compared to many ancient letters. Other letters of the day are as much as three times longer! So while it may be humorous, it is truly a brief letter.

I believe he is saying it is more than just brief in length, it is brief in content. There is much more he could have said about the greatness of Christ he didn't say.

He hints that when he visits them, there may be a Part II to his teaching about Jesus! This is a great point of application. Thinking we know all we need to know about Jesus reveals our ignorance, not our knowledge! Learning about Jesus is like eating chips and salsa, the more you have, the more you want! The more you study about Jesus, the more we want to learn.

Another interesting point is that when he visits, he hopes to bring Timothy. This is the Timothy that Paul wrote the letters of 1 + 2 Timothy to. This comment is important because it helps us tie this letter to the very beginning of the church. It is not a latter addition like Dan Brown's fictional lost letters of the Bible.

**Greet the leaders and the saints. Those from Italy send you greetings.**

This is our clue that the letter was written to Jewish Christians in Rome. Why would they care about people from Italy unless they were in Italy? That ends the letter. Let's jump back to verse 15 and pick it up from there.

### **Let's sacrifice!**

A number of years ago I pastored a church going through change. The church had an expensive organ. The historical worship of the church was always with the organ, all the songs were sung from a hymnal. It was a very traditional church. For many of us, that style of worship isn't our favorite. The theology of most hymns is spiritually rich, but the organ and hymnal is not the style many in the younger generation prefer to worship in.

When I came to the church, they had just gone through a change in worship style. Nobody was left that played the organ with any skill. The church used a worship team with guitars, congas, drums, bass and singers because those were the musical gifts present in the congregation. When I came to the church, some people asked me if I could save their church, they wanted the worship style to go back to the way it was. Even though we sang hymns using a projector screen and modern instruments, for some people in the church, that didn't count. They believed hymns needed to be sung from a hymnal, not a projector screen and the organ should be the *only* instrument played when we sang them. I understand where they were coming from. The changes in worship were too much for them to take.

Unfortunately, some people left the church because the worship changes were more than they could handle.

A similar struggle was happening with the first century Jewish Christians this letter of Hebrews was written to. For over a thousand years the temple and the Old Covenant sacrifices were the way they worshipped. The design of the temple was given by God. Every piece of furniture had significance. Even the

location of the temple was given by God. Ever since they could remember, everything about their worship and the worship of their ancestors was about the mosaic covenant and the temple.

With Christ, they had something completely different. The sacrifices of animals were over because Christ was the *once for all sacrifice* that animal sacrifices only prefigured. The day of atonement was unnecessary because Christ is the once for all atonement. There is no physical house of God, the people are the house of God. There is no levitical priesthood, Jesus is the eternal high priest. Everything about the worship they grew up with was coming to a screeching halt because Jesus superseded it. Does anybody think the worship transition was difficult?

The end of the sacrificial system was not just a tough transition for them to swallow but it was a hard transition for the society they lived in to understand. All pagan worship had some kind of animal sacrifice involved in it. This change was so radical that many Christians were accused by the culture of atheism! Why were they accused of atheism? They didn't offer animal sacrifices! A second century church leader named Irenaeus writes saying the word on the street about Christians was, "Christians have no real religion, because they have no sacrifices."

Did the culture get it right? Are Christians done with sacrifices under the New Covenant? What do you think? As Christians, we are still offering sacrifices, just a different kind. What are they?

### **A Sacrifice of Praise**

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Hebrews 13:15

What is a sacrifice of praise? The second sentence defines it. It is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. A fruit is a natural benefit of a tree or a vine just being itself. An apple tree can't help but bring the blessing of apples because of who it is. A grape vine can't help but bring the blessing of grapes because that is who it is. With Jesus Christ as our savior, with complete forgiveness of sin, with being the object of God's great affections, with the knowledge that everything God does is intended for our good and his glory we can't help but praise God for all he has done. Is there a sacrifice we offer, YES. We can't help but continually thank God for loving us and for saving us and for giving us a hope and a future. Our lips can't help but say thank you to God! Have you offered your sacrifice this week?

### **A Sacrifice of Serving**

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. Hebrews 13:16

God is not just worshipped with lip praise but with life praise.

But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? 1 John 3:17

Sacrifice of ourselves for others comes as a natural part of being in the same family.

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. Galatians 6:10

The affect of God's generosity on us is a desire to be generous towards others, especially those in the family of God.

I believe this is an area God is pleased with our church. So many of you are opening your homes, sharing your possessions, money and time. I am amazed at the practical expressions of love I see in this church. This includes hospitality, bringing meals to the sick, driving elderly to doctor appointments and giving money to those in need. When we make the sacrifice to do good to those in need, yes, we help the hurting but who gets the blessing? We do.

I dream that we would be a church that does not simply say we are family but we become famous as a church that really loves God and really loves people.

If you are not feeling loved by this body, I have to ask you, are you involved in a small group? Are you involved in a Faith U. class? Are you attending anything beyond Sunday morning so people can know you and your needs? None of us can read minds. Allow yourself to be known by others. Don't let yourself be consumed by a consumer church mentality where you think the church is there to just serve my needs, let us do good to others and let Faith EFC be a church where we are famous for loving and serve those around us.

### Let's Close in Prayer

#### Pray for Us...

Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner. Hebrews 13:18-19

There are two things I want us to notice about his prayer requests.

...because prayer changes things.

I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner. Hebrews 13:19

The writer of Hebrews is adamant that the voice of prayer moves the hand of God. It is hard to understand how a sovereign God is moved by our prayers but the Scriptures are clear he is.

In Luke 18, Jesus tells the parable of the persistent widow. It is a parable of contrast. In the parable a pestering widow finally gets justice because she pesters a judge and drives him crazy, then Jesus says

And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Luke 18:7-8

According to Jesus, God is not someone who needs to be pestered to get him to hear and respond to our prayers. If God has given us his own son, will he not listen to our needs? The problem is not God's inability to change a seemingly hopeless situation but our unbelief that he will answer our prayers.

This doesn't mean God will always change things to the way we like them, when we like them. He is God and he knows what the right timing is and what the best answer is to our prayers. We may not understand why he answers our prayers the way he does but while we may not understand our circumstances, we know God's character. He is good and he is loving to us. He bends his knees to listen to our prayers.

**...because purity of heart doesn't mean perfection of life.**

I found this very interesting.

**...for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. Hebrews 13:18**

Notice, he doesn't say he has done nothing wrong and he has always acted honorably. He says, "*as far as I know*, I have done nothing wrong." His conscience is clear. His heart is *trying* to act honorably but he knows his intentions could have been misunderstood. This is why he needs their prayers. He needs God to protect him from *sins he doesn't see*.

When I was first married, I thought of a way I could love my wife. After dinner I told her to sit down and put up her feet because I would put away the dishes. I thought I was blessing her. The next day I learned she was not pleased with my blessing. She couldn't find anything because I put everything in the wrong cabinets. I had the right desire in my heart but my hands didn't achieve the blessing I was shooting for. Sometimes we can try to do the right thing but it comes across the wrong way.

This is very important. Actions may not always paint an accurate picture of someones heart. The writer of Hebrews has a clear conscience and desires to act honorably but they would pray that his actions would accurately portray the motives of his heart.

What a great prayer request! Lord, *keep me from the sins I don't see*. Lord keep me from people thinking the wrong thing when I am trying to do the right thing. This week, let's make that our prayer.

**Let Me Pray for You**

Finally, we have this beautiful prayer where he closes by praying for them. It is a prayer that that gives all the honor to Christ. Christ was raised from the dead because of the acceptable sacrifice of his blood. Christ began the new covenant. May Christ equip us with everything we need to do his will. May he work in us what is pleasing in his sight so there would be more glory to Jesus Christ forever.

## Conclusion

As I close I want to pray this prayer over us this morning as a benediction.

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, 21 equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.  
Hebrews 13:20-21

## Hebrews – The Lessons to Remember

Sign Title: Hebrews, the lessons to remember

April 25, 2010

This is it! The last message from the book of Hebrews. It was an incredible journey. Before we moved on, I wanted to take this last week for us to look back on some of the life changing lessons in Hebrews. I want to tell you ahead of time how we will close this last message. If God has done one or more of these things in you, through His Word in the book of Hebrews, I hope you will come forward to be a visual representation of the power of God's Word.

- If you were converted to Christ and brought to saving faith in Him.
- If you were straying from Christ and God's word awakened you spiritually and brought you back to a serious pursuit of God.
- If during our studies in Hebrews you were able to renounce some besetting sin or gain some measure of victory over it.
- If you were restored in a broken relationship.
- If you came to a major new way of viewing the world and your identity in Christ.
- If you gained major insight into the nature of God, his ways, and his plans for us through Christ.
- If you have entered a crisis and found strength to carry on through learning to rely on Christ.

If any of these steps of spiritual growth took place in your life during this series, I ask you to come forward and join me in prayer as a visual representation of the power of God's Word in our lives.

Here are the lessons I want us to remember.

**1. It doesn't get any bigger or better than Jesus.** *Christ is the greatest thing God has done or could do.*

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high... Hebrews 1:1-3

Who is the most significant being outside of God the Father? Jesus! After the father, it doesn't get any bigger than Jesus. Not only does nothing get bigger than Jesus, but nothing gets better than what he did. Jesus humbled himself to fuse humanity with his divinity. He humbled himself to the point of death and died a humiliating and agonizing death on a cross to pay for our sins. After paying for sin and canceling sin's power against us, he rose from the grave to conquer death.



Not only can things not get any bigger or better but they can't get any simpler. To experience full forgiveness of sin, all we have to do is place our trust in Jesus, to make Jesus the king of our life. It doesn't get any bigger, better or simpler than what God did for us through Jesus. Can anyone think of a grander display of God's love for us than what Jesus did? Try to find something bigger or better than him!

Do you know what this means? Sometimes we wonder if we are significant. We wonder if we are loved. We wonder if we have value. If we were dead and gone tomorrow, someone would take our place. We know we are expendable.

This morning, there is limited value to who we are as an employee, a spouse or a parent but there is incomprehensible value bestowed upon us when Jesus loves us. When God sent his son to die for us, it was not because we were filled with value but God chose to value us by sending his son to die for us. That gives us value and significance we didn't have. It gives us supernatural levels of value and significance that is out of this world.

You are incredibly significant and valuable, not because of who you are, but because you are the object of God's undeserved affection. Christ dying for us *makes us significant*. We are adopted brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. Identity can not get any more significant than identification with Jesus.

## **2. Christ is the ultimate high priest. *He understands my weakness and pain***

For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Hebrews 2:18

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:15-16

This past week I met with a friend who lost someone they love to cancer. They are walking a tough valley. He told me he had a chance to talk to someone else who lost a loved one to cancer. He said, it was amazing, they understood his pain. They didn't just read about it in a book or study it in class, they lived it.

In the Old Testament times the priests listened to the peoples struggles, cares and worries so they could intercede to God for them. One of the best things about having a priest was his ability to understand you. Priests had the same weaknesses and struggles as everyone else so they could deal gently with weaknesses because they had their own.

While Jesus, as God, knew all things, before coming to earth and fusing the fullness of his deity with humanity, he understood weakness and pain, but he didn't understand it from human experience. The point is, after Jesus lived and suffered, we now have a Jesus who really understands weakness and temptation. He doesn't just know about the road we walk, he walked the road. Jesus knows what it is like to have friends turn their back on you. Jesus knows

what it is like to lose someone we love. Jesus understands the pull of temptation and the drain of weakness and fatigue. Jesus actually lived it.

When we go through hard times, there is nothing like the healing balm of a friend to come alongside us who walked the same path and made it through. They have a connection like no other. Friends, there is no one who understands the tough stuff of life better than Jesus. There is no better shoulder to cry on. There is no more empathy to be found than in the arms of Jesus. After rising from the dead Jesus ascended to the right hand of God the Father where he is our permanent high priest and advocate. He says, Father, I understand and know their pain because I lived it. I am advocating for them because I understand.

Before we leave Hebrews, remember the great high priest and advocate to the father we have in Jesus.

**3. Jesus saves to the uttermost.** *His death perfected for all time those who are being saved.*

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. Hebrews 7:25

For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. Hebrews 10:14

What happens after we've blown it? We are filled with guilt and shame. Guilt is anger or remorse for what we have done. After a while the guilt of repeated failures work their way into something deeper called shame. Shame is when we no longer feel bad for what we did, it is when we feel bad for who we are.

Trying to heal the wound of guilt and shame we look for some kind of penance. We ask ourselves, what can I do to make it right? We promise God we will read our Bible every day or we will do 50 Hail Mary's or we will not drink pop for a week. We do all kinds of things to punish ourselves or to make ourselves worthy of God's forgiveness.

As Christians, don't allow yourself to wallow in the mud of guilt and shame. Don't lose site of the greatness of what Jesus did for you. His sacrifice for sin is so great and so complete that for us to think there is any kind of penance or discipline we can put ourselves under to make us more worthy of forgiveness is an insult to him. It is misunderstanding the greatness of our sin and thinking it is something we can take care of and it is misunderstanding the greatness of what Christ has done because we think there is something left for us to do to find forgiveness.

This is not to say sin is insignificant but if God has forgiven us of our sin to the uttermost, how dare we have higher standards for forgiveness than he does. How dare we think there is something more we need to do.

Satan wants you to be filled with guilt and shame because it makes you lose perspective of the greatness of what God has done for us. It robs you of the joy and forgiveness that are ours through Jesus.

For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Hebrews 9:13-14

When you walk out of here this morning, don't forget that because of Christ, we are completely forgiven of all our sin, our consciences are now clear. Before we leave Hebrews, remember that Jesus saves us from sin to the uttermost

**4. We are new covenant celebrators, not old covenant sacrificers.** *Christ abolished the old covenant.*

But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Hebrews 10:3-4

When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second. Hebrews 10:8-10

One of the great questions about the Bible is the relationship between the Old Testament and the New. The Old Testament was dominated by rituals, ceremonies and holidays. It was a completely different way of life. Was the Old Covenant bad? Of course not, God gave it to us. The Old Covenant was given by God to show us our sin, not save us from sin. With the coming of Christ, God literally abolished the Old Covenant. Maybe a better term would be fulfilled. He is everything the Old Covenant pointed toward. When the new covenant came, the old covenant didn't become bad, it became obsolete.

Worship in New Covenant times is no longer about sacrifices for sin, it is *celebration* of forgiven sins, it is *anticipation* of Jesus' return, it is about greater *identification* with Jesus, our savior and king. When we come to church each week, we come to a party. New covenant worship is a weekly party about Jesus. It is about expanding and unfolding the greatness of Jesus.

It really irritates me when church is boring. If church is boring, the reason it is boring is because the worship isn't about Jesus. How can brothers and sisters of Christ look at Jesus and not be fascinated, not be filled with awe and celebration? A boring church is a church that didn't invite Jesus to the party. Before we leave Hebrews, remember we are new covenant celebrators, not old covenant sacrificers.

## 5. Don't fall away from Jesus. *There is no plan B.*

As I reread Hebrews this week, it struck me how many straight-up unashamed warning passages there are in Hebrews. There are dire consequences for spiritual drifters!

Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? Hebrews 2:1-3

For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. Hebrews 3:14

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. Hebrews 4:11

Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. Hebrews 10:35-36

Scary passages in Hebrews about spiritual drifting is one of the reasons pastors don't like to teach this book. The bottom line on spiritual drifting is really pretty simple. If we drift away from Jesus, there is no plan B. There is nothing more God can do to save us. Christ is the heir of all things in eternity. You can bow your knee to Buddha in eternity if you want but you will be doing it in hell. God has one plan and there is nothing else he can do to save us besides Jesus. The writer of Hebrews wants us to quake in our boots over the devastating consequences of either outright rebellion against Christ when we know better or subtly drifting away from Christ thinking that he is just one of many ways to God. In our ultra tolerant culture where the only thing that isn't tolerated is truth, we need to think about this carefully.

Teenagers, you will go through a time when Satan will push temptations your way to draw you away from Jesus. You will have teachers who will ridicule you in class. It is coming. You will be told that you don't have a brain in your head if you follow Christ. Don't turn your back on Jesus. God will reward you for being faithful to the end.

## 6. Expect tough choices. *Living by faith is the only way to please God.*

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. Hebrews 11:6

God will put us in situations that are trials and tests. The question is, will we live by what we know is true because of our spiritual eyes or will we follow just what we see with our physical eyes. Moses had the choice of living in posh luxury as the son of pharaoh but he turned his back on it because he saw with the eyes of his soul that the reproach of Christ was worth more than the treasures of Egypt. Noah had 100 years of living by faith and being mocked as

he built a massive boat in a field. Abraham had the tough choice of living by faith when God told him to sacrifice his only son.

God will put us in situations where we will face tough choices with our money. Should we save it all for our earthly retirement? How much does God want us to send forward for our eternal retirement package where thieves do not break in and steal and rust will not destroy? Expect to make choices in faith.

There will be times God calls us to take leaps of faith where things don't add up on paper and where they don't make practical sense but we choose to live by what we know is true in the unseen world than by what we see in the seen world.

Before we leave Hebrews, remember we please God when we live by faith.

### **7. Expect Trouble. *God disciplines those he loves.***

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. Hebrews 12:6

For they (our earthly fathers) disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. Hebrews 12:10

Yes, God disciplines us. God allows difficulty into our lives. This is not because God hates us but because he loves us. The difficulty may be there to turn us from sin or he may have allowed the difficulty simply so he can use the difficulty as a platform in our lives for him to show his glory like he did with the man born blind in John 9. The important thing for us to remember is God disciplines us to make us better, not bitter. If we don't receive his discipline knowing his love and purposes, we will become bitter. But because we know God's character, we know he loves us enough to send his son to die for us. He doesn't hate us. While we may never know the reason God allows pain and suffering into our life, we know God promises that no matter what he allows into our life, he wants to use it for our good and as a platform that will allow us to bring him glory. Isn't that what we are all after?

Before we leave Hebrews, we want to remember to never look at our trials the same. They are never beyond God's hand and they are within the bounds of God's purpose.

### **8. The best is yet to come! *We are redeemed for a heavenly home.***

For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers... Behold, I and the children God has given me. Hebrews 2:11 + 13

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,... Hebrews 12:22-23

For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Hebrews 13:14

God's plans for us through Christ are simply amazing. We are brothers and sisters of Jesus. In eternity, we couldn't have a greater identity than this. Right now we are a little lower than the angels but in eternity we leapfrog over them in identity. Jesus created the angels but none of them can claim Jesus as their brother or sister; only we can. For eternity we occupy the role of being a grand display of God's completely undeserved mercy raised to dizzying heights of his love. We will reign under Jesus in the New Heavens and New Earth.

This world is not our true home, it is only the home we are redeemed from, the new heaven and new earth is what we are redeemed for. Our incredible future is only one breath away. As Paul says, the moment we are absent from the body, we are present with the Lord.

This summer we will learn more more about the eternity as we dive into the topic in a 13 week summer series called, The Mysteries of Heaven.

Before we leave Hebrews, let's remember that no matter how tough life gets, the last moment of this life is our welcome into our grand identity in the next.

## Conclusion

We learned some amazing things about Jesus and God's love for us through him in this book. As we close, if God's word through the book of Hebrews had an impact on your life in any of the ways we talked about at the beginning of this message, I invite you forward as a way of publicly thanking God for the new life he has brought in your life through Jesus and God's Word.

Jesus, thank you for loving us. We confess our understanding of your identity is too small, our understanding of your love is too weak, the fullness and utter completeness of the forgiveness you obtained is something we struggle to comprehend. Thank you for giving us a greater view of our savior through this book. Thank you for the wonderful identity that is ours as brothers and sisters of Christ. Thank you for this incredible Christ exalting book. May be never be the same. We give you all the glory for the changes you made in our lives through it. Amen.



© Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the EFCA. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics of study are ancient rhetoric and preaching. Feel free to contact him at [ktruck@gmail.com](mailto:ktruck@gmail.com) or visit his web at [www.christ2rculture.com](http://www.christ2rculture.com)

## Works Cited

- Bruce, F.F. (1990). *The Epistle of the Hebrews*. Revised ed. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.,
- deSilva, D. A. (2000). *Perseverance in gratitude : A socio-rhetorical commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. DeWitt, Steve, *Hebrews: A Digital Commentary*. Bethel: Crown Point, IN, 2006.
- DeWitt, Steve. (2006). *Hebrews: A Digital Commentary*. Bethel Church: Crown Point, IN.
- Girdwood, J., & Verkruyse, P. (1997). *Hebrews*. The College Press NIV commentary. Joplin, Mo.: College Press.
- Grudem, W. A. (1994). *Systematic theology : An introduction to biblical doctrine*. Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House.
- Gutherie, George H. (1998). *Hebrews: The NIV Application Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Mich.; Zondervan Pub. House.
- Hayford, J. W., & Snider, J. (1997). *Beyond the Veil : Unveiling Christ's Fullness: A study of Hebrews*. Spirit-Filled Life Bible Discovery Guides. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
- Hughes, R. K. (1993). *Hebrews : An anchor for the soul*. Preaching the Word. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.
- Kistemaker, S. J., & Hendriksen, W. (1953-2001). *Vol. 15: New Testament commentary : Exposition of Hebrews*. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- Lane, W. L. (2002). *Vol. 47A: Word Biblical Commentary : Hebrews 1-8*. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word, Incorporated.
- Lane, W. L. (2002). *Vol. 47B: Word Biblical Commentary : Hebrews 9-13*. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word, Incorporated.
- MacArthur, J. (1996). *Hebrews*. Chicago: Moody Press.
- MacDonald, James. *www.walkintheword.com*, series on Hebrews
- Owen, John. *Hebrews*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998.
- Piper, John. *www.desiringgod.org*, series on Hebrews
- Stedman, R. C. (1992). *Hebrews*. The IVP New Testament commentary series. Downers Grove, Ill., U.S.A.: InterVarsity Press.



Witherington III, Ben. (2007). *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude*. IVP Academic: Nottingham, England.