

Read Hebrews 1

But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.” Hebrews 1:8

Is Jesus God? This simple, yet profound question really tripped me up early in my college years. I accepted Christ at 12, and the church I attended as a teen was not a place that grew people strongly in the scriptures. So, when my new church asked me this question, I struggled. Jesus clearly is the Son of God, but wasn't it blasphemous to call Him God? Then I realized that was the exact issue the Pharisees had with Jesus; not calling himself the Son of God, but God Himself! Jesus is the Son of God, and because of the triune nature of God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), there is only one God, expressed in three distinct and equal persons. Therefore, Jesus is God!

Hebrews 1 could be a 17 week series, but let's not do that today. Despite uncertainty on the author, the church has always held this letter in high regard as scripture from the early days of compiling the Bible. Chapter 1 is probably the biggest reason, being one of the most forceful declarations of the divinity of Jesus found in all of scripture. False religions like the Jehovah's Witnesses (Jesus was an angel), Islam (Jesus was just a prophet), and others are all struck a mighty blow by this revelation of the true nature of Jesus. Not only did Jesus make these points clear, but the writer of Hebrews demonstrates the first wave of Jewish believers didn't just trust in Jesus, but were willing to put their lives on the line by following one considered by the religious authorities to be a blasphemer worthy of death! **On days you feel unsure that salvation holds you tight due to your sin, remember your soul was not won by some mere man. God Himself came here for you, and when finished, simply “sat down” (v.3) having completed everything needed for your salvation. If you have any worry or doubt, bring it before Jesus. Let him, not your pastor or parents, reassure you of His salvation!**

Read Hebrews 2

How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? Hebrews 2:3

“ Quick! Give me some reminders on sharing with Jehovah's Witnesses!” This text came in from a church member one day who while mowing his yard, noticed the JW's walking his neighborhood. First of all, I was so proud of him for being willing to jump into conversations with them while being a little unsure of how. Secondly, I pointed him to Hebrews 1 which is one of the strongest arguments against the Jehovah's Witnesses (their claim that Jesus was first made an angel and then made God's Son). Hebrews 1 specifically destroys such a claim.

Now in Hebrews 2 the writer continues the thought that people have been and will be misled, so we must pay “much closer attention” so we don't miss real salvation. Unfortunately, some believe that anyone who mentions the name of Jesus must be Christian, and many are deceived by Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and other false churches. The gospel is both simple and specific: it's Jesus alone for salvation. Neither JW's or Mormons believe that, both speaking the

name of Jesus, but preaching a different Jesus just as we were warned about in 2 Cor 11:4. We are the pinnacle of God's creation, and God has proven His care for us, even from the very beginning of Adam and Eve's sin when he provided the sacrifice to cover them (Gen 3:21). **So if God Himself has provided a way of escape, how can we expect to escape eternal judgment any other way? He offered us His perfect Son as a sacrifice; what a great salvation! If there had been another way, Jesus would not have died. So let us receive the salvation. Let us appreciate the salvation. Let us declare the salvation, even to those who claim to know Jesus, but are preaching a different gospel.**

Read Hebrews 3

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. Hebrews 3:12

Can you be an ex-Christian? Hebrews is a deeply theological book on the nature of faith, and the descriptions given at times of unbelief cause some to fear that it's possible for a believer to lose their salvation. This is why it's important to remember the audience of each biblical book or letter. Hebrews was written to people who had been waiting on a Messiah. Some came to truly know and believe in Jesus. Others were struggling with leaving behind the law and religious practices they grew up with. We'll see this really show up in Chapter 6.

"Unbelieving heart" must be the worst word combination available in scripture. The heart is the seat of our emotions and our belief in Jesus comes through a heart trust. The writer here calls them brothers, but that's more a statement of their relationship with other believers than a definite statement of salvation. Those who were not believers will be revealed as they fall away, indicating they may have liked certain aspects of Christianity, but never truly embraced Jesus as the sole solution for sin. They kept their belief in other solutions like religious tradition or personal righteousness. **Do you know someone who looked like part of the church, but completely fell away? How do we respond to them? While we can never truly know a person's spiritual condition, we should pursue these people with a gospel conversation. Don't just ask why they've been out of church a while. Ask them what they've been learning about God recently. If the Holy Spirit is within them through faith, the conviction will come. If they are unresponsive to such conversations, it's not busyness or dissatisfaction with the church that's being revealed...it's unbelief.**

Read Hebrews 4

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 4:16

Few things bring gratitude like getting something you really needed. Seminary was a lean time for our family as I struggled to find work that could fit with my school schedule. But God confirmed his call for us to be in seminary at that time. The one month we were going to really struggle to pay our rent, someone anonymously paid it, though we had told no one of the struggle. Later I was going to take a semester off of school due to a lack of funds, and another

anonymous donor paid for my semester and kept me on track to graduate. These moments of generosity stand out because of how great my need really was.

Hebrews 4 is a reminder of how much we need the very things we often take for granted. God is offering us rest, grace, and mercy and yet we struggle so much to embrace his offer. The most common reason we struggle to receive His best is because we feel so underserving. Well let me clear your mind...you are! We are not invited to draw near to a throne of personal goodness, but confidently to a throne of grace where we actually find grace. God's grace gives what we do not deserve, but in Christ we can let go of our fears and by faith trust God's promises of persistent forgiveness. **If you're struggling to prayerfully draw near to God, there are two likely reasons. First, you don't believe you can, which is a lie of the devil. Second, you've forgotten all that God is offering! Of all your needs, remember as you begin talking to the Lord, that we draw near initially for the mercy and grace of God. He cares about your physical and emotional needs as well, but seek his greater gifts of mercy and grace first. Doing so means that when you are in a time of great need, the temporary problems are placed into proper perspective by the eternal promises.**

Read Hebrews 5

**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**

"Prayerlessness is sin." Andrew Murray's opening statement from "Living a Prayerful Life" stirred up a lot of discussion in my men's group. Some felt that it didn't emphasize the grace of Jesus enough. Others felt that the absence of prayer could never be on par with the presence of something more intentionally sinful like lust, dishonesty, etc. However, as the weeks went on, the guys kept coming back to this statement. I remember one of the guys looking at me weeks later and saying, "You know, I think that's right."

Prayerlessness is sin because we've been called by God to pray (Matt 6:7-13, 1 Thess 5:17). Not only are we commanded to pray, but we see Jesus, the Son of God, the perfect man, was a person of prayer, even when faced with dangerous and difficult situations that tempt us to action first. The prayers of Jesus were often praises of the Father, seeking wisdom and strength to endure life in the flesh. It doesn't reveal Jesus as powerless, but shows that he took on the weakness of flesh, limiting some of his God abilities in order to exemplify a life with God. He also offered up supplications, meaning prayers on behalf of others. When we're in our greatest times of struggle, praying for self is easy. But do you continue to pray for others? Do you allow personal suffering to shut down your care for others, directing it all upon yourself? Supplication is important because you see God working in your prayers for others, reminding you he can work in your request too. **We all struggle with prayer, but let us remember that in Jesus' greatest moments of struggle even He emphasized a prayerful life. If Jesus needed it, how much more so do we? Approach that throne of grace and know you're heard because of your standing as a child of God, and not on your success in the spiritual disciplines. Lift your prayers and supplications today.**

Read Hebrews 6

“We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain.” Hebrews 6:19

Among the items I sold in the SEARS lawn and garden center were outbuildings. I didn't know anything about them other than what was printed in the catalog that the customers could read for themselves, but I muddled through a sold a handful. After several months on the job, a customer was asking me about the anchor kit that was listed as an accessory and whether they should buy it. I presumed an accessory was an extra and unneeded expense, but as I read the description for the very first time, I realized it's literally foundational for an outbuilding! Otherwise, it had no floor and no chance of staying put during the randomness of midwestern weather!

Midwestern weather has nothing on the spiritual storms we face in life. Storms of sin, storms of personal challenge, and storms of doubt all threaten to blow us away! But in Jesus Christ we've been given more than a church membership card, but an anchor for our soul! Verses 4-6 talk of people who have learned the truth of Jesus, and even come into the life of the church, but failed to truly anchor their souls in Jesus. Instead they chose personal goodness which according to the Bible, doesn't even exist (Rom 3:10). We have been rescued by the work of Jesus on the cross (v.6), by the promises of God (v.17), and by our confidence in Jesus through faith (v.11-12). **Think of a recent storm you weathered? Perhaps it was a spiritual issue only known to you, a physical challenge that was known by others. Can you look back and see how Jesus anchored you through it? Do you remember the moments you thought the storm would never pass, and now you sometimes forget it ever occurred? That's the anchor that is Jesus. Thank Him for the way He's held you fast, and that He promises to do so into eternity!**

Read Hebrews 7

He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.

Hebrews 7:27

Who is a pastor or minister that greatly influenced your life? My youth pastor taught me how to really love and befriend people, especially as I became one later myself. My pastor in college taught me to treasure and study the scriptures. The pastor I served as an associate taught me the value of long-term vision for the church. While each of them influenced my life in different ways, none of them had a perfect impact. They each had their flaws and imperfections. While we should respect our ministers, we are not called to place them on a pedestal of perceived perfection. We should not look to them to do our spiritual work for us.

Hebrews 7 is a challenging read, so kudos to you! Who is this Melchizedek person? We don't know much about him, not even who his family might have been (v.3 doesn't mean he was virgin born, but simply of an unknown background.) We do know he was both a king of Salem (later to become JeruSALEM) and a priest. He was clearly a godly man, and a picture of Jesus as

the great future King and Priest. As noteworthy as Melchizedek was, he wasn't perfect. He had need to confess and repent of sin. He had no ability to offer himself up as a perfect sacrifice. **Don't look for the perfect pastor...He doesn't exist. God has called ministers to pray and teach, but always doing so in ways that point people to the perfect priest. You have a high priest/pastor in Jesus (v.26). Bring your hurts to Jesus. Seek your healing from Jesus. Your local minister is a spiritual spark plug who should be pointing and encouraging you to greater power through the greatest high priest, Jesus Himself. Take your opportunity through faith to go directly to Jesus today with any need.**

Read Hebrews 8

But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. Hebrews 8:6

I promised my kids a dog for a long time. By promised, I mean "tried to make something always be later and never now." I grew up mainly with farm dogs and I didn't love the idea of a dog in the house, but I told the kids that once we bought a house in Pennsylvania we could do it. But then I began to push back the promise because there was no fence and we didn't want it to run away. Finally, my mom worked out a backdoor deal with Nikki and the kids to give us her dog in such a way I couldn't say no. I was later convicted that I should never use the word promise as a short-term way to avoid my children's request.

When it comes to promises, no one is better than God. It does seem kind of odd to read here that God is going to make a better promise than his previous one. How can God best himself? It really comes down to who God made the original promise to. The Jews weren't initially ready to receive and understand it, so God made promises through the law of Moses that demonstrated a need to rely on God for personal holiness, and ultimately a savior. The new covenant/promise through Jesus moves us from promises under law to promises under liberty (James 1:25). No mediator would ever be needed between us and the Father except for Jesus himself.

Commentator A.T. Robertson says, "At every point it revealed that Christianity was better than Judaism." God is a promise maker, and no promise was more important than Jesus' arrival, sacrifice, and resurrection. It's a promise that proves his love and desire for closeness with you.

What other promises has God made you? Where have you seen God keep his promises to love and provide for you? He's made promises for your life and your soul, so search and trust our promise-making, promise-keeping God.

Read Hebrews 9

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

If I was on the floor for my Jr. High basketball team, one of two situations had occurred: We were playing extremely well and up by 30, or everyone else had fouled out. It was the latter situation that found me on the floor late in a big game trying to guard a player on the inbound. He was pretty big, so I had both hands on him as he caught the ball and I was called for a foul. I wasn't trying to foul him and was frustrated with the call. Soon after, they were throwing in

bounds again and the referee stopped play for a moment. He walked over and instead of penalizing me, quickly showed me how I could legally body up and to keep my hands off my opponent. "I know you're not trying to foul," he said, "But I have to call that every time if you keep doing it." I never did it again...at least not unintentionally.

Unintentional sin is still serious. When we choose to allow the unchecked lust, anger, or jealousy to leap from our mouths, the intentional sin is pretty evident to everyone. But what about the unintentional sin, or the act that we only later realize was sin? Jesus died for all sins, intentional and unintentional; for the times we disobeyed willingly or ignorantly. This chapter reveals that Jesus has died once to give us an eternal redemption. The high priest had to repeatedly offer sacrifices, for the intentional sins, and then annually for the unintentional sins of the nation. Regardless of our intent, the seriousness remains the same for both. **Do you write off unintentional sins? Jesus has offered us equal forgiveness for sin, whether we meant to or not, but that doesn't remove our need to become sensitive and aware of all our sinfulness. What sins do you find yourself frustrated and even surprised by in your life? Remember first, that Jesus died for all our sins. Second, because He died for our sins and offered the covering for them, our love for him should fuel our hatred for sin. Take time to confess all sin, intentional or not, as sin and seek to work in partnership with the Lord to defeat it more fully in your life.**

Read Hebrews 10

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. Hebrews 10:24-25

Since 2000, I've not had many moments where I didn't have an official ministry role in the church. These have actually been great reminders to me of the purpose of the church. It's not just a place for learning and working, but for connection and encouragement. While attending churches I didn't serve as staff, I joined in to clean the church, take welcome packets to visitors, and run tech during praise team rehearsals. What I found in those moments was the great reminder...church is intended to be a place we connect with others and encourage their efforts by our own.

Today's passage is most emphasized as not allowing a habit of missing church. While that's certainly part of the message, it's not intended to praise attenders and shame the inconsistent. Instead, we're being encouraged to remember the purpose of the church: to gather, encourage, and stir one another up in love and good works. The church is responsible for encouraging Christians. We primarily encourage people to repent and trust Christ. Secondly, we encourage those who have, to hold fast in the challenging times. We all experience up and down moments in faith, but as we gather together, it's unlikely we're all down at the exact same time. It's in your high moments you lift up the lowly, and vice versa. **So how is the church impacted by your presence? Who do you encourage and who encourages you? Church attendance isn't about guilt, but about opportunity!**

Hebrews 11

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1

Teenage boys choose to take on the really hard-hitting questions of life. In one church I served as student pastor, several wondered, "Does North Dakota really exist?" While they considered their question hilarious, it provided a great spiritual lesson for us. I had travelled to North Dakota and assured them it very much exists and people even live there. It required no faith on my part to believe in its existence because I had seen it with my own eyes. Then I taught them our verse for today.

Hebrews 11 is often called "The Hall of Faith" because of the famous names we read from the Old Testament. However, it's not just their stories that are celebrated, but their faith and trust in God for the unseen. We learn here that the opposite of faith is sight. Noah was asked to build a boat for a flood he couldn't see. Abraham was asked to travel to a land he hadn't seen. Time after time, faith was on display as faithful men and women believed God knew what was over the next hill, even though they couldn't see it. Verse 13 tells us they all died in faith, believing in a promise yet to be fulfilled. Old Testament believers were saved in the same way we are, but on the other side of the arrival of Jesus. They trusted in a Messiah to come, and we trust in a Messiah who has come, though we haven't seen with our eyes. We haven't seen the Heaven he's preparing for us. And when someone asks, "Don't you feel crazy for believing in something you've never seen?", we can respond, "That's faith!" **Pray today that God would increase your faith and remind you that what is unseen is as real as anyone or anywhere we will encounter today. God, give us a faith of assurance and hope! Give us a faith of conviction and confidence!**

Hebrews 12

Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2

Marathon training was everything I imagined it would be: long, brutal, and not a ton of fun. I enjoy running, but planning my week around numerous extra training sessions began to rob me of the joy of my running. That's when I turned back to the goal. I wanted to hit the big goal many runners never attempt, let alone accomplish. I wanted to prove to myself I could go further than I had previously believed, and perhaps inspire others to try hard things and find their personal "marathon". As I learned to appreciate the path that took me to the finish line, I found joy in the process as well as in the personal victory.

Looking for joy in the hard circumstances is simply mirroring Jesus. He endured the cross out of joy! Not for the pain that was coming (which he clearly anticipated based on what he shared with his disciples) but for the pain of sin that would be healed through his death. He was mocked and treated as less than human, but he endured it all for the joy of the victory that was won for every soul. As we consider our responsibility to be Christlike, we go beyond just his

words and teachings, but his example in finding joy in the victory that often comes through pain. **What is your excuse for missing joy? Do you believe the lie that your pain and challenges are bigger than most? Regardless of the pain, we remember as children of God we are not forgotten. He is walking with us and always challenging us to trust Him in the moment and to consider the bigger result He is working out. Jesus endured the cross and the shame by finding the joy in a victory to come. There is our prayer prompt for the day!**

Hebrews 13

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Hebrews 13:8

This chapter wraps up with numerous reminders. The spiritual world is real. Marriage promises matter. Contentment is more comforting than wealth. Pray for your leaders. Each one gives us a moment of pause, but perhaps there is no more important reminder than the unchanging nature of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the same yesterday. He has existed before there was time as part of the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He's the same Jesus who called you close on the day of your salvation, knowing exactly who you were and where you had been.

Jesus is the same today. Your moments of failure today bring the same compassion from Jesus He had for you at the beginning. The gospel of today is the same gospel of yesterday, unchanged by an ever-changing world that redefines sin as sane. Paul was saved by the exact same message that I was!

Jesus is the same forever. He won't grow tired of us. His perfect love for us will remain perfect into eternity. We are called to be just like Jesus except in this one area...unchanging. Jesus is unchanging because He's already perfect. **Take up the call of change to become more like Jesus. To be people who are consistent in holiness and compassion, but to recognize we can only do so through the unchanging grace and mercy of Jesus in our lives. Thank Him today for his unchanging attitude towards us, loving us on both sides of our salvation, and enduring with us in our least Christlike moments.**