

HEBREWS Introduction

If you are new or first time visitor I want to explain what we'll be doing for a number of weeks. One of the things I like to do is teach through the books of the Bible – (go online or to our app for some past series on Ephesians, Judges, Ecclesiastes, etc).

It will be a pretty long series because the book / letter to the Hebrews is rather long. It can also be a bit complicated. I actually avoided teaching through this until a few years ago when I tackled it in a Sunday School class.

So why should you hang in here with us? You might be saying, "I'm not a Hebrew". Are you sure?? (Ancestry.com may have a surprise for you). While the letter was addressed "To the Hebrews", it's not just for them.

You might be saying, "I'm not even sure where I am with the whole God, church, Jesus thing." That's OK. We're not always as sure as we might seem. And THAT IS ONE REASON WHY THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN.

From our own experience, or from the experience of those we know and love, we have all seen those in the church community who begin to doubt the reality of Christ, lose their confidence in Christ, his work, and his Word.

I've had two recent conversations with people along those lines and numerous such conversations over the span of my 40 years as a believer. While the content of the book of Hebrews may seem odd and at times inaccessible to us it is really dealing with some very practical issues, which may also be very painful issues.

Sometimes we can functionally move away from Jesus by resorting to a form of religious expression that has lost real meaning for us. We can hang onto external trappings and even behaviors while our hearts are not really engaged. The author of Hebrews wants to remind people to stay connected to Jesus above all Else. He warns them against unbelief, and he warns them against moving toward some religious practice without true religious affection for Christ.

So, no matter where we are in our spiritual life the book of Hebrews will be an opportunity for us to see God through the Jesus lens and it should give us a new or renewed outlook on life.

One reason I decided to teach the book a few years ago is because, RC Sproul, one of my seminary professors, said this would be one of his top picks if he were stranded and could only have one book of the Bible – it ties together the OT and NT – Old covenant and New Covenant.

So, if you are new to the bible, church, etc, then this book can be helpful in putting the pieces of the puzzle together.

IT IS A CHALLENGING BOOK to study, so pray for me and read the book yourself. My guess is that Hebrews is not as well known to most Christians as other letters. How many of you have never read Hebrews? You may not realize it, but there are many familiar verses in this letter. Here are a few...

[1:1] Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2] 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.
(Heb 1:1-2 .)

[3] how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation (Heb 2:3 .)

[12] For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Heb 4:12 .)

[27] And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, [28] so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.(Hebrews 9:27-28)

[31] It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:31)

[11:1] Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
(Hebrews 11:1 ESV)

I was going to go into more detail about the Author, audience, and date, but I won't. I'll let the short video give us an overview.

BIBLE PROJECT VIDEO 8min 16sec.

There is a significant concern in the book about what I'll call "spiritual drifting"- 2:1 – i.e. drifting away from a Christ centered worship and life – 3:11-12; 10:23-25

EX: Sandy J. – letter from– early Dec 2011

Basically, he had drifted into unbelief, no worship or fellowship – it became a habit

People don't wake up one morning and say, "I'm going to punt the faith." It happens gradually over time – you drift – EX: in the water at the beach

The same goes for relationships – i.e. marriage – between the altar and the divorce court there is a season of drifting, bad habits that get engrained, unbelief and then a sense that all is hopeless.

My guess is that no one here is wrestling with a return to Judaism and the practices of the OT covenant rites and rituals. That does not mean that we are not tempted by the false gods and idols of our own age and the contemporary promises of security – having our preferred political leaders in power, a comfortable retirement, good health, a stable job and family, a reputation for godly living. There is nothing wrong with those things, IF THEY ARE KEPT IN PERSPECTIVE.

The call of Hebrews is to see that Jesus is superior to things. The call of Hebrews is to look upward and keep our eyes fixed on Jesus rather than looking around us to others or to our own past.

The call is to rest and trust that God himself will equip us with the ability to press forward in faith. (13:20 – 21). **20 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, 21 equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever.**

As a preview to Hebrews I want to look at some Steps to Spiritual Drifting that we find in this letter / sermon "to the Hebrews" These themes will be developed over the coming weeks.

1. Laziness – 2:1 – 1 For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.

How often do you choose to do that which is difficult and or undesirable to stay spiritually healthy? Do you pay attention to what you've heard?

EX: at the job site or out hunting, hiking in dangerous area, caving, white water rafting, or rock climbing – “PAY ATTENTION” or you could get injured or even lose your life. HEBREWS is telling us that there is spiritual peril in ignoring our souls, so be diligent to pay attention.

2. Hardened Heart – 3:12-14 – 12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,

How sensitive and responsive are you to the Holy Spirit? Humble yourself, don't wait for God to do it. – EX: ice forms on top of bird feeder in winter – you need to crack the ice daily

3. Self-Pity – 4:14-16 14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Self pity flows from a heart of unbelief. Self pity is an evidence of being wrapped up in SELF. “How long does it take you to forgive someone who has done you wrong, or forgive yourself?” What do you think is God's attitude toward you? Condemnation? Disgust? NO, we are called to the throne of GRACE.

4. Restlessness – ch 3-4 this flows from #1-3; there is an unsettled, uneasy sense about your life. We'll look more closely at the theme of REST as we go through the book. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. 10 For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. 11 Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through *following* the same example of disobedience. 4:9-11

5. Lack of purpose – BOREDOM- 5:11-14 this flows from #4.

11 Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

“Can you create ways to stay in spiritual shape by yourself?” “Are you bored by being alone with God?”

6. Pride – 12:1-10 looking to self instead of looking to Christ. It manifests itself in SELF-pity, sensitivity, being easily offended, defensiveness, boasting, self-righteousness, easily compromised, easily angered, fear of witnessing.

1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

7. Low tolerance for reproof – 12:5-11

"MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD,
NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM;
6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES,
AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES."

“How do you handle correction and those in authority over you?”

8. Lack of contentment – Heb 13 5 *Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"*

Spiritual drifting leads to losing perspective as we put other things above Christ. It may not be intentional, but it means that we end up in a spiritual wasteland none the less.

The call of Hebrews is to “remember Jesus” who is superior to everything else. That is also the call of THIS TABLE. “Do this in remembrance of me.”

Here’s something to consider. It is from Revelation 3 but resonates well with Hebrews 12 and the invitation to commune with Christ at the TABLE.

Rev 3:19-20

19 As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be zealous and repent. 20 See! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

I love the way the late Jack Miller, pastor, seminary professor, and author described the way God "draws" us. Commenting on Rev. 3:19-20 Dr. Miller says,

"Some interpret it like this: Jesus stands at the door of your life and knocks; you're on the inside and, of your own free will, you open the door and welcome him in. There's some truth in that.

But really, how it works is that Jesus stands at the door and knocks. You hear the knocking, put three locks on the door, and move furniture up against it. Then the Holy Spirit slips in a window, goes into the basement, turns the furnace on full blast, and sets a few fires while he is at it. It starts to get really hot and smoky in the house, and in desperation you begin to move the furniture away from the door. As you grasp for air you open the locks and fling open the door. Fresh air rushes in, and you grab hold of Jesus with that wonderful free will of yours. Well, sure it's free, but only because the Holy Spirit turned up the heat. That's grace isn't it?"

(John N Miller, Saving Grace: Daily Devotions from Jack Miller, New Growth Press, 2014 p. 356)

If God sets a fire in your basement it's so you will open the door. Perhaps you recognize some signs of spiritual drifting in your life. The TABLE is the place to get back on track, if you come with a heart of repentant faith. If your basement is on fire, but the locks are still on the door, then don't come today.

Come to the Table

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