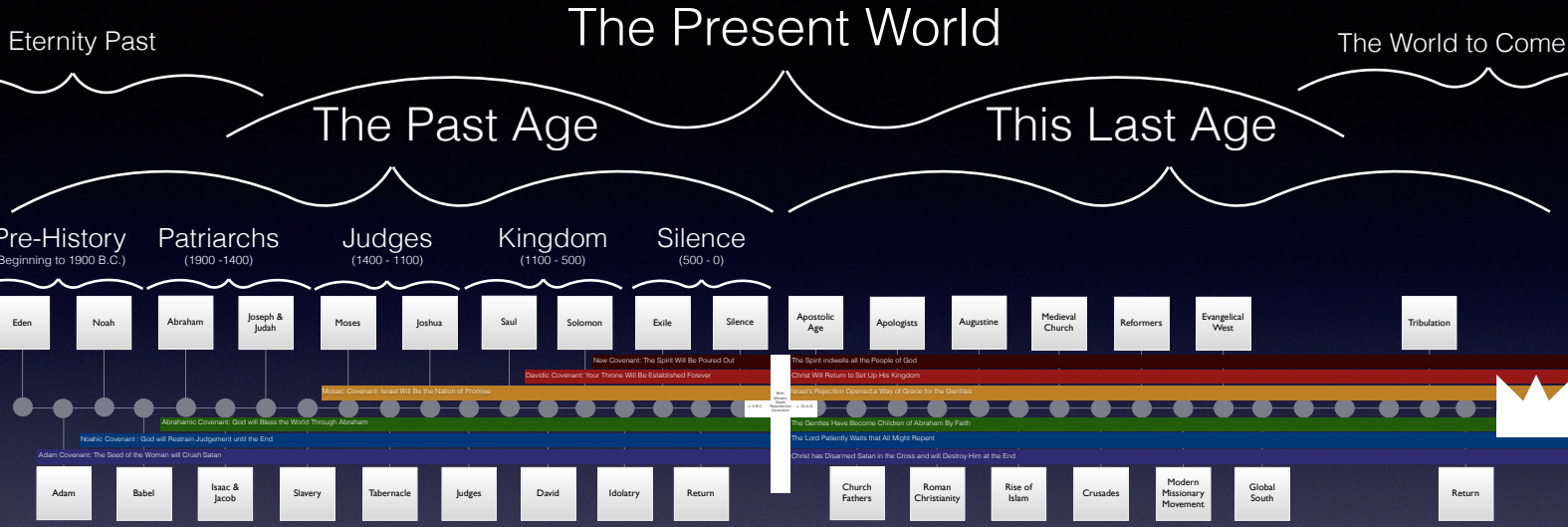


CONSIDER JESUS



THE BOOK OF HEBREWS



Paradise Given
 And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good.
 (Genesis 1:31)

Paradise Lost
 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the Prince of the Power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

Paradise Regained
 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us ... made us alive together with Christ ...and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus... so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.
 (Ephesians 2:4-6, 3:10)

Paradise Realized
 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet and there were loud voices in heaven, saying "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever."
 (Revelation 11:15)

Today we will be starting a new series through the Book of Hebrews. I don't have much by way of introduction this morning, for this whole sermon is in a sense the introduction for the series. I'm not going to jump fully into the book today but instead give you a little bit of an overview, to kind of whet your appetite for what we'll be studying this fall.

I've got a bit of a resource sheet for some of you who want to go a little deeper into the book this fall on your own time. Some of the things that I've been listening to and reading in preparation for the series.

- * Read the book of Hebrews. Download the audio and listen to it over and over.
- * Watch this preaching of the book: <https://vimeo.com/30397355>
- * iTunes U Courses:
 - * Reformed Theological Seminary
 - * Dallas Theological Seminary
 - * Liberty University
- * Rightnow Media: J.D. Greer "Christ is Better"
- * Books: Lane: A Call to Commitment

So why Hebrews, well there's a lot of reasons. It actually started with a desire to preach through Leviticus. I know you BSF ladies studied Leviticus last year, and Leviticus is an important book. It's important in its presentation of the Holiness of God and its explanation of the Jewish sacrificial system that not only allowed the Jewish people to approach this Holy God who lived in their midst, but also pointed to Christ, our own atoning sacrifice and high priest. Leviticus is an important book today, for how often do you hear the objection - how come you Christians pick and choose what you follow in the Bible. You forbid certain sexual practices the Leviticus speaks of, yet eat bacon and shellfish and wear mixed fabrics which are also forbidden in Leviticus. What's the deal?

Also, I rarely speak on Old Testament books, and I don't want to be accused of not preaching the whole counsel of God to you, so I was planning to preach Leviticus. But a funny thing happened on my way to preaching Leviticus. I can't get away from Hebrews. That will make more sense as we work our way through Hebrews, but basically Hebrews is in a sense a Christian commentary on the Old Testament. The author of Hebrews painstakingly works his way through the Old Testament texts, but not simply explaining them, but showing us what they mean now that Christ has come. Hebrews, more than any other place in Scripture, gives us a "Christian" way of reading and understanding the Old Testament. So here's what I'm going to do - I'm going to preach Hebrews, but take it slow so that we'll have time to soak in not only the writer of Hebrews message, but to take in the Old Testament as well, especially as it connects to the writer of Hebrews argument.

So yeah, we're going to be working through a lot of the hard questions that relate to the Old Testament: "Why do Christians "pick and choose" what parts of the Old Testament they obey?", "How come Christians are ok with eating shellfish and wearing mixed linens, but not with other things that Leviticus forbids?", "If Jesus said that not one part of the Law would pass away, how can we say that we are no longer under the Law?", "What was the deal with the temple and the bloody sacrificial system? It's so weird", and also other questions like, "Can we or can we not lose our salvation?" and that one that I know is one your mind, "Who is this Melchizedek guy" So that's what started my interest in studying Hebrews, but as I've started diving into the book, I've become even more convinced that this is an especially important book for the North American church today.

Sermon for a church that is losing its place of privilege in society

What do I mean? Well it is helpful to reconstruct the situation into which the book of Hebrews was written into. Throughout most of the first century, Christianity enjoyed a sort of privileged position in the Roman empire by virtue of its association with Judaism. In the eyes of many of the Roman authorities, that's what Christianity was, just a sect or offspring of Judaism. Being under the umbrella of Judaism shielded the early church from persecution to a degree, for Judaism enjoyed a special status in the Roman world accorded to no other non-Roman religion.

The goodwill between the Jewish people and Rome stemmed back to 47BC when the Jews assisted in rescuing Julius Caesar from military defeat in Egypt. In return Caesar officially granted the Jews the right to observe the Sabbath, freedom from military service (since this would inevitably conflict with observance of the Sabbath), the right to maintain the temple in Jerusalem and observe Jewish festivals, and protection against attempts to destroy the Jewish Scriptures. He also reduced the tribute owed by the Jewish nation. Later on, and most significantly, they were granted an exemption from the Imperial cult; the Jews would be expected to revere, but did not have to worship, the emperor. Were there tensions? Of course, especially in Palestine, but elsewhere in the Empire the Jews enjoyed a live and let live status in their Roman communities. And they in fact thrived, sending Jewish missionaries and building synagogues throughout the Empire.

The early church benefitted greatly from this Roman tolerance of Judaism. Yes, they suffered at times at the hands of fellow Jews, being kicked out of some synagogues, but in the eyes of their Roman neighbours, they may have been even more favourably accepted - for these Christian Jews were different, they didn't separate themselves to the same degree. They mingled, ate and even worshiped with Romans. And so for a time, the Christian church enjoyed peace as their movement expanded through the empire. The suffering at the hands of the Jewish leaders was a fading memory, and now a new generation of converts and children were entering into the movement never having had to bear the scars of persecution.

Yet about halfway through the first century, as the way of Christ continued to spread and take on a more Gentile flavour, the Romans began to catch on to the fact that these, who had been given the name "Christians" in Antioch, were more than a insignificant Jewish sect. They were turning the Empire upside-down and worshipping a new God, whom they called Christ, and whom they believed has been made Lord over every earthly rule, even Caesar himself. Rome's tolerance would soon end, and with it the church's privileged position that they had enjoyed through their association with Judaism would soon end. Between 64-68 AD Nero launched the first official strike of government-sanctioned, empire-wide persecution of the church, a bloody persecution that saw confessed Christians being tied up in animal skins and thrown to wild dogs or being made literally into Roman candles, lighting up the cities at night. Now, note, that hasn't happened yet in the book of Hebrews. Hebrews 12:4 clearly states that "In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." But the word "yet" is important. The clouds are gathering, the storm is on the horizon, and the umbrella of Judaism is now being removed, and the Christians are being exposed. They're losing their privileged position in society. Public opinion has shifted unfavourably towards them. While no one is burning yet, they are daily hearing of brothers and sisters in the faith losing friends, property, and liberties that they had once took for granted. And so now we see the temptation facing the church, particularly the Jewish contingency. To publicly disassociate from Christianity and return to Judaism and its protection under Roman law.

Sermon for a church that is in danger of apostasy

What is apostasy? Apostasy is a falling away from truth, it's a rejection of faith once held. It is not merely sin, it is a total repudiation of a former association with Christianity. It is not simply unbelief. For an unbeliever has never had an association with the faith. An apostate has. You probably know someone who fits this bill - they once worshipped alongside of you, maybe even led a Bible study you attended, they once held to the faith, yet now have completely departed. You know someone like that? Sure, we all do. And I'll tell you, in my experience, there is nothing more confusing and dismaying than witnessing a friend walk off the path. It immediately drives us toward theological questions: Are they still saved? Were they ever saved? Did they lose their salvation? Can someone lose their salvation? Is there hope that they'll return? And perhaps the most terrifying question: if they were once so sure of the things they believed and fell away, how do I know that I myself won't follow that same path?

Now, we're going to be confronted with many of these questions as we progress through the book of Hebrews, because apostasy is one of the key themes of the book. The sermon of Hebrews is structured around this one key theme - don't fall away! Throughout the book of Hebrews the author goes back and forth between explaining a certain theological or biblical truth and then pressing home an exhortation or an appeal to his readers. That's how the book of Hebrews is structured: explanation, exhortation, explanation, exhortation, explanation, exhortation, etc. And while each section of explanation is different driving the theological argument forward, the exhortations are all the same: don't fall away, don't fall away, don't fall away! Press on!

Exhortation section #1: Hebrews 2:1-4 which begins *"Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it."*

Exhortation section #2: Hebrews 3:1-4:16 which include Heb. 3:12 *"Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from (apostenai) the living God."*

Exhortation section #3: Hebrews 5:11-6:20 which includes one of the most terrifying warning passages in the entire book, yet concludes with a great encouragement that God has sworn by oath and promise to save those who persevere in faith.

Exhortation section #4: Hebrews 10:19-39 which finishes with the encouraging word: *But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.*

Exhortation section #5: Hebrews 12:1-29: which begins with the inspiring encouragement to run our race with endurance, fixing our eyes on Jesus, yet closes with one final warning about turning away.

So why do we need to hear this message? Because we must heed the danger of time of darkening! Some of you may know the saying, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." The statement almost seems to welcome times of suffering and persecution, as it is out of this times that the church will experience new growth. And yes that is often true, but remember, what did Jesus say must happen to a seed before it brings forth new growth. It must die. We don't want to think about that part. See when the church is in a place of privilege in society, it is easy for people to attach themselves to the church without truly having real, soul-

transforming, new-life birthing faith. Christians on the outside, but not truly on the inside. Youth who grow up in the church, maybe hearing stories of former generations or Christians around the world suffering for their faith, but they themselves have never been tested. New converts who enjoy the community of faith, the excitement of worship, the fellowship of the saints, even perhaps witnessing the power of the Spirit or giving mental assent to the truth of God's word, but their faith remains untested. And as the church loses its place of privilege in the culture, these drift away, for their faith has like a coat that they wore to be thrown off when the weather changes. This is who the book of Hebrews is written to - to a church filled with believers, some of whom are genuine and some who are not and who are considering going back to Judaism to their former way of life. The problem is that we don't know who is who, so the sermon is for all - do not turn back, press on, press on!

This is what Hebrews are very important book for us today, for we are a church that has enjoyed a privileged position in our culture. We are a church that has enjoyed unprecedented freedom, to gather, to worship, to propagate our teachings. Yet we are a church that is being exposed. The umbrella of privilege is being removed. We've not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood and some of our other brothers or sisters, yet we daily hear of lawsuits and liberties being stripped away, we are confronted with mockery and scorn. And so we are facing in our culture that same period in which the danger of apostasy is at its highest. Yet, what an exciting time to live! This is a time of the purification of God's people, where the name of Christ means something. And so this sermon is not entirely a discouraging sermon, but an encouraging one, as the author writes:

Heb. 6:9 Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. 10 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. 11 And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

This is a Boat-Burning Sermon

So that's the exhortation of the book, but what's the message of this book? While the message is one of the most theologically profound and well-crafted arguments in the entire Bible, the message itself is a simple one - Christ has burned all the ships. What do I mean? Well I'll give you an illustration. In the Art of War, Sun Tsu spoke of creating a death ground in which the commander of the army deliberately cuts off any hope of his army's retreat, so that his soldiers would realize that their only hope of survival lay in facing the battle in front of them. Throughout history it has been the custom of some commanders to burn their boats once landing upon the shore of hostile territory, so that there can be no thought of retreat. Hebrews is a boat burning sermon. The message of the book is that in Christ's coming everything that Judaism pointed to has now been fulfilled and thus rendered obsolete. From the very first verse, the author establishes that God has done something new in Christ beyond all he had done before.

Heb. 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,

There is a complete break from the past that has occurred in the sending of the Son into the world. Now, many teachers have pointed out that the theme of the book is that Christ is better, that he is better than the prophets, greater than angels, superior to Moses, of a higher priesthood than the Old Testament Aaronic Priesthood, more effectual than the temple sacrifices for

removing sin, and indeed that is a recurring thread in the book. Yet that is not the end of the argument, for the author goes on to speak of the implications of Jesus' being the supreme one, namely, that the Old Testament system that pointed to Christ has fulfilled its purpose and has thus come to an end. The Old Testament was but a shadow, but now that you've got the substance of the Son, who is the radiance of the Glory of God, the shadow has passed away entirely. Literally, to these people who are tempted to return to Judaism, the message of the book is that *there is no Judaism to return to*; those ships have been burned.

And while we are not Jewish, and our temptation is probably not to turn to Judaism in our darkening times, the message of Hebrews can still speak to us. For if the Jewish Christians, who had the law, who had the promises, who had the word of God, who were His people, who had all the advantages of being people of revelation, if they are warned that there is nothing to go back to once having come to Christ, how much more true is it that for us Gentiles, who once groped about in the darkness without the light of salvation or the promises of revelation, how much more true is it that we also have nothing to turn back to? So that is the prayer of this series, as we go through this book, that we may gaze into the full glory of Christ, and see his superiority over all things, and hear his message that all boats have been burned! There is nothing to return to, and that we may then press on into Christ having full confidence that He who has promised is faithful.

Heb. 10:19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 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 1:1 / The Son is the Greatest Message From God

Hebrews, a sermon for a church on the edge, in danger of drifting away. Times were getting dark. The church was losing its place of privilege. They were not yet dying for their faith, but as the Christian faith emerged from the protective umbrella of Judaism, they faced more and more tension. And the question facing the Hebrews is would they remain firm in the faith, or would they go back to what they knew before, a more socially acceptable faith. When you're the the edge, you want to know someone is there. To be in the presence of a friend. To hear a comforting word. It's human nature to seek presence and guidance when we're on the edge. And just the right word, spoken at just the right time can bring you right back, stop drifting, secure you.

Its true in the day-to-day crises and its especially true when we face spiritual crises. For its one thing to hear a word from a parent or a word from a friend, but there are some crises when only a word from God will do. It's amazing what a word from God can do. Maybe your fearful and your friends and family are telling you that it will be all right, that they are there, but you're still anxious until you hear from God. Of you feel unloved, that no one *could* love you, and though you hear the words that people say to you, one word from God, is all it takes and you know - you're loved.

Now there are various approaches to God and his word. At the risk of over simplifying, we could throw the world into three camps.

Some people are **Secularists**. Very few people throughout history, though more these days - though still a minority in the world, maybe even still in Canada.

- god is not, or if he is, he matters not.
- god has not spoken in any meaningful way, nor is he likely to speak.

It takes a lot of commitment to be a secularist. It's definitely easier to live a secular life in times of comfort and ease, for that impulse to seek God in times of difficulty is nearly overpowering for many people. Nevertheless, some people are able to do it, at least for a time.

Others are **Spiritualists**. Many, many people today and around the world.

- something is, what that thing is matters not.
- personal guidance is private, subjective, and nearly always affirms my happiness
 - * Tarot Cards
 - * Coincidences
 - * Near-death experience
 - * Peace in my heart, inner peace
 - * Supernatural guidance
 - * Divine signs

The, finally, for lack of a better word, the **Revelationists**. Primarily the "people of the book", Jews, Muslims and Christians

- "God is, and is the rewarder of those who seek Him." - Hebrews 11:6
- Not only that God speaks, but that "God has spoken", he has revealed his will and purposes to humanity.

Now as I said, the last approach is primarily the approach that the Scripture takes. That though God does at times lead and guide individuals personally and privately, the story of the Bible is the story of God's self-disclosure to his people collectively, objectively, and authoritatively.

Hebrews 1:1 / The Son is the Greatest Message From God

Now in the Bible, that God has spoken is generally assumed, not argued. However, while it is not argued, it is obviously supported. Two powerful, nearly irrefutable, supports that God has spoken, both hinted it in the first two verses of Hebrews:

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.

- The historical fact of Biblical prophesy: God spoke to our Father's **through the prophets**
 - How do we know God spoke through prophets, because what they spoke came to pass. It had to come to pass, or it wouldn't be in the Bible. The Jewish law spoke of this test of prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:18 *I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 19 And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. 20 But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.'* 21 *And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?'*— 22 *when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.*
 - Moses is in the Bible because what he spoke from God came to pass. He was told that God would deliver the people of Israel through him. If he didn't succeed, he wouldn't be regarded as a prophet, only a forgotten shepherd.
 - Isaiah is in the Bible because what he spoke from God came to pass. Most of the people were saying trust in Egypt to save, but he went to the king and said the people are wrong trust in the Lord and you will be delivered. If his word hadn't come to pass he and everyone in Jerusalem would have been slaughtered - not in the Bible!
 - Jeremiah is in the Bible because what he spoke from God came to pass. In Jeremiah's day many false prophets were "speaking from the Lord" that Judah would remain in peace and safety. Jeremiah called them out and said that they were making things up and that Judah would go into exile for 70 years.
 - Daniel is in the Bible because what he spoke from God came to pass
- The consistency of Biblical teaching

And one of the primary supports of the truth of God in Scripture is the consistency with which God speaks, which is not only one of the points that jumps out from us in this verse, but it is the assumption that underlies the entire book of Hebrews. The book of Hebrews could not be written if God had not spoken with a consistent voice throughout human history. The author of Hebrews relies, sometimes on precise words or obscure texts and demonstrates how they all fit together like puzzle pieces - the only way that anyone could possibly weave the message of the Bible together is if there is one voice behind it.

This is a powerful apologetic to both the secularist and the spiritualist. For the secularist, who believes that no God has spoken, cannot explain prophesy. The spiritualist, to whom revelation is subjective and private, struggles for consistency - having to consult the stars or Tarot cards or listen for voices day after day - its exhausting.

Hebrews 1:1 / The Son is the Greatest Message From God

But here, in the scriptures, God has spoken. We know that God has spoken because what he has spoken to the fathers by the prophets came true, and we know that what has been prophesied came from the mind of One God for it is consistent.

Yet, there is a greater Revelation to Hear and Obey

For there is a contrast in this verse. *In the past, God spoke [in this way] but in these, the last days, God has spoken to us in a SON.*

Here we see that all of human history has been divided into two ages, and this is consistent with the way that the Jewish people viewed history - that there is an age in which we live, and that there is an age to come, the last age. Now for Jewish people, even until today, they see this last age as still yet to come, for this age is to be inaugurated by the Messiah. Yet that is the exact message of the gospel that we preach - that the Messiah has indeed come and in his coming he has brought in this last age. In Jesus, God has spoken, in in speaking trough Jesus, all human history has shifted in regards to our relation to God and his revelation.

You can see this in your Bible. We divide the Bible up that way, don't we? The Old Testament and the New Testament. We even see this on our calendars. It is now 2015. Why? Because in the past days God spoke to the fathers in fragmentary ways, but in this last age, He has spoke to us in his Son. We changed our calendars to mark these two ages! You can't escape this reminder - every time you look at your phone, know that the reason it blinks 2015 is because God has spoken in His Son.

But now we get to the main point of this verse. For it is not just that God has spoken in a different way - he used to speak through prophets, but now He has spoken through Christ - no, the point is that He has spoken in a better way, a clearer way, a more definitive way.

"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets" - the phrase "many times and many ways" is literally translated, "in many parts and many ways" - the idea being that God's revelation in the previous age was piecemeal. It came in bits and pieces, one person receiving a word here, and another hearing a word there, and another receiving a vision there. They each were given a puzzle piece to set together and try to discern a picture of what God was doing. But they didn't have the box, or even know what the picture on the puzzle was. And the Jewish people scoured over these pieces, trying to understand what God was trying to save to them. The Apostle Peter puts it this way:

1Pet. 1:10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, 11 inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

You ever try to do a puzzle without the box? That's what the prophets were attempting to do over thousands of years of God dropping puzzle pieces among them.

Yet, now, in these last days, God has done something greater than sending more pieces. He in fact has done something greater than even sending us the box. He has sent us a Son. He has spoken to us a more clear word, a better word, a more definitive word because He has spoken through a better messenger, a better prophet, a better apostle - His own Son.

Hebrews 1:1 / The Son is the Greatest Message From God

This speaks to the supremacy of Christ as a messenger. That's what this book of Hebrews, at least this first part is about. Christ is the superior Apostle (Hebrews 3:1: *Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession*) He is the clearest word that the God could speak. He is greater than the prophets because He is in fact, not a prophet at all, He is the very the Son of God. Now we'll dig deeper into this next week, but we are introduced to seven qualifying attributes of the Son that speak to his superiority:

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.
- 3 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,
- 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

So we'll dig into those a bit next week, but understand that these all support the main idea that the revelation that we have in the Son is of a whole different level. So what is the message:

Don't turn back to the pieces when you've got the person.

- To the original Jewish hearers of the sermon, it would be like going back in time, to a different age.
 - Heb. 2:1 Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. 2 For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, 4 while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.
 - Heb. 12:25 See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. 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.
- To us: the temptation is to drift into Spiritualism or Secularism.
 - Secularism is the opt out in our culture. God hasn't spoken to me personally, so I'm out. God has spoken definitively.
- we are tempted as well to seek a new or greater Word, an more relevant word, a more personal word.
 - I believe that this last age is to be an age of prophesy.

19 And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

- We can still seek the pieces, not the person
- So if you're failing in your faith, seek a word from God, but in seeking the Word from God, seek the Word of God.

Hebrews 1:1-4 / Son of God, Son of Man

Heb. 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. 3 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, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

I was talking with a pastor friend of mine the other day, and I asked him what he happened to be preaching on this weekend. I think he said he was preaching on a verse from the Psalms, "Wait for the Lord". He kind of joked with me a bit. Not too theological - all application. He said, what are you preaching on? Hebrews 1, I told him. Oh, he said, all theology then! No application! Yeah, this is a deep passage, sure. We're going to digging pretty deep as we work through it, getting our hands dirty, yet remember, this is a sermon of perhaps the greatest application and exhortation, the greatest message that we need to hear, hang in there, don't turn back hold on to Jesus, hold on to the end, fight for your faith, yet the way that the Holy Spirit has guided the author of this book to get that message to us is through theology, through laying out a table of theology for us, setting out meals of truth, as it were, one by one, a banquet of theology, that we might feast on Christ and who He is and what he come to tells us, that we might be filled with him, and that meal might sustain us through the trials that are coming. For someone might say, I don't need theology, just give me Jesus, and maybe that is fine when the church is comfortable, but when trials and persecutions come and you have to ask yourself whether your faith is worth keeping, you better have a clear picture of who Jesus is and what he accomplished. If Jesus is nothing more than a friend or a slogan to you, he's easy to shed and throw off in uncomfortable situations. That's what this first chapter is about, Jesus is no jacket to throw off when you're tired of him. So over the next number of weeks we're going to be looking at Jesus, this Son of God of whom the author of Hebrews speaks. Hopefully we will throw some application in there as well, but we'll trust the Holy Spirit to do that as well. **The Son. Who is the Son?**

He's the God-Man

You want to sum up this passage quickly, that's it. Write that down. He's the God-Man.

Everything in these four verses each of these seven statements carefully weave these two natures of Jesus together into this one name, "Son". Look over these seven statements quickly:

- Jesus is appointed by God to be the heir of all things: As we'll see, that's a promise connected to his Messiahship - his humanity.
- Yet, Jesus is the one through whom all was created: meaning He's uncreated. Meaning He's of God.
- He is the radiance of the glory of God: God
- The exact imprint of God's nature: God
- He upholds the universe by the word of his power: God
- Yet, after he made purification for our sins: (by dying on the cross) Man
- He sat down at the right hand of God: God/Man
- Having become superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. God/Man?

The last couple get confusing because it becomes harder and harder to separate the two natures. And we're not meant to. In the end, He's simply the Son, the God-Man forever reigning. And that's the main point of this text - the Son is greater than any created being, because as God, he is before all things, and as Man/Messiah He has redeemed and therefore claimed all things. Now we'll look at these things more carefully in the weeks to come, but that's the main

Hebrews 1:1-4 / Son of God, Son of Man

point - He's the God-Man. In the past, God spoke to our fathers in fragmentary ways, but now, in these last days, the Son, the God/Man has come to speak to us.

- Since He's God sent from God, we know He's got the full picture of what we need to hear. He doesn't just have a piece of the puzzle, like the prophets of old, He is the revelation of God himself.
- Since He's man sent to men, we can know that He can communicate to us in ways we are able to understand. He knows what we're made of, he walked among us and shared our nature. The old illustration is what would I need to do to communicate with an ant - I am a higher being than an ant. I could try to send messages to the ants, but ultimately I'd need to become an ant.

Application: Fear and Draw Near

He Is Lord Over All

2. whom he appointed the heir of all things [yet] through whom also he created the world.

3. and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

These phrases play off of each other. They are connected. Now before we look at them individually, notice that they together set the Son's ministry over the scope of all history. The son is appointed to be heir of all things. That speaks of the consumption of history, a time to come when the Son enters in to his full inheritance. Yet this Son is also present at the creation of the world (literally "the ages"). So He is before all things, yet all things exist for Him.

Last week I told you about how the Hebrews viewed history as this age and the final age. Now the author of Hebrews has already told us that the Son has brought human history to its pivot - in the past age, God spoke to our fathers through the prophets, each of them receiving a piece or two of the puzzle of revelation, yet now as the Son has come we now have entered into the last age, an age in which we don't just have the puzzle pieces, we have the person himself.

Yet here we see that history is not just composed of those two ages, for before it all began, there was the Son, setting everything in motion with the Father, after all is said and done, there will be the Son coming into his full rights as heir of all things. All history points to the Son, because the Son is before and beyond history. Even more, he sustains or bears up all things by the word of his power, that's present tense, Jesus' ongoing ministry a sovereign Lord over all History. Not one atom of the universe is outside of his control.

Application: In suffering understand He is Lord over all History. The Romans? ISIS? They are on the wrong side of history. Jesus is on the right side of history, because He is Lord over history.

His Work Is Finished

While the scope of this passage covers all of human history, we are directed to one particular point in time as the climax of all the Son's works: *After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.* In the Greek, the original language, the verb "he sat down" is significantly highlighted. Why? Well, there are probably at least two reasons. First, because He's the Son! No one else is Scripture sits in the presence of God. They stand, or kneel, or fall on their faces, but you don't sit. You wouldn't sit if the prime minister enter the room or even a judge, much less God! But Jesus, the God/Man, the Lord over all, sits in the presence, at the very right hand of God, the place of counsel, trust and strength. But secondly,

Hebrews 1:1-4 / Son of God, Son of Man

and probably even more to the point, He sits down because His Work is finished. *After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.* The work that the Son was sent into the world to do has been finished. Later in the book of Hebrews this is going to be a major point - every other priest works themselves silly, the work never ends, because people never stop sinning! Under the Old System, the Jewish priests worked tirelessly at the temple, every day making bloody sacrifice after bloody sacrifice, bring incense, lighting candles, washing robes and arms and hands, only to soil themselves in an hour or the next day with the next slaughter. Not Jesus. God sent His only Son into the world once to suffer the wrath of God upon sin, to make purification for all those who would trust in him. When the time came for Jesus to fulfill his mission, he set his face toward Jerusalem, knowing that he must be handed over to sinful men, to be crushed for sin, to be that sacrificial lamb. And on that cross, my burdens gladly bearing, He bled and died to take away my sin. And what were his final words? "It is finished." the Son of God, dying to bridge the infinite chasm between God and man that our sins had forged. No man could bridge that gap, only God himself could. Yet God could not stand in our place, only a perfect man could. So how can redemption be accomplished? Because the Son - the God/Man has done it. And when He accomplished it, having made purification for sin, once and for all, God raised him from the dead, and He sat down and rested, having done all that the father had sent him into the world to do.

That's the Son: The Perfect God/Man, The Lord Over All, The One Who Has Accomplished What he Set Out To Do.

You can almost here the writer of the book of Hebrews saying, "And you want to go back to the priests? To the old system? That system in which there is no relief from sin, no accomplished work, no exalted Saviour?"

Hebrews 1:5-6 / The Son: The Man-Messiah Worthy of Worship

What are your sources of truth? The most fundamental questions of life, up there with Who am I, How did all this come to be, what's wrong with the world? What the purpose of it all? In fact all these questions are eclipsed by the prior one - "How do I know?"

In our broader secular culture we've proposed two primary answers to this question, personified in popular culture through the characters of Spock and Kirk, traveling together through the far reaches of space in an endless star trek.

Spock personifies reason, logic, cold calculation. Kirk - emotion, bravado, intuition, going with my gut, if you will. For Spock truth is truth because it logic necessitates that it be. For Kirk, truth is truth because it feels right. Now the genius of Star Trek is that it at times exposed the inadequacies of both approaches - Kirk and Spock had to learn that they needed one another, that they both were limited in their approach to truth, that neither logic nor impulse alone was enough to conquer the cosmos or answer that timeless question, "What is Truth"?

The Jews - the Hebrews - have always taken a different approach to truth - a third way. It's a way that not with ourselves, with our own capacity to reason or intuit, but starts with a God who created us to comprehend truth and then reveals truth to us Himself.

Heb. 1:1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,

God spoke, through the prophets. The prophets were a source of truth. Yet God spoke through other messengers. While at times he spoke through prophets, He often mediated his message through the prophets through supernatural messengers, angels. It's what the word angel means - messenger. So when you read "angels" in your mind, read "messengers". Through angels the Lord spoke to Abraham, ministered to Jacob, met Moses in the burning bush, mediated the giving of the law to Israel, led the people of God in the wilderness, encouraged Joshua, consoled Daniel. They were fearsome and inspired awe. Whenever angels encountered human beings the general reaction was fear - "Do not fear!" is often how an angel greeted a human. And so again, this is another reason why the Hebrews regarded the Old Testament as having the highest authority as a source of truth - it didn't not come from man, or originate in man, but was given by God to man through the mediation of angels. Not that's a source of truth - not Spock's cold logic, or Kirk's calm intuition, but the power and majesty and presence of supernatural messenger. You can keep your logic, a Hebrew might say, we had angels speak to us. Oh you *feel* that what's right for you is right for you? God gave us the law through Angels! You see how this works?

Yet it was exactly that supernatural source of truth that was now a stumbling block for these Hebrews. Because the argument of these first four verses, in fact this whole chapter is that **Jesus is a greater messenger**. A greater source of truth. Because what was impressive about Jesus was how unimpressive He was. On many occasions in which he seemingly could have established his divine credentials through calling upon and commanding legions of angels, He nearly always pursued a less spectacular route. And you have to remember that the author of the Book of Hebrews is writing to a people who are looking for any reason to slide back toward Judaism. And here, the humanity of Jesus was a becoming a huge stumbling block. If you think of the first century sceptic, its now been decades since Jesus was on the scene, and what, really, has he done? Rome's still Rome. Why revere this man Jesus, why worship him - suffer for him - when we have the law delivered through angels? **How can a human being be regarded so highly?**

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Now the author of Hebrews already answered this objection in his introduction - the first 4 verses that we looked at a couple of weeks ago: *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. 3 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, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*

So the author has asserted that the Son has become superior to the angels and inherited a greater name than they have, yet now in the second half of this chapter, he is going to do more than simply make assertions - he's going to go into their own scriptures and show them that their own source of truth, that revelation that they hold in such esteem, that word that was mediated by those angels they hold in such esteem, their scriptures themselves teach that the Son is greater than angels, and therefore the word that he speaks is of more authority than even their Old Testament so they must not turn away from Him. This is a useful apologetic to us - we are surrounded every minute with assertion after assertion after assertion - but assertions are not arguments. If you want to persuade, you're going to have to learn how to defend your assertions. And if you want to be a master of persuasion, how to show those whom you are trying to persuade that their own source of truth points to your position. That's what the author of Hebrews does as he weaves the Old Testament together in the second half of this chapter to demonstrate that the Son, is a greater messenger than even the angels of God. Today we're going to look at the first three of the passages.

Heb. 1:5 For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"? And again, when He brings the firstborn into the world, "Let all God's angels worship him."

The first quotation, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you" is taken from **Psalm 2**, and the second, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son" is from **2 Samuel 7** and the third **Deut 32**. Now, the original Hebrew readers would have understood immediately the connection, but we've got to dive in a little deeper because we're not as familiar with the Old Testament. So let's look at these passages. I'm going to look at the second passage first, for reasons that will become clear, and to do that we've got to go back to the time of David. For those of you who don't have the timeline of the Old Testament right in your head, I've made one for you that will use through this series. So here's the **Old Testament** and we're looking at the time of the Kingdom, and particularly at the life of the greatest King of Israel, **King David** lived about 1000 years before Christ. Now you might know a bit of the story of David, how he was a shepherd boy, not even notable in his own family, but that God chose him and anointed him to be King over all Israel. For most of David's life, he was a warrior, a fighter and God used him to unite Israel and through him gave Israel relative peace. And so here David is at a relatively peaceful time in his life, and he's settled in his new palace in Jerusalem, and he thinks, here I am living in peace in my house, and the ark of God is still dwells in a tent (the tabernacle). Yet then God speaks to him through Nathan the prophet, "Hey, David, did I ever ask you to build me a house? This is not about what you can do for me, it's about what I am doing for you." Nathan goes on to say in 2 Samuel 7:11-16:

Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. ¹² When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body (emphasis, we're talking about a human) and I

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will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. **14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.** (source of quote) When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, 15 but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”

Verse 14 is the difficult one. Here in Hebrews we are told that this passage speaks of Jesus, yet it goes on to say, “When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men.” What’s going on? Is he speaking of Jesus or isn’t he?

Well, we need to read more carefully. The promise being made here is that the Lord is going to establish David’s kingdom forever through his descendants. This is a promise we sometimes refer to as the Davidic Covenant. The contrast is with Saul, the first King of Israel- God never promised Saul that He would be a father to him or that Saul would rule Israel as a Son of God. To rule as a son meant that the Davidic king would be God’s representative ruler from his throne. And that God would never take this promise away from the line of David - even if any one of David’s descendants failed to act in a manner worthy of representing God, and they all did, except one, nevertheless, David’s line would be established forever. So while this promise speaks specifically of Solomon, who would indeed be the son to build a house for God’s name, but also later would sin and disgrace his house and be disciplined, the promise extends far beyond Solomon, to speak of sons, or perhaps even a son to come, who will reign forever before the Lord. And why will he reign before the Lord? Verse 15: “My steadfast love will not depart from Him” God says.

So let’s take this back to **Hebrews**. So we see that to be a Son of the Father, **is to be loved forever**. It’s an amazing promise - that **God will never fail the One He has chosen to love as a Son**. Even though angels are impressive messengers of God, God never promised any angel that his house and throne would last forever. Why, because he never promised to love an angel as He has promised to love the Son of David.

This is the Father-quality love of God. The Father loves the Son and thus never fails Him, yet amazingly, through the Son, we also are made children of the Father and receive the same promise. John 1 is a parallel passage to Hebrews 1 as it also speaks of Jesus’ incarnation - his coming into the world, and in verse 12 “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” We who believe in Christ are adopted into the Father Love of God - actually being reborn into that Family by the Spirit. The author of Hebrews speaks of our sonship later in the book noting that God disciplines those He loves, but that in Hebrews 13:5 - “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” God never promised that to Saul or the angels, but He promised that to the Son, and then through the Son he extends His Father love to us.

So that brings us to **Psalm 2**, the source of the other verse mentioned by the writer of Hebrews 1:5. Psalm 2 is a **coronation Psalm**, meaning that it would be one of the songs sung whenever a son of David would be crowned king of Israel or Judah. So that in each generation, the promise of 2 Samuel 7 (“I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”) would be realized

Hebrews 1:5-6 / The Son: The Man-Messiah Worthy of Worship

as the Lord says, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." The man of Israel, is now recognized as King, the Son of God". Let's read the Psalm

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us. He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." (or, I have installed my king")

I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Again, this is spoken of an earthly king, this could be said of each son of David as they were installed King over Zion. The important thing to see here is that Sonship is here connected to inheritance: "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession." Now, none of the son's of David ever fully came into that inheritance, the nations of the earth continually raged against the Lord and against his anointed. Yet the promise was that one day a Son of David would come who would silence the nations and come full into his inheritance. That's what Hebrews picked up on - in these last days God has spoken to us in a son, whom He has appointed the heir of all things. That's the genius of this psalm - while the psalm could be spoken of at any king's coronation in the line of David, it is only fulfilled in one king who would indeed ask and be given not only the nations but all things as an inheritance.

So now we have the **second piece** of the puzzle - how is the Son, even in his incarnation a greater messenger than the angels? Because **the Son is the appointed heir**. And as the appointed heir, **the Son gains all that the Father has to give**. He gains his authority, he gains his acclaim, He gains his reign. To no angel is this ever promised, but it was promised to a Son of David. And as appointed heir, all nations, every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father, indeed all creation will bow before Him as he comes into his inheritance.

And again, just like the first promise of the Father's love, this promise is also extended through the Son to those who believe in the Son. *Rev. 21:5 And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6 And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. 7 The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 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."*

Now the third passage is harder to connect with the idea of Sonship. For Deuteronomy 32 at first glance speaks nothing of the Son - it makes no explicit reference to the Messiah or to the

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Son of David. It makes sense that it doesn't, for it was written by **Moses**, 400 years before David. The entire song is about how Yahweh, the Lord will judge his people after they turn away from him by sending a foreign nation against them, yet in the end He will avenge them and for the sake of His own name, have mercy on his people as He judges the nations. Yet in this section of **Dueteronomy 32:39-43**, the Lord is speaking. "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me," yet in verse 43, according to the Septuagint, the early Greek translation of the Bible that the author of the Hebrews is using, Yahweh the Lord instructs all of creation to worship "him"! Who is "him"? Well the author of Hebrews understand from 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 2, that the "him" who the angels are to worship could only be the Son of course, whom the father loves and has appointed heir of all things!

So going back to Hebrews we can begin to see how powerful this message would be to the Jewish people - their own Scriptures, their own source of truth, delivered to them by angels point them to the Son of David who would be loved by the father forever, whom God has appointed to be heir of all things and therefore **is to be worshipped** by all, that **God has commanded Him to be worshipped** by all, even by the angels through whom the prior revelation was given.

Now here's the crazy part, we're only looking right now at the Jesus' role as Messiah in his incarnation. We're not yet even talking about his essence as the divine Son of God that we will get into a bit more next week. The point today is that even in his humanity, Jesus has a unique relationship with God his Father, even in his humanity Jesus has been promised more than any other being, even in his humanity, Jesus is worthy of our worship. Jesus in his incarnation wasn't flashy. He had no majesty or stately form that we should be drawn to him. Instead of a supernatural warrior, he came among us as a child, a baby. He was a dirt poor kid and had to learn obedience and grow in favour with God and men as he matured. He may have had acne in his teenaged years. Ultimately, he was despised by men. Yet, the humanity of Jesus should not be a stumbling block for our worship, it should be a focus of our worship - for God has exalted Him, so that He, even in his incarnation, has become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. He is the Son of David, the Messiah over all through whom God will judge the nations and establish his kingdom for ever and therefore worthy of all our allegiance and our worship.

And that always brings us back to the same exhortation - if you Hebrews once listened to prophets and angels who declared to you the word of God, how much more must you give your ear to the Son of God, and not turn away what God has revealed in Him. And that's true for us as well. We can't figure God out, we can't feel God out, we need God to reveal himself to us, and He has by sending us a Son.

Hebrews 1:7-14 / The Son: The Divine Creator and Sustainer of All Things

The point of Hebrews 1:1-4, in fact all of chapter 1 is that the Son is the greatest messenger, greater than the prophets, greater even than angels (messengers). That if you believe in the Old Testament (and remember he's speaking to people from a Jewish background who believed the Old Testament to be true) then how much more should you give ear to what Jesus is proclaiming, for He's a greater messenger. The introductory section concluded with the statement in verse 4: having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Now to **defend these statements**, he introduces **7 passages** from the Old Testament, showing them from their now scriptures that the things he has asserted about the Son - all the amazing things in verses 1-4 can be supported by the Old Testament scripture that they so highly revered. Now, if you just skim over them in English, they kind of read like a machine gun - God says this about the Son and this and this and this and this ... In fact, some commentators call this method of argument a "string of pearls" argument where you just line up scriptures to overwhelm the readers to your point.

However, if you start looking more deeply at the scriptures he points us to, you begin to see that he is carefully building each passage to make his case. Last week we looked at the first three of these and made the point that even in his humanity, in his incarnation, through his role as Messiah, Jesus is given a position which is greater than any of the angels. Psalm 2 and 2 Samuel 7 speak of a covenant God made with David, that God would establish his kingdom forever. Each son of David who ascended to the throne would uniquely represent God as he reigned over the nation, yet the promise looked forward to a specific son of David, the Messiah, who would reign forever over all nations. This promise was the most cherished promise of the Old Testament. From before Jesus' time until now, the Jewish people are waiting and seeking this Messiah, this Son of David, who will come and bring Shalom to the world. In **2 Samuel 7** David is promised that his reign will last forever, because God will never take his love away from the son. In **Psalm 2**, this Son will inherit all things as all nations come to bow before him. And the climax of this first section is in **Deut 32** in which God, says very explicitly, "I am God, there is no other God beside me, stop worshipping idols", yet then pivots and says, "let all the angels of God worship Him." The idea is that when God brings the nations into obedience, he will do it through another, and when all is brought to fulfillment, it won't be blasphemous to worship that one; in fact, God himself commands all creation to worship him.

So last week, each of the passages we looked at focused on Jesus' role as human Messiah, yet even if we stopped there (only focusing on his humanity) it would be enough to concede that God has given Jesus a role and a name higher than the angels. Yet we're only halfway through the passages. And we have to go further, because there were some pretty substantial claims made about Jesus in **those first four verses**. Look at **verses 2-3 again**: *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.* Those are huge claims, way more than could be said about any human being. Each of these statements unequivocally claim that Jesus Christ is in fact divine. That everything God is, He is. That everything God does, He does.

So how can he defend these claims? I mean, this is the heart of it all. Christians claim that Jesus is not only the Messiah, not only an amazing human being, but in fact God himself. Though he is in some mysterious way distinct from the Father, He is nevertheless God himself, no less than the Father. And it is this belief that creates a separation between our faith and every other faith out there. Every other unbelief, every other cult. Atheists obviously - he's

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not God. Muslims, He's not God, to Mormons and Jehovah's witnesses, He's less than God. Jewish people, obviously He's not God - yet they are the one's to whom this passage is directly written to. And this is everything. If Jesus is God, worship Him, if not - DO NOT. Can he possibly prove the divinity of Christ through the Old Testament? Well that's what we find in these next four passages: proof from the Old Testament that Christ is a greater messenger, not simply because He is the human Messiah, but because he is God himself. This is crucial - see some people today act as if Christ's divinity is something that the church just made up, like they invented it, yet here in Hebrews we get a solid argument that the Old Testament itself taught that the Messiah would be divine.

Now **verse 7** we're going to skip over quickly, as he just brings it up to set up a contrast to the passages in verses 8-12. It's a quote from Psalm 94 and basically like, Angels? What are angels in comparison to the Son - they're like winds. So we're just led to focus on the Son again, so let's look at the next passage, **Psalm 45**.

Psalm 45 is a song of praise dedicated to the King of Israel. It speaks of the handsomeness of the king, the loveliness of the princess and the entire royal court, and the overall majesty of the ruler of Israel. Let's read it together:

1 My heart overflows with a pleasing theme; I address my verses to the king; my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe. 2 You are the most handsome of the sons of men; grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever. 3 Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one, in your splendor and majesty! 4 In your majesty ride out victoriously for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness; let your right hand teach you awesome deeds! 5 Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; the peoples fall under you.

6 Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness; 7 you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness.

Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions; 8 your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia.

From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad; 9 daughters of kings are among your ladies of honor; at your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir.

10 Hear, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear: forget your people and your father's house, 11 and the king will desire your beauty. Since he is your lord, bow to him.

12 The people of Tyre will seek your favor with gifts, the richest of the people.

13 All glorious is the princess in her chamber, with robes interwoven with gold.

14 In many-colored robes she is led to the king, with her virgin companions following behind her. 15 With joy and gladness they are led along as they enter the palace of the king. 16 In place of your fathers shall be your sons; you will make them princes in all the earth. 17 I will cause your name to be remembered in all generations; therefore nations will praise you forever and ever.

And there it is, in the midst of this song of praise to the king of Israel, suddenly the Psalmist says something of the son of David that would be blasphemous if spoken about any other human being: to the King of Israel, he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever." Again, he's saying this of a man, of the Son of David, worshipping him, and calling Him "God". Now, there is a sense in which this King is obviously not identical to God, for he says in verse 7,

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“therefore God, your God, has anointed you,” but nevertheless, the Psalmist, who is under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit remember, addresses the Davidic king using the name “God”. he is worshipping the Messiah and calls him God and this is not idolatry. Now again, this isn’t the end of the argument, for yes, still this was said of a human king, but it definitely pushes it further.

The Son is The Davidic King inherits all this and reigns forever, God commands all creation to worship Him, and in our worship it is appropriate to **address the Son as God**.

But still, the argument could be made, that these passages still fall short of demonstrating that Jesus is God. We’ve come pretty far toward that conclusion, but we’re not completely there yet. That brings us to Psalm 102, which has become one of my favourite Psalms over the last few weeks.

At first glance **Psalm 102** seems pretty strait forward. The subtitle is: A Prayer Of One Afflicted, When He Is Faint And Pours Out His Complaint Before The Lord, and it seems to be like countless other Psalms, simply a song of one who calls out to the Lord, and comforts himself by meditating on some attribute of the Lord - here being the Lord’s eternity. I’m dying Lord, but you will remain forever. I’ve reached the end of my days, Lord, but you will never reach the end of yours. So yes, on the one hand this psalm had historically been lumped together with other such songs. Yet there are some things in this Psalm that suggest that we are not to simply take this Psalm as a simple song of affliction that anyone can identify with.

1. Is that really all that comforting? It’s kind of a weird prayer if we take it like that. I’m dying here Lord, but at least I know that you’re going to be ok.

2. The Psalm says explicitly it was not written for the Psalmist, but (verse 18) **for a generation to come**, for a people yet to be born. From the Psalmist’s perspective, he is saying that this Psalm is not a general word of assurance that could be prayed by anyone at anytime. No, this is explicitly prophetic and is for a time the was future to the psalmist. So what age in particular was this psalm written for?

3. The author of Hebrews gives us the answer. He notes that there is a dialogue going on in the Psalm. As we already say in Deuteronomy 32, we need to be careful to note in Hebrew poetry who the speaker is, and when the speaker suddenly changes. You notice that some of this Psalm is addressed to the Lord, “Here my prayer, O Lord, let my cry come to you!” and some is third person reporting “The Lord builds up Zion, he appears in his glory.” So something’s going on here. Now the author of Hebrews is reading a translation of the Hebrew scriptures that even more clearly demonstrates that there is a conversation going on here. In the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, from which the author of Hebrews quotes, verse 23 reads: “He answered him in the way of his strength” - which means that in this Psalm there are at least three people. There is the “He” who is answering, the “him” who is receiving an answer, and the Psalmist who is recording this conversation for a generation to come, that they might praise the Lord. So the question is who is talking to whom? Well the author of Hebrews has told us, that at least verses 25-27 is spoken by God the Father to the Son. That’s is, Psalm 102 is a prophetic report of a conversation between God the Father and God the Son!

Let’s read the Psalm through with this understanding: That would mean that verses 1-11 are recording **the Son’s prayer to the Father**. As I read this, picture Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, a man soon to die, praying through the night, crying out to God until his body ached:

Hebrews 1:7-14 / The Son: The Divine Creator and Sustainer of All Things

1 Hear my prayer, O LORD; let my cry come to you!
2 Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress!
Incline your ear to me; answer me speedily in the day when I call!
3 For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace.
4 My heart is struck down like grass and has withered; I forget to eat my bread.
5 Because of my loud groaning my bones cling to my flesh.
6 I am like a desert owl of the wilderness, like an owl of the waste places;
7 I lie awake; I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop.
8 All the day my enemies taunt me; those who deride me use my name for a curse.
9 For I eat ashes like bread and mingle tears with my drink,
10 because of your indignation and anger; for you have taken me up and thrown me
down. 11 My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass.

Now, what word does the Father have for the Son? Remember, he is the Son of David. It has been promised to Him that he will rule forever, reigning over the nations. If the author of Hebrews is right, verses 12-15 are part of **the Father's answer to the Son**, and here we do see that The Father is reminding the Son of the promises that the author of Hebrew's has directed us back to time and time again in regards to the Davidic covenant.

12 But you, O LORD, are enthroned forever; (Isn't that what God promised David?)
you are remembered throughout all generations.
13 You will arise and have pity on Zion; [You will arise: anastasia can mean resurrection]
it is the time to favor her; the appointed time has come.
14 For your servants hold her stones dear and have pity on her dust.
15 Nations will fear the name of the LORD, (Psalm 2 - the nations as the inheritance)
and all the kings of the earth will fear your glory.

Can you imagine Jesus comforting himself with these words in the Garden. "Father, I am in anguish! Take this cup from me. I'm going to die!" "No, no my Son, you will be enthroned forever, this is not the end, you will rise again and nations will bow before your glory."

Verses 16-23 then is **the Psalmist's report**

16 For the LORD builds up Zion; he appears in his glory;
17 he regards the prayer of the destitute and does not despise their prayer.
18 Let this be recorded for a generation to come,
so that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD:
19 that he looked down from his holy height; from heaven the LORD looked at the earth,
20 to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die,
(salvation that Jesus came to bring)
21 that they may declare in Zion the name of the LORD, and in Jerusalem his praise,
22 when peoples gather together, and kingdoms, to worship the LORD.
23 He answered him in the way of his strength

Verse 24 is again, then a plea from the **son to the Father**, and then we get to the verses quoted in Hebrews and so we know that these verses as spoken from the **Father to the son**:

25 You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning,
and the heavens are the work of your hands;
26 they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment,

Hebrews 1:7-14 / The Son: The Divine Creator and Sustainer of All Things

27 like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed.

But you are the same, and your years will have no end.

28 The children of your servants shall dwell secure; their offspring shall be established before you.

“Jesus, my son” the Father says, “there can be no end to your days, for you were before all things, and you will remain even after all things perish. You are Lord over all creation and you hold everything in your hands like an old robe” So **here we have** the definitive statement in the Old Testament that Jesus is the Son *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* for in Psalm 102 **God Declares the Son to Be the Immortal Creator and Sustainer of All Things.**

So yeah, that’s the Son! He’s the human Son of David who will reign forever and inherit all things, yet it is not blasphemy when we worship him or call him God, because He himself created and now sustains all things - and all of this is found in the Old Testament.

Now, there is now more objection - if Jesus is God, why is there not peace on earth? Every Jewish child knows that when the Messiah comes he will bring peace, and if we claim that Jesus is not only Messiah, how come we do not yet see that peace that was promised and for which we long? For the original audience, why is Rome breathing down our necks? For us today, Why do the Nations rage? Why are millions fleeing Syria? Why are university students massacring each other on campus? Why’d my parents split up? Where is peace?

And so that leads us to the last passage, Psalm 110, the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament. It comes up again and again in the book of Hebrews, so I’m not going to spend a lot of time on it today, but this is how it begins: Psa. 110:1 The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” Now Jesus taught this Psalm and taught that David was admitting here that the Messiah would be so great that even the great King David would bow before him calling him Lord. But notice what the author of Hebrews picks up on, that the Old Testament foretold this: when the Messiah reveals himself, he will not immediately begin to reign. He will reveal himself to humanity, yet then sit at God’s right hand until the appointed time, that is, until God subdues all His enemies for Him. We don’t yet see everything in subjection to Him, but that doesn’t mean that He is not the Son. **See He came the first time to declare** God’s salvation and He will come again to complete God’s salvation. He came the first time to save, He does the second time to judge. He came the first time to make an offering for sin, He comes the second time to make an end of sin.

Now we understand the full weight behind the exhortation at the beginning of chapter 2:

2:1 Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. 2 For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, 4 while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Hebrews 2:1-4 / Hold On to Future Salvation

Hebrews 2:1-4 is the first of many warning passages that the book of Hebrews is famous for. Now some people like to read all the warning labels and are sticklers for taking every precaution. Maybe they are wired that way. I remember that one I had a boy scout leader that made us read out loud the warning message at the front of the movie that we watched. Others live on the edge. You don't even read those warning labels. Rebel. You probably rip the tags off your mattress and don't tumble wash your sweaters.

Now in the book of Hebrews, you can't get away from these warning passages, they dominate the book. In fact, the point of the whole book is to warn these Hebrew Christians not to forsake Christ and return to their old ways of life.

Why do we need these warning passages?

1. Some would say we don't need them for theological reasons. Once saved, always saved right? Isn't God strong enough to keep those who come to faith in him? I walked down the aisle so I'm a Christian, always going to be a christian, even if I stop being a Christian I'll still be a Christian.
2. Some would say that we don't need them for psychological reasons. Don't warning people only try to get them to believe out of fear, shouldn't we just tell them God loves them and sparkle up the gospel with rainbows and lollipops and it will be so sweet that people will come to find Jesus? Well, the authors of Scriptures thought differently. They warned people about the coming wrath. Jesus himself thought differently. He warned people of the coming judgement.
3. Some would say that we don't need them for ecclesiastical reasons. Because everyone here is saved - they all say they are Christians and they all look like Christians and talk like Christians and take communion like Christians and got baptized like Christians. Now on the one hand, we all know how easy it is to fake all that stuff. Some of us are really good actors. And its not that hard. But, this first warning passage actually gives us a another reason why we need to preach warning passages even to the choir. Because when people drop out of the faith, they don't just drop out of the faith - they drift away. Let's look at the passage.

—> Therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

The warning: —> lest we drift away.

As I said before: when people drop out of the faith, they don't just drop out of the faith - they drift away. Now, the words "From it" are added to your English translations - they are not in the original, so for right now ignore them and just focus on the warning, lest we drift away. What's that look like, well, there are two ways of understanding it. The first way is to understand it as "drift pass". Last summer we took the youth camping, and one of the boats drifted past. These youth were never on the shore, they were just floating by, this would be a person who come to hear of Christ, shows interest for a while, but then other things claim their attention and they just drift pass.

The other way to understand it is "to drift off". You ever had a boat or a raft tied up to the shore and you think its fastened tight and later you see it drifting away? That's a picture of a person who you thought was securely fastened, yet slowly, almost unnoticeably, they drifted.

Hebrews 2:1-4 / Hold On to Future Salvation

Therefore:

The “therefore” reminds us that this is the conclusion of what has been taught in chapter one.

—> **That God has spoken in His Son.**

We must:

This is not optional for us, that is, if we do not want to fall into the warning, if we are not going to drift away, there is not some optional program of perseverance. To persevere in the faith, we must, it is necessary that we pay close attention.

Pay much closer attention:

Why much closer attention?

- Is it because God has spoken less clearly? No, in fact he has spoken more clearly. Remember, in the past he spoke bit by bit, piece by piece, but now he has spoken in a person: a Son who is the radiance of his glory the exact imprint of His nature, the Son is everything God could ever will to convey to us about who He is He has revealed to us in the Son.
- Is it because God has spoken less openly, as if it is some sort of well-kept secret that we have to search out? No, look at verses 3-4: *It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, 4 while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.* This was all done openly and declared publicly and attested miraculously through signs and wonders so that we could not miss that God had spoken.
- The reason we are to pay much closer attention to what God has spoken to us in Jesus, is because we are assured condemnation if we don't. The whole passage is called an *a fortiori* argument. This type of argument comes up again and again in Hebrews. It means that you argue from the lesser to the great. For example, how can you expect to lift 100 pounds if you can't lift ten. Or if you obeyed your teacher, wouldn't you obey your principal? Or in this case, if you have trusted in the former words that God spoke through the prophets and angels, how much more must you pay attention to what the Son has said? *since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? —> That's the reason* we have to pay much more close attention to what we have heard, because if we do not, we drift away and if we drift away, we are assured condemnation. that which we neglect, we drift away from
 - * A relationship, for example, your wife, or family
 - * Church fellowship: consider his to stir one another one to good deeds.
 - * Jesus Christ himself.
- Just to be careful here: we are not assured condemnation because *every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution*, He's not saying that. You can live a very defeated and miserable Christian life if you think that's what this verse is saying. The book of Hebrews is not about the sins we commit from day to day. Remember, he's arguing here from lesser to greater, and he's contrasting the law given in the Old Testament to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The idea is if the law would judge every single one of those daily sins, how much more will we be judged if we, through neglect and rebellion against the Son of God turn away from God himself? Remember, we're speaking to a people who are tempted to do just that. To deny Christ and turn away from him and reject that word that is being preached to them - that's what is at stake here, not those day to day sins. The danger warned against in this passage is not that we would be condemned over our day to day sins, its that we drift away altogether.

To what we have heard

Now notice something important here. He does not say at this point, we must pay closer attention to Christ. Later in the book He does. In chapter 3:1 he says, let us consider Jesus, our apostle and high priest. In chapter 12:2 in the translation I memorized in high school: let us fix our eyes in Jesus the author and the finisher of our faith. So yes in other places he says to pay attention, consider and fix our eyes on Jesus, but here he says we must pay closer attention to what we have heard. Right because that's his point in these first chapters: that in Christ, God has spoken to us. Okay, so what has God spoken to us about in Christ, that we are to pay closer attention to? Verse 3: *how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord ...* So what has God spoken to us in his Son? He has declared to us —> **this great salvation**. Now let's break that down a little further.

1. Justification - our past salvation. At first we might think this is what he's talking about. Obviously if we neglect to respond to the message of how we can be reconciled to God, then we are in danger of coming judgement. But that's not the salvation to which we are referring.
2. So perhaps he's speaking of our Sanctification - our present salvation. Our growth in holiness. Surely this must be the case, for as James says, faith without works is a dead faith, it is not operative, and so we must diligently work out our salvation in fear in trembling, we must grow in grace to crucify sin and find our identity in Christ, and yes, that is all true, but that is also not the salvation to which we are referring.
3. Future Salvation - glorification. He's introduced this future salvation in 1:14: *Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those **who are to inherit salvation?*** - this is future salvation. And it is confirmed that he is speaking of future salvation in verse 2:5: *For it was not to angels that God subjected **the world to come, of which we are speaking.***

So this is really important, in fact remember, he's told us this is necessary: Somehow paying close attention to what Christ has declared about future salvation, is necessary so that we do not drift away. So what did Christ teach about this future salvation?

1. **Christ taught us to repent for the kingdom of God is at hand:** Matt. 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
2. **Christ taught us to pray that the Father's kingdom come on earth as in Heaven:** Matthew 6:9 Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
3. **Christ taught us that his kingdom is worth living for**
 1. **It's worth losing worry over:** Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.
 2. **It's worth losing security over:** Matt. 13:44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.
 3. **It's worth losing family over:** Luke 18:29-30 "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers* or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, 30 who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."
 4. **It's worth losing pride over:** Matt. 18:3 and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.
 5. **It's worth losing sex over:** Matt. 19:12 For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are

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eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.”

6. **It's worth suffering over:** Matt. 16:24 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?”
4. **All this idea of future salvation wrapped up in that word inheritance.** All 1:14 *for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?* We are to keep our inheritance in front of us, that is what keeps us from drifting away.

That's future salvation, but it is so much “now” that it invades our soul and keeps us from drifting.

1. It's better than entertainment: A vision of future salvation, tasting that glory which is far greater than the meaningless pursuits that we fill our days with.
2. It sustains you through the toil of life. Your life and your work are not meaningless.
3. It emboldens our witness and our acts of love.

Eph. 1:11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Eph. 1:15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

Hebrews 2:5-9 / Why Was It Necessary for God to Become Man?

So far in Hebrews 1 it has been established that Jesus is the greatest messenger/apostle of God, being in his very nature God himself. And that's important - I mean, if I have a message to give to someone, the person whom I can trust most to communicate that message is obviously myself. And so God, in declaring his message of salvation to us, came himself into the world, in the person of the Son, to deliver His message himself.

Yet to the Hebrew mind that only left a more disturbing question: Why was it necessary for God to become a man? I mean, of all the ways the God could have spoken to us, why would he come as a human being? Think of all the magnificent ways he spoke in the Old Testament - in a cloud of fire, in a trembling mountain, in a voice that shook the heavens, though terrifying angels, enflamed bushes, fire from heaven. What is a human being compared to those things? I mean, if God wanted to say something to us, why didn't he just say it to us? We still turn up our noses on the idea of God coming and speaking to us as a man. How many times have you ever wished that God would just open up heaven to speak to you? What would God the Son ever gain from coming as the son of man? A baby born, a child reared, and young man learning a hard craft, hands growing calloused through physical labour, a wandering teacher prone to hunger, exhaustion, rejection, and sorrow - what is gained? What is man? As one Jewish rabbi of the time said "His body is but the bread of worms; he is so much spit, mere nipped-off clay" (1QS XI, 21-22a).

The humanity of Jesus was a stumbling block to people of that time trying to understand who Jesus is. The Jewish God never had any trouble speaking to his people, so why would He have to come as a human being? Doesn't make sense! It's possibly even blasphemous! And the Roman gods never seemed to have any trouble disguising themselves as people - there are tons of stories of greek and roman gods taking a physical form, but they never *became* human.

The rest of Hebrews chapter 2 is going to answer this question in a profound way that leads into one of the major themes of the book. The key to understand the first two chapters of Hebrews is given to us in a summary statement at the beginning of Chapter 3. *3:1: Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession.* It helps you understand the art I made up for this series. Now, in chapter 1, We've already established that Jesus is the apostle of our confession - the great messenger of God, but now in chapter 2, we will see how this question of "why was it necessary for Jesus to become man?" positions us to see Jesus as our great high priest, and to begin to explain to us what that means. Very simply, something to keep in mind as we go through the rest of this chapter, is the simple truth: Christ Cannot Announce What He Has Not Accomplished

That makes sense right? I mean in our daily life who understand the foolishness of announcing what has not yet been or will not be accomplished. I used to play sports, and nothing was more annoying than the guy who talked a big game, but never accomplished anything. We had sayings like, "Don't let your mouth write checks that your body can't cash", or "Don't talk the talk if you can't walk the walk." Mike Pence announced winner of the vice-presidential debate - *before it started!*

And remember, what has Christ announced? **The redemption of mankind.** Remember what he declared, back in verse 3: *such a great salvation. it was declared at first by the Lord.* And last week we noted that in context he is speaking about future salvation in the world to come, a salvation that we are yet to inherit, a salvation that will come to pass when every enemy of God is defeated, and the Son of God rules over all creation. This is what Christ, the greatest

Hebrews 2:5-9 / Why Was It Necessary for God to Become Man?

messenger/apostle announced when He declared, “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.” Salvation is coming, salvation is here. But in proclaiming that message, He’s got to back it up. You cannot announce what you have not accomplished, and so it was necessary not only that God announce this great salvation, but also accomplish it. And in order to accomplish that great salvation for humanity, it was necessary for Christ to come among us as a human being. That’s what Hebrews 2 is about. And let’s look at why this is so, Hebrews 2:5-9:

5 For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. 6 It has been testified somewhere,

“What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? 7 You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, 8 putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. 9 But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

In answering the question: “Why was it necessary for God to become man?” we are pointed back to **Psalm 8**, which reminds us of man’s place in God’s created order. Psalm 8 declares that humans are not just “so much spit, mere nipped-off clay”, but were created - not angels but humans - were created to reign with God over the world to come.

Now we studied Psalm 8 earlier this summer, as one of our Psalms in our “Prayers from the Pit” series. To quickly review, Psalm 8, a Psalm of David, is considering the apparent insignificance of man before all of the wonders of creation and before God Himself. Just before the section quote in Hebrews, David writes, “*When I look at 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, and the son of man that you care for him?*” So this is a man gazing at the cosmos, and sensing his own personal insignificance. And if one does that, we can easily be thrown into despair,

In this immense cosmos, Carl Sagan writes, we float “like a mote of dust in the morning sky.” Stephen Hawking delivers the news more bluntly. We are, he says, “just a chemical scum on a moderate-sized planet, orbiting round a very average star in the outer suburb of one among a hundred billion galaxies.” “So much spit, mere nipped-off clay” The universe is immense, and we are so very tiny. When we contemplate the vastness of the universe we inhabit, our humdrum location, and our inevitable future doom when the sun implodes, or later on, in the heat death of the universe, human life can seem utterly insignificant.

How does David console himself before the immeasurable vastness of the universe? By reminding himself of the purposes for which God has created humanity. David is drawing from **foundational truths of the Bible**, going back all the way back in **Genesis 1** at the creation of the first human couple:

Gen. 1:26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the

Hebrews 2:5-9 / Why Was It Necessary for God to Become Man?

earth.” 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Gen. 1:28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

See, God had a purpose in creating humanity, namely that He might subject all of the created order under their dominion. That they might rule over nature as God would, not exploiting it, but caring for it. This was why God created humanity - for this unique purpose, to rule over creation. So humans, even though they look weak and frail and insignificant, especially in comparison to God’s angels, are in fact superior to angels in this sense - **that “it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come”** but to man.

But David knew, as we also know, that mankind failed, for we know that story of the Bible. We’ve see how the first Adam failed in his role as God’s representative ruler. He rebelled against God’s dominion and creation was plunged into chaos and destruction. As humanity rebelled against God’s rule, the creation rebelled against humanity’s rule. In turning from the invisible God, we exchanged the truth of God for a lie and where we once were crowned with the glory and honour of God, we now were under new management, bound by sin and enslaved to Satan, the prince of this world.

And so mankind needed to be rescued, to be renewed, to be reinstated. Now remember, as we studied the passages referred to in Hebrews 1, they pointed us to the Davidic King who would come, a human being through whom God would restore the world - yet how can man restore himself? How can he regain what he once lost? How can He turn back the clock to his previous sinless state? We need another chance. We need not only a new David, but a new Adam to undo what the first Adam messed up.

And so, that is what Christ came to do. God came as a man, so that mankind might regain our destiny of ruling over God’s creation.

1. Christ is Already Exalted

The phrase, **“for a little while”** jumps out from this text. It is highlighted in verse 7, and again in verse 9. And we see that the point the Holy Spirit is making here is that Jesus’ humiliation was merely temporary. Not because he was only a man for a little while, but because He has already been exalted as a man, high above the angels, for everything **has already been put in subjection to Him** as the first part of verse 8 states. And this is confirmed elsewhere in Scripture. After Jesus rose from the dead he proclaimed that through his resurrection from the dead, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Paul the apostle prays in Ephesians 1 that we might know *“19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”* So Christ is already exalted above the angels and over all creation, yet in Hebrews chapter 1, the quotation from Psalm 110 told us that Christ is seated at God’s right hand *until* his enemies are all subjected to him. So therefore, while the time of his temporary humiliation is

Hebrews 2:5-9 / Why Was It Necessary for God to Become Man?

already past, we *do not yet see everything in subjection to him*, for it is not yet the time of our future salvation, when every enemy will be vanquished - even death itself - and all will be redeemed.

Isn't that awesome to know that Christ is already reigning over this earth victorious? That God's purpose for humanity has already been fulfilled in Christ and now we are just waiting for that purpose to play out? That while the kings of this earth take their stand against the Lord and against his anointed, God has already installed His King on his Holy Hill? That we as the church, as citizens of his kingdom have the privilege of announcing his reign in every generation until he comes to live live among us? See, on Monday night, the media declared that Justin Trudeau had won the election, but he has not yet begun to practically rule Canada. But they could announce it, because he had accomplished the victory. That's where we are at. Our king as already been appointed, yet we await the execution of his rule in its fullness. And so we pray, "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

2. Christ's Humiliation Was His Crowning Achievement

In order for Jesus to save humanity, it was necessary for him to become one of us. As one early church father, Gregory of Nazianzus wrote: "that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved." The author of Hebrews picks up on the language of intent in Psalm 8 - *You made him* for a little while lower than the angels; again in verse 9: 9 "But we see him who for a little while *was made* lower than the angels, namely Jesus." Meaning that the Son "once was not lower, for he is the radiance of God's glory, but he was made to be lower". There was an intent in making Jesus low for a little while. so that we could see Him and know him - this Jesus. And why was he made lower? vs. 9: "*so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*"

Now, that brings us to a different question that we will get into next week, "Why was it necessary for Jesus to die?" But our question for this week is "Why was it necessary for God to become a man?" and the answer here given is that He had to become man, to taste death for humanity. So for now it is enough to say that if Jesus didn't become man and taste death, there is no salvation for him to proclaim, because he cannot announce what he has not accomplished. So Jesus was temporarily made lower than the angels for the express purpose of tasting death for us, because it is through Jesus identification with us that he became our high priest. Notice in verse 9: the through the death he tasted on our behalf, he was crowned with glory and honour. Now, where do I get this high priest imagery from these verses? Well in Exodus 28, God is giving Moses instructions for the priests of Israel, specifically what they are to wear before anointing them as priests. Twice in that chapter, the exact phrase is used, speaking of the turban that the priests would wear, so that they would be adorned with glory and honour.

Yet here in verse 9 we see Jesus, "crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death". Now again, Psalm 8 spoke of the glory and honour bestowed upon humanity by virtue of us being created in the image of God, but we have already seen that we messed that up. And so, in order to redeem us, Jesus had to somehow stand in our place before God as a second Adam, offering Himself through death as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. So Jesus stood as one of us, a man in place of us human beings, and offered himself to God, in our place. He served us before God as our priest, our mediator, making a perfect sacrifice on our behalf.

And so we see that Jesus was not just a messenger, for God could have and did indeed speak to us through any number of messengers. Jesus did not just come into this world to proclaim

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salvation to us, he came into this world to accomplish salvation for us. His death, which looked to the world as his greatest defeat and moment of humiliation, was actually his crowning achievement whereby he was set apart to be our high priest, mediating between us and God over the broken sacrifice of His own body.

1. Do not despise or deem insignificant humanity, either your own, others or Christ's
To despise and dishonour humanity is to despise and dishonour Christ. This is not self esteem teaching, this is thinking biblically of what it means to be human.
2. Know that Christ redeems all of your life, because he lived all of his life
There was purpose in Christ coming to us in our humanity. From the moment of conception until he gave up his final breath, and even now in His resurrected state, Jesus fully identified with us. That means that there is not one phase of life that is common to us that was not common to Him. We imagine that there are some parts of life that are less important or significant than others. We think a zygote in the womb is a clump of cells to be discarded, yet Christ entered into the womb of Mary. We often push aside little children because they have little power, yet Christ grew in his childhood in favour with God and with man.
3. Worship the God who became man to save humanity
Know that Christ still exists for all eternity to come as the God-man.
If you're a Christian, to worship means to present your selves to him, our high priest, and by the power of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God seek to let him transform us into his image. He has shown us what mankind was created for, and thus let us live in him

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If Jesus is Yahweh, if He is the fullest revelation of who Yahweh is, then why even come as a man? So he could fulfill mankind's destiny, as one who has dominion over all things, and He comes into his exaltation through his greatest humiliation, his bloody death on the cross. How does one even begin to make sense of the death of Jesus?

The death of Jesus is a stumbling block for many, Jew's and Greeks, ancient and modern. As Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 1:22-24 "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles"

Assuming the Bible is true, Jesus knew he was God and knew that he would be raised three days after his death. It is obvious that this was not a real sacrifice. How do Christians come to terms with this empty gesture? "Is it noble to pay a very small price for a large reward? All he did was the spiritual equivalent of changing his pants." If Jesus knew he would be resurrected, wasn't his death an empty gesture? According to this thinking, a few hours of torture and shameful and humiliating death are an empty gesture. Jesus had three bad hours. So what?

Others liken the death of Christ to Divine Child abuse - that the Father would subject the Son to so much suffering is likened to abuse. Well, which is it? Was the death of Christ nothing more than the spiritual equivalent of changing his pants, or as it abuse?

Still others just don't understand the death of Christ. If God wanted to forgive us, why doesn't he just forgive us? Why even send Jesus to die a bloody death? If God can do everything, why can't he simply just forgive sinners?

Why did Jesus have to die? Jesus became human, ultimately **saw last week** that "He might taste death for everyone" He became human not just so that he might die for sinners, but that he might taste death. That he might experience death. Very profound - ultimately the death of Jesus was not only for us, but was also, in fact even primarily for him.

Big Idea: Jesus tasted death for him and for us. Jesus tasted death for us:

That He Might be Made a Perfect High Priest ... And Call Us His Own Brothers

Heb. 2:10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder [Champion] of their salvation perfect through suffering. 11 For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, 12 saying,

"I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise." Heb. 2:13 And again, "I will put my trust in him."

And again, "Behold, I and the children God has given me."

There's a word that has been bothering me on the internet lately. "Perfectly". I know I've talked about those clickbait titles before, but here's one: Some person "Perfectly" explains, describes, responds, sums up, my least favourite - destroys, whatever, some complex issue in a picture, or a meme, or a tweet, or a short clip, or whatever. I don't know, it annoys me. We're throwing around that "perfectly" word too loosely. Not a lot of things "perfectly" do anything.

Except this: the death of Christ perfectly unites him with those for whom he died. That's what it means when it says that Jesus should be **made perfect through suffering**. For how can Christ - who we have seen is God - ever be made more perfect? From the context its clear - through

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His tasting death, through His suffering, Jesus has been perfectly united to those for whom He has died. This is not clickbait exaggeration. And it demonstrates that Jesus' death was far more than just an empty gesture of a few hours of suffering - it was the capstone of the entire life that Jesus lived, that Jesus should live the full experience of a human life for us from conception to death, he perfectly identified with our humanity so that he could perfectly represent us before God.

He became our perfect high priest through his suffering. The word "to be made perfect" is a word that again was used of priests in that same passage that we looked at last week. Exodus 28 not only it was used to mean that a priest was fully equipped for his office. And it is in this sense that Jesus' sufferings perfected him. Hebrews picks up on this idea in 5:7-9:

Heb. 5:7 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. 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. 9 And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, 10 being designated by God a high priest ...

When we see Jesus on the cross, tasting death for us, we understand to what extent He came to identify with our own weakness and humanity. So He who sanctifies us, Jesus, is made of the same stuff as us, who are in need of his sanctifying work. And so through his death, his perfect identification with us, Jesus **is not ashamed to call us his brothers**.

Remember, last week we talked about how scandalous it would have been to the Greeks and Romans that God should become man, even to die! But here's the thing, it may seem shameful to us, but it is not shameful to Him. Jesus so identified with us and our humanity and our weakness, even our death, so perfectly united with us, that He is unashamed to call us his brothers. How often do we come to church filled with shame over our weaknesses, our sicknesses, or temptations? We are so ashamed of ourselves, yet in bringing many sons to glory, Jesus is unashamed to call us his children, even his brothers, because he so fully identified with us, and identifies with us in our sufferings. Not all of us, but those whom he is bringing to glory he calls his brothers.

That He Might Be a Victorious High Priest ... and Rescue Us From Fear of Death

Verse 10 uses a unique word to speak of Jesus, the ESV translates it as "**founder**" but the word was far more descriptive. In Greek writing ἀρχηγὸν was used of heroes, people who founded cities, they opened the way or established a beachhead, like a navy seal who storms the bunker to take control of the stronghold. The idea is that **Jesus is our hero** who has opened a "new way" for us, eternal life in heaven! **Jesus tasted death so that he might be victorious:** but over what?

Heb. 2:14 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, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. 16 For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.

If you remember, last week we looked at Psalm 8 which set our focus back on the original created order. That God created humanity, crowned with glory and honour and set us to have dominion over all of creation as his image-bearers. That took us back to the beginning, the very

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first chapters of the Bible, in which we also observed that the original created order did not last. For a rebellion occurred - and the purpose of all rebellions are to upset or overturn the established order. Now, the first rebellion of the Bible is not recorded for us in detail the Bible, for the Bible contains the story of mankind's redemption, but we get glimpses of a rebellion that occurred in heaven, prior to the rebellion of man. From what we can piece together through the glimpses given in scripture, before the creation of mankind, God created another race of beings, angels (of which the author of Hebrews has already had much to say). Angels are not the souls of human beings who have died, but a separate class of beings altogether, created by God to serve humanity in some ways. Now we know that one of the angels, who we now refer to as Satan or the devil, led other angels in rebellion against God, leading to their expulsion from heaven. Having failed in his rebellion against God, Satan set his sight on another target, us, and through deceit led humanity into our own rebellion against God. He was the one who led humanity into death, as our rebellion and sin severs our relationship with God who is the source of life. And so all humanity has been plunged into death; as Ephesians 2 describes our state apart from the intervention of God:

Eph. 2:1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

How does Satan hold the power of death over us? Not through any actual authority he has over us to take or give life, for God is still the ultimate authority over life and death. But it's through the fear of death that Satan still has mastery. Vs. 15: *through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. **Jesus tasted death to deliver us from fear of death***

There are two ways in which the fear of death enslaves us. First, we fear oblivion. That we will simply be snuffed out like a candle, and their lives will be shown to have been meaningless. The famous atheist Bertrand Russell expressed this fear when he wrote: "Brief and powerless is man's life; on his and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark." Second and perhaps the greater fear is that death will not end in oblivion, but in judgement. Many are afraid of what that judgment will hold. They haven't paid much attention to God, and they've done things they know are wrong. They thought those things would be more fun and make them a lot happier. Now they know what they deserve at God's hand.

Now Christ's death speaks to both of these fears. First, Christ death demonstrated conclusively to us that death is not the end. For we hear of some who have had near-death experiences and come back and told us life beyond the death of our bodies, yet Christ was not dead for 5 or ten minutes, but laid in the tomb for days. Yet what of the greater fear? Not that simply there is life after death, but what of the judgement? Well here again, through death "he helps the offspring of Abraham" Why Abraham? Because Abraham is the father of those who believe, and to those who believe in Him who tasted death for us and who was raised for us, he offers full and forever forgiveness of sins. Therefore, we fear neither death nor judgement if we are found in Christ. So Satan's mastery over us is broken forever. As church father John Chryostom taught in the

he who does not fear death is outside the tyranny of the devil. For indeed 'man would give skin for skin, and all things for [the sake of] his life,' [Job 2.4] and if a man should decide to disregard this, whose slave is he then? He fears no one, is in terror of no one,

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is higher than everyone, and is freer than everyone. For he who disregards his own life disregards more so all other things. And when the devil finds such a soul, he can accomplish in it none of his works. Tell me, though, what can he threaten? The loss of money or honor? Or exile from one's country? For these are small things to him 'who counteth not even his life dear,' says blessed Paul [Acts 20.24]. Do you see that in casting out the tyranny of death, He has dissolved the strength of the devil?

What freedom! Where death is your sting? If you were to die tonight - are you in still in fear of death? If you still live in fear of death, then you are not yet freed from the fear of death, and are in need of the same faith of Abraham - in which he believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.

That He Might Be a Compassionate High Priest ... and Help Us Who Suffer When Tempted

There is one other way in which Jesus' death was for him and for us, found in verses 17-18:

17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Now God has always been merciful and faithful. Even In the Old Testament, the supreme revelation of God's character is repeated multiple times: "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty". Yet there was no greater test of God's merciful and faithfulness, than when he took on our own flesh and blood, being "made like his brothers in every respect" as the text says. Through the sufferings he experienced as He himself was tempted proved himself to be faithful, for he did not give in to the test, and He himself is able to add to his mercy empathy, for He now is able to sympathize with us in our weakness. See before the incarnation, God knew in some theoretical manner what it meant to suffer as a human, and thus He was truly merciful and faithful toward us, yet in His incarnation, Christ learned obedience through what He suffered, and so now Christ is merciful and faithful toward us because he knows experientially what it is to suffer, and therefore **He is able to help us when we suffer in our temptations.**

So that when you suffer, when you're tempted, you're not alone. God himself, in the person of Jesus Christ has been there.

So Jesus' death was not just an empty gesture. It was for him and it was for us. Through tasting death Jesus became a perfect, victorious, compassionate high priest so that he could unite himself to us, deliver us from fear of death and compassionately help us in our struggles and suffering.

Hebrews 3:1-6 / Christianity and Judaism

Coexist: What of other religions? Aren't they all the same? Don't they all teach the same things? No, no they don't. They do not. The religion that would seem to be closest to Christian faith is Judaism. We have the same scriptures, the same prophets, teach our kids the same stories, pray and sing the same psalms, address God by the same holy name, if there were any religion that we could say basically teach the same things it would be Christianity and Judaism. Yet we believe things that they would find highly offensive, even blasphemous, idolatrous. And they deny things that we believe would lead them to life.

The book of Hebrews was written into a religious controversy, remember. It is written to a Christian community, some of whom are considering or have already turned their back on their Christian confession and returned to Judaism. So far in the book of Hebrews we've been given a picture of Christ that stands above the prophets of the Old Testament and even angels as God's messengers, yet this far that argument has all been stated in generalities. Yet there remains one figure that looms large over Judaism and must be addressed head on: **Moses**.

It's hard to overstate Moses' position in Judaism. In a very real sense, Moses is Judaism. Before Moses, the children of Israel were a group of enslaved tribes, with little centralized leadership and no formalized system of worship. Through Moses, God rescued them out of slavery in Egypt, created the nation of Israel and instituted the sacrificial/religious system that lay at the heart of Judaism for 1500 years. God met and spoke to Moses regularly. Moses **stands at the centre of the Old Testament**. At God's direction and inspiration, Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible, which still to this day are the foundational teachings for the ethics and theology of Judaism. So Moses recorded everything in the Bible in the Pre-History, Patriarch and Judges eras. Moses was is considered the greatest prophet in Judaism. At the end of his life, Moses prophesied the next 1500 years of Jewish history, which came to pass exactly as God had said through Moses. All other prophets of the Old Testament were basically derivative to Moses. If the nation slid into idolatry during the time of Judges or the Kingdom, the prophets had one message - return to the covenant! The covenant that God had revealed through Moses. Jewish tradition states that the reason Moses was buried in an unmarked tomb was so that they wouldn't be tempted to worship his tomb.

That's not to say Moses was never challenged. In fact, one of the challenges to Moses' authority for the backdrop to this text in Hebrews. There is a story in **Numbers 12** in which his own brother and sister challenge Moses's position as God's representative. Miriam, Moses' sister, was a prophet in her own right; Aaron, Moses' brother, the high priest. So they had credentials.

Num. 12:1 Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman. 2 And they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" And the LORD heard it. 3 Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth. 4 And suddenly the LORD said to Moses and to Aaron and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting." And the three of them came out. 5 And the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the tent and called Aaron and Miriam, and they both came forward. 6 And he said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. 7 Not so with my servant Moses. **He is faithful in all my house.** 8 With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" 9 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them, and he departed.

Hebrews 3:1-6 / Christianity and Judaism

So when Moses was challenged, God himself spoke up on Moses' behalf. Miriam was a prophetess, yet God regarded Moses as a prophet of prophets. Aaron was High Priest, yet Moses stood between him and the Lord, a priest to the high priest. Why? God Himself says, because (vs. 8 0 and this is what is quoted later in Hebrews): **He is faithful in all my house.** God says of Moses, "I can talk to him, I can trust him. He's faithful, among all my people" How could you speak a word against my servant Moses. So yes, in Judaism Moses has an exalted place. And so the comparison must be made between Moses and Christ, and the relationship must be fleshed out between Moses and Christ, for what this really is about is the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. And that is what we find in **Hebrews 3**

Now I did a bit of my own translation in verse 1 because the sentence order in the Greek is intentional, and you'll see why:

Heb. 3:1 Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider the apostle and high priest of our confession - namely, Jesus! {not Moses} 2 He was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. 3 For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. 4 (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) 5 Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, 6 but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

Why Consider Jesus Over Moses? By extension, why hold fast to Christianity over Judaism?

• **Because Jesus Founded the Household of Faith**

- Key Analogy: House
- "We Are God's House"
 - The house is people
 - The house is God's elect
 - "holy brothers"
 - If indeed we hold fast to our confession: Not "we are his house up until that moment we no longer hold fast", "here's how we know if we are indeed his house - we hold firm to our confession."
- Jesus built the house
 - (vs. 3) or Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself.
 - He is the archegon of our salvation: 2:10 "the founder of their salvation"
- The house includes believers under both covenants
 - Verse 2 quotes Numbers 12: Moses was faithful in all God's house
 - Verse 6: We are his house
 - There are not two separate houses: there is a continuity between the Old and New Testament regarding the people of God, so there is some sense of continuity between Judaism and Christianity. What is this continuity? Well if the house is God's elect, and the builder of the house is Jesus founding our salvation, it is clear that:
- Believers under both covenants are saved by faith in Jesus
 - In the Old Covenant they were saved holding fast to their confidence and their boasting in their hope in the messiah to come.
 - In the New Testament we are saved holding fast to our confidence and our boasting in our hope in the messiah who has come.

Hebrews 3:1-6 / Christianity and Judaism

- Therefore we consider Jesus over Moses because He has always been saviour of all of God's elect throughout all the ages. He founded this household of faith.
- **Because Moses was Faithful as a Servant**
 - Verse 2 and 6 speak to Moses Faithfulness as a servant of God
 - Again, this stresses the continuity between Moses and Jesus
 - This is important: The author of Hebrews is not disparaging Judaism or Moses, but is arguing that we actually are honouring Moses by confessing Jesus and being Christian, not because Moses was wrong, but because he was right.
- **Because Moses Pointed Us to Christ**
 - Verse 5: "to testify to the things that would be spoken later"
 - So Moses actually spoke of Jesus.

And Moses did speak of Jesus. In Genesis 3:15, Moses wrote of a descendent of Eve who would come and crush Satan's head. In writing of Abraham, Moses wrote that one of his descendants would bless the entire world - but most directly related to the themes that we've been studying in the book of Hebrews is the prophesy Moses gave in Deut. 18:15

"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen— 16 just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.' 17 And the LORD said to me, 'They are right in what they have spoken. 18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 19 And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.

So Moses actually told the Jewish people of this prophet who was to come and told them that they must listen to his words and that if they do not God himself would punish them. And so the Jewish people testify against themselves when they say that Moses is the greatest prophet, for Moses himself told of another prophet to come. So if we are really to honour Moses, to really obey the word of God through Him, then we must obey Christ, for He spoke of Christ and pointed to Christ, which is exactly what Jesus says in John 5:43-46:

43 I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. 44 How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? 45 Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. 46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. 47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

So here's the point: don't think you're honouring Moses by returning to Judaism. For those Jewish people who reject Christ are not following the teachings of Judaism at all for if they were, then Moses would have directed them to Christ!

- **Because Moses Himself Was Under Christ's Lordship**
 - We've already seen that Moses was faithful in all God's house but verse 5 notes it was a servant. Moses, being one of God's elect is a member of that household - an honoured member yes, but still one of many servants.
 - Christ however, verses 6, being the archegon - the founder - is faithful over God's house as a Son. The Son is master of the House. Meaning this - Moses Himself was under the Lordship of Christ.
 - If Moses were here today, He would compel us to consider Jesus as our apostle and High Priest.

Hebrews 4:1-16 / Strive to Enter God's Rest

We came today the most important passage in understanding the theology of the warning passages in the book of Hebrews. Hebrews is full of these warning passages - they are the heart of the book. Remember, the book of Hebrews is dealing with apostasy - those who have or are drifting away from the faith that they once confessed. And we've already been told that the stakes are high, that to drift away from our confession of Christ is to experience inescapable condemnation. We've already heard this in the first warning passage in Hebrews 2:1-4:

Heb. 2:1 Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. 2 For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

When we studied that passage, I noted at the time that the passage didn't delve into the mechanisms of apostasy, it only warned us of the dangers of drifting. So here in Chapter 3 we're digging a bit deeper into a bit more of a theological understanding of this matter of apostasy.

It's an important question, not only because our mind wants understanding, but also because at times our hearts need healing. I was a new Christian when I began facing this issue of apostasy, for my own older brother, who confessed the faith for a few years, who even was instrumental in leading my sister to Christ, denied the faith and walked away, and has not returned. So as a new Christian I was confused?

- Was he genuinely saved and then lost his salvation?
- Was he faking it the whole time, and then walked out?
- Was he still saved even though he had rejected Christ?
- Had he tricked himself into believing? Might I be tricking myself into believing?

Tough questions for a new Christian. And I needed answers, not only for my mind, but also for my heart. I needed to know how to love and pray for my brother. Some of you are in the same boat, and the heart and mind search for some answers. Well, as I said, Hebrews 3-4 are the go to place in the book of Hebrews to begin to point us toward them.

We actually were pushed in this direction at the end of the passage we looked at last week: **3:6 *And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.*** I noted last week that it is an interesting construction: "**Our Future Confession Reveals Our Present Condition**". It's perhaps a difficult concept to understand, so let me give you an illustration. You ever get on a bus or train quickly, and then have a moment of panic set in because you're not sure you got on the right one. But you know that if you are on the right bus, you surely will arrive at your destination. So it follows that if you arrive at the right destination, you were indeed on the right bus. So here it is: We are on the right bus, if indeed we arrive at our destination. That's the exact construction of this phrase: And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. Our Future Confession Reveals Our Present Condition.

Again in verse 14, the exact same construction: **14 *For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.*** How do we know that we are on the right bus? We get to our destination. How do we know we have truly come to share in Christ? We get to our destination. We hold our original confidence firm to the end.

So what does this mean? Does this mean that we cannot know who is generally saved until we get there? Is there no way to have confidence or assurance of our faith? That I could be tricking myself into thinking that I'm a Christian, yet come to find out tomorrow that I am not? Sometimes

Hebrews 4:1-16 / Strive to Enter God's Rest

when people hear of the doctrine of election, they fall into despair because they say, "What if I'm not elect?"

Here's the answer of this sermon in Hebrews. That the bus toward tomorrow is filled with a whole bunch of today's, and it is how we respond to God's voice *today* that matters. We can't worry about tomorrow, for Christ is speaking to us today, so respond to God's revelation today, because when tomorrow comes, it's still just another day called today. **Take Care of Today, Everyday**

From where does he get this principle? From Psalm 95, which he quotes in verses 7-11:
Heb. 3:7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, *Today, if you hear his voice, 8 do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, 9 where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. 10 Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.'* 11 *As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'*"

Now Psalm 95 is a Psalm of David. It's a Psalm that was used just as we used it in our service this morning, as a call to worship when the Children of Israel would gather together. And the first part of the Psalm seems to us to be really appropriate for that purpose:

Psa. 95:1 Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! 2 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! 3 For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. 4 In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. 5 The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.

Psa. 95:6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! 7 For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

Nice right? But then, look what happens next.

Today, if you hear his voice, 8 do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, 9 where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. 10 Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.' 11 *As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'*"

Now notice something, usually I don't pay much attention to the verse divisions, as they were not part of the inspired text, but were added later to just help us find our place easy, but notice what they did here. Look at verse 7 and 8. It's a really weird verse division, isn't it. Why'd they do that? Why not just start verse 8 at the sentence break? Because the people who added the verses divisions knew that we'd be tempted to stop after the nice invitation to worship, and leave out the warning to check our hearts. So whenever the community of Israel would gather together and read Psalm 95 as a call/invitation to worship, they would get the nice smiling: *Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! 7 For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.* And then we hit them with the baseball bat right between the eyes.

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For they knew, as David who wrote the Psalm under the inspiration knew, that when we gather together for worship as the people of God, that there are those among us who while they look as though they are tracking with us, are on the wrong bus altogether, for though they hear the word of God, and have seen God move in their midsts, they are not united by faith with those who believe. David concludes this by reflecting on the spiritual state of the Israelites under Moses and Joshua. If ever there were a people who had every reason to believe in God, it was them. Verse 9 reminds us that they had seen God's works for 40 years. They had seen the plagues, the manna, the cloud by day and the fire by night. They had seen God speak and the mountain shake, yet these who had left Egypt with everyone else, never arrived in the promised land, for they never responded to the revelation of God that they had seen and heard. In fact, in their continued exposure to the word of God, they became calloused to the word of God, they ignored the word of God. While they got up every day to follow along with the rest of the group, their heart remained unchanged, and they all died in the wilderness. Their destination revealed their condition, right?

And so David sees this and in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit we writes psalm 95, understanding that within this great body of people assembling for worship, each one who gathers must take care of how they respond, today. And that is exactly what we are called to in Hebrews. Yet even more, because now God is not speaking through Moses or David, but through his Son, and today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart like people have always done. But today, repent.

And I know what some of you think, because it's human nature to do so. I'm in junior high, I'm got my sports season, I'm in high school and I've got to study, when I get to university I'll get serious about my faith, next semester, no, when I start my job, or when I get married, or when I retire, and we think we can go on putting off repentance until tomorrow, for there will always be tomorrow, but what we fail to understand is that every day that we do not respond to God's voice calling us, is a day that we've yet again hardened our hearts, and when you get to that day called tomorrow, you might find that your heart has become so hard that you will not repent, you cannot repent, because you've rejected the word of God all along. Do not put off God. He might be speaking to you about a specific sin in your life, a specific thing he wants you to do, you're hearing his voice in his word and in your spirit, and you're putting him off, you're hardening your heart against him, you're living in disobedient sin, and He is angry, and unless you hear his voice today, you may never turn, you will remain under his wrath, and you will never enter in to life. Ottawa U story of presup [if time]

So this is the conclusion of Psalm 95 in Hebrews 3:12: **TAKE CARE OF TODAY, EVERYDAY:** *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.* Check your heart, today. Encourage your brothers and sisters today. Speak the Word of God into one another's life today. Are you responding to God's revelation to you today? The good news of the gospel is this, that Jesus Christ came into the world to proclaim salvation - that everyone who hears his voice and turns to him in genuine repentance and faith will be saved. As our great high priest, He offered himself as a cleansing sacrifice on our behalf, that our sins might be completely forgiven, and he raised from the dead to provide evidence for the fact that He indeed had conquered death on our behalf.

Hebrews 4:1-16 / Strive to Enter God's Rest

3:1 Consider the apostle and high priest of our confession - namely Jesus!

Jesus is our great apostle because, being God sent from God, declared God's salvation to us.

Jesus is our great high priest because, being Man sent to man, represented us before God

Remember to whom it is this sermon is written:

- To churches: not to people out there, but to people in here. To communities of faith gathered around the preaching and testimony of the apostles.
- To weary people: The Christians are losing their place of privilege in the society which was originally afforded to them through their connection to Judaism, but now their Christianity is beginning to cost them something, and some of them are growing weary and considering abandoning their confession and returning to Judaism - perhaps some have already apostatized - drifted away from the Christ whom they once confessed.
- And remember how chapter 3 began, which a comparison between Christ and Moses, which was actually a veiled comparison between Judaism and Christianity - the point being that because Moses was a faithful prophet, then we must hold fast to Christ, because Moses spoke of Christ. So the main point of chapters 3-4 is that we can't go back.

Now in bringing up Moses, the mind of the Spirit naturally points us back to **Moses' generation**, for there too was a set apart group of people, who had heard God's word and seen his works, yet they too were a people who turned back. Continually. Remember, God had miraculously delivered them, guided them, fed them, led them, yet their hearts were back in Egypt. They were hardened against God. And ultimately, tragically, they rebelled against God their deliverer, and that generation did not enter into the promised land, but perished in the wilderness.

Only Joshua, Moses' successor, and Caleb were allowed to lead the next generation into the promised land. They succeeded where the generation before them had failed, and they gained victory over the land, until it says in **Joshua 11:23** "So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD had spoken to Moses. And Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments. And the land had rest from war." Rest. That faithless generation failed to enter God's rest because of their unbelief.

Now the tragedy of what happen to that generation is not recorded in Scripture as a footnote in the history of the nation of Israel. No, what we see in the scripture itself is that that exodus generation serves as a paradigm of the salvation experience for every subsequent generation of the Israelites, meaning history repeats itself. It's why 500 years after Joshua led them into the promised land, the great **king David** could look out upon his own people, call them in to worship, and give them the same warning, the warning of **Psalm 95:7** "*Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.' As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'*" So David pleaded with the people of his day, when you come to worship the Lord and hear his word, come with a soft and open heart, for if you are unbelieving and turn away, you remain under God's wrath. And the author of Hebrews assures us that the same warning is extended to us today. That we also, as we gather together as God's people, as we come together to hear the Word of the gospel preached through the sermon and the sacraments, we are in great danger of bringing condemnation upon ourselves if our hearts remain unmoved. And so last week, we had a warning: 3:12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading

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you to fall away from the living God. God's wrath is assured to any who fall away from the word that has been declared by the Son.

Now in chapter 4, we are still in the midst of that word of exhortation from Psalm 95. It's really one message, 3+4 but last week's point was formed negatively, "do not harden your hearts" and this week is positive: "strive to enter into God's rest". It's not enough to say, "Don't go back to Egypt", we must also set ahead of ourselves the goal to which our faith is striving. And what is that goal? Sublime, supernatural, sustaining, rest. Let's **read chapter 4:**

Heb. 4:1 Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. 2 For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest,'" although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4 For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." 5 And again in this passage he said, "They shall not enter my rest."

Heb. 4:6 Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, 7 again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

Heb. 4:8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. 9 So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, 10 for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

Heb. 4:11 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. 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. 13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Heb. 4:14 Since then 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 is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 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.

This passage has one great proposition with four applications flowing out from it. We'll look at the proposition first: **God Offers Rest to the Weary of Soul.** Note the emphasis on the offer of God's rest here:

- **Vs 1:** The promise of entering His rest still stands
- **Vs 6:** It [God's Rest] remains for some to enter it
- **Vs 9:** There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God

What does this mean? That there remains a Sabbath rest?

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- Well we understand Sabbath rest primarily from the rhythms of the week that God set up in creation. That “six days we shall work, and on the seventh day we remember the Sabbath and keep it unto the Lord.” And Israel was told to keep the Sabbath because the Lord himself rested from his work on the seventh day of Creation. And so the people of God have kept the Sabbath, in the Old Testament on the seventh day of the week, and now the church meets on the Lord's Day. And one might think that the purpose of the Sabbath is simply to set that day aside, to trust God that the universe will go on without me getting to all the work that I need to do, to set aside a day for the worship of Him, for fellowship with Him, and yes, we could do well to keep the Sabbath better, but that is not what the author of Hebrews is talking about here.
- For here, Sabbath is not a day, it is a state of being. Sabbath is an invitation to find our rest in God. For Hebrews teaches us that God is still in his Sabbath day rest. *3 For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’” although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4 For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” 5 And again in this passage he said, “They shall not enter my rest.”*
- So we see, God has been enjoying his Sabbath rest ever since the foundation of the earth - that's one long day! And he calls us, who are weary of soul into his rest. “Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden,” Jesus says, “and I will give you rest”. And so the Sabbath command of Scripture points to the rest we have in God in salvation.
 - Vs. 3: We who have believed enter that rest
 - Vs. 6: The disobedient failed to enter rest
 - Vs. 9: Those who enter God's rest has rested from his works

You will not find rest in this world in anything else.

- Injustice: Everyday on the newspaper. Where is justice, where is mercy, where is love, where is peace. And you can devote yourself to one issue, or problem, and then you realize that the problem is bigger and more complex than you once thought, and there is no rest.
- God offers rest to the weary soul.

Four Applications:

Let Us Fear Lest Any One of You Should Fail to Enter It

Heb. 3:1 Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, 2 who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. 3 For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. 4 (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) 5 Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, 6 but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

- Assumption of the church positively responding to the word of God: Lest any one of you
- Onus on the mature in the church/leadership to know the flock
- Small group/accountability to elders

Let Us Strive Together To Enter His Rest

- Community striving: *Heb. 3:12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*

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- Word of God like a sword in our midsts: *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. 13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

Let Us Hold Fast the Confession

Heb. 4:14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

- Not departing from Jesus
- In Jesus we find rest, because in Jesus God's justice and mercy are satisfied.
- God's wrath toward evil and injustice was poured out upon the cross and will be satisfied at the final judgement.
- God's mercy toward sinners is extended freely to any who come.

Let Us Draw Near to the Throne of Grace

15 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. 16 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.

- We will not be turned away
- Rest is not simply a spiritual condition,
- It's a practical offer, of Jesus standing with us in our sanctification, giving us mercy and grace to help in our times of need.

Hebrews 4:15-5:10 / "Why Do We Need a High Priest?"

So far in Hebrews, the concept of High Priest has been alluded to, but not explained.

- Alluded to Christ's Priestly work in 1:3 "After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high"
- Allusions to Christ's Priestly office in 2:9-10: "Crowned with glory and honour ... perfect through suffering"
- First clear designation of high priest in 2:17: Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

What does it mean to have a high priest? Why do we need a high priest? Some of us, the only exposure we have to the concept of priest is through contact with Catholicism or Anglicism, or maybe Buddhism. We don't meet priests often in our daily life - to be honest, we don't really know what priests do. Also, some of you, having come from different church backgrounds, may wonder why, for example, no one here calls me priest, they call me pastor - is that the same thing?

What is a High Priest?

- **A High Priest Represents Us Before God:** *Heb. 5:1 For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.*

This is the job description of the High Priest: *to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.* A priest was a mediator of sorts, a person who stands between two parties in a transaction. So the priest stands between God and the people, offering gifts and sacrifices on behalf of the people before God. Under the Old Testament system connected to the temple, God dealt with the priest as a representative on the people's behalf. The high priest in particular, one a year, on the day of Yom Kippur - the Day of Atonement - would be appointed to enter into the most inner section of the Temple - the Holy of Holies and make sacrifice for the sins of himself and then for the sins of all the people. Through this system of priestly representation, the sins of the people were atoned for and the people could survive living in the near presence of a Holy God. That's the job description of a Priest.

- **A High Priest Knows Our Weaknesses:** *2 He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. 3 Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people.*

Verse 2 explains that the priest, though a mediator between the people and God, is not an impartial mediator. See, sometimes in a conflict between two parties, it is necessary to have an impartial mediator to resolve disputes - primarily so that equity and fairness can be ensured. Yet God does not appoint priests to be impartial mediators. Instead, God appoints priests who will be sympathetic toward those whom they represent. The priests were not appointed to take God's side against the people - he sent prophets to do that role - but to be soft toward the people, to take the side of the people, to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward. And so the priests were never to forget that they themselves were beset with the same weaknesses as those whom they represented. And so the priests had to sacrifice for their own sins first, reminding them that they were no different, no better than the people they were called to represent.

And think of why this is - imagine you are an Israelite living under that old system. The entire system was set up to remind you regularly of your imperfections, weaknesses and sins before a Holy God. And you come to the temple, either on an appointed day or on a common day when

Hebrews 4:15-5:10 / "Why Do We Need a High Priest?"

you find yourself unclean or guilty of transgressing the law. Your sin is ever before you, you purchase the appropriate animal to be taken to the priest and be sacrificed, slain, for your sin. And you ascend the steps of the temple, dragging your sins and imperfections embodied in that poor creature, and you come seeking absolution, forgiveness, cleansing, atonement, reconciliation to you God, every step you take the weight of the animal, the weight of your sin crushing you under its burden. And you arrive before the priest - what kind of priest will greet you? One that sneers at you, that judges you, that crushes you all the more? No, he established His priests to be sympathetic representatives, to deal gently with us in our ignorance and waywardness. To be the face of grace toward us, even as they offer gifts and sacrifices to God on our behalf.

- That's why it is important that God calls the priest to the position: *4 And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.*

Knowing our hearts, knowing that we seek positions of honour to bring glory to ourselves, it was essential that the role of the priest not be open to whomever desired it. For if a priest could choose this honour for himself, he would likely point to that choice as something that set him apart from other people, a point of pride, lifting him above the others, and though such a priest could perhaps fulfill the duties of his job description, his sinful heart would abuse the pride of his position and he would not likely be a sympathetic representative. And so the office of priesthood was not chosen by any man, but it was instituted by God who called and appointed men to the position. So that they could point to nothing in themselves that they could boast in. They could remain sympathetic representatives precisely because their appointment to the role was based on God and not in themselves.

How Christ fulfilled the role of High Priest?

- **He Was Appointed To Be Priest By God** *5:5 So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; Heb. 5:6 as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."*

The requirement of a high priest to have been appointed by God has been met in Christ. Thus far in Hebrews, Christ has been assumed to be a high priest based on the work that he has accomplished, but here we are pointed to two very important Old Testament texts that demonstrate that God has appointed Christ to be High Priest. For ultimately it doesn't matter as much what we see in Him as it does what God says of Him. Now these two quotations are from two Psalms that we've already seen as we've been working through Hebrews, Psalm 2 and Psalm 110, declaring together that God has declared Christ to be a High Priest. Now, since we'll be delving deeper into the issue of "What is the Priesthood of Melchizedek" and why is it important later in the book, for now it is enough to note that God explicitly appointed Christ to the role of high priest that we are considering today.

- **The Sympathy of Our High Priest** *4:15 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. 16 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.*

As we saw above, one of the functions of the high priest was to comfort and empathize with the people God has appointed him to represent. The priest, as one of the people, represented the people before God, yet the charge could be made that Jesus, God incarnate, could never represent us lowly humans, for what could he know of our weaknesses? So get this, the

Hebrews 4:15-5:10 / "Why Do We Need a High Priest?"

question is not, is Jesus strong enough to be our high priest, but is he weak enough?

Yes! Jesus is able to sympathize with our weaknesses? Why? Because his humanity is a real humanity. His flesh was real, his suffering was real, his weakness connected to our human limitations was real. And in perhaps one of the most astounding theological decorations of the New Testament: Jesus in every respect has been tempted as we are. Jesus knows temptation. Jesus can sympathize with us for he experienced the tug of the flesh in his own person. You know that tug? That hook that grabs hold of you and seeks to pull you to seek your own glory, your own comfort, your own satisfaction? Jesus felt that tug as well - He knows how hard it is to reject, renounce, rebuke that lie.

Naturally when this letter says that Jesus was tempted in every respect as we are our writer is not thereby implying that within his lifetime Christ encountered every possible different temptation. He could hardly have experienced personally the specific temptations peculiar, for example, to women, to married people, to the elderly, to those made redundant in a time of economic recession or to those who live in a modern technological society. Yet at the root of the different temptations encountered by men and women throughout the wide range of human experience there are a number of basic trials or tests, and Jesus certainly knew what it was to meet these and emerge victoriously from the struggle. It can be argued, surely, that far from being less than ours, Christ's temptations were even greater. For he never gave in - the temptation was therefore unrelenting. Yet, He never gave in, and therefore is not only able to sympathize with us in our weakness, but also show us how to overcome temptation.

- **He Executed His Duties Perfectly** *Heb. 5:7 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. 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. 9 And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, 10 being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.*

There we see that not only was Jesus appointed High Priest by God, but that he executed his job description faithfully as He lived among us *in the days of his flesh*. Just as the priests at the temple would first offer up sacrifices on behalf of themselves, Jesus offered up prayers and petitions to God that he might be saved from death. In the garden of Gethsemane, on the night he was betrayed, Jesus poured out his prayers with anguish and weeping, that the Father might spare him from the cup of his wrath. Though the Father heard His prayer, He answered not by removing Jesus from the trial, but by strengthening Him for the trial. And thus Jesus, our High Priest, got up from His knees having offered a sacrifice of prayer so that for our sake, he might offer a greater sacrifice, the sacrifice of his own life to become the source of eternal sacrifice for all who obey him.

This is what qualifies Jesus to be our perfect priest: That through the offering of Himself through suffering, He perfectly identified with us, learning obedience *through* His suffering. He both fulfilled his duties to God on our behalf, and at the same time learned the essence of what it means to be godly human living in this broken world - He learned how to obey God in the midst of suffering and trial. He learned what it means to experience the reality that God doesn't always remove us from the pain, yet He can be trusted to bring us through the pain. Now did Jesus know this before His incarnation? Of course! Being God himself, He knows the ends and the means of God's plan, that God has His purposes for every tear, that God even uses our sin at times to bring about his purposes. Jesus knew that. Yet "this is similar to the difference between our experiencing a hurricane by means of a computer model and living through a real hurricane.

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The first might give one a tremendous understanding of a hurricane, perhaps a far better one than could be obtained by the person in the middle of the storm, but it is the second type of experience that makes it possible to empathize with the terror of those living through the storm."

This is why we need a High Priest. Because we live in the storm. We live beaten down by sin and by suffering. Jesus, our High Priest has not only made an offering for our sin, but stands alongside of us in our suffering.

This is really important to remember as we go through Hebrews. For these early chapters have focused on Jesus, the apostle of our confession, the Word sent from God warning us to not harden our hearts and drift away into apostasy. That's the role of a prophet, to warn. To use the word of God to strike down our hearts of unbelief. And it is necessary for some of you need to be cut down - you're a false professor, and need to be warned of the eternal consequences your unbelief and brought to repentance before its too late. Yet some of you who are actually saints will hear the warning passages of Hebrews and Satan can twist God's word to bring you to despair, pointing out your sin and your weakness, and make you fear coming to God for your shame - you need to understand that Jesus is not only our apostle/prophet, but he's also our High Priest who has opened up a way for us to confidently draw near to the throne of Grace, even in our weaknesses and temptations.

Hebrews 5:11-6:3 / Reaching a Church on Pause

Have you had a good holiday season? It's healthy to pause. But it's necessary to resume where we left off and press forward yet again.

The Author of Hebrews takes a pause in his writing. About halfway through Hebrews 5 he takes a pause from the argument he is building to pause for a bit, to gather his listeners together, and basically prepare them for what is coming in the rest of the book.

As I've suggested repeatedly as we've been studying this book together, the book of Hebrews was likely written to a church that had experienced a position of privilege in Roman society on account of their affiliation with Judaism, which was a legal religion. However, as more Gentiles converted to the faith and the church emerged out of the shadow of Judaism, it found itself losing that place of privileged and that now to continue in their faith was now going to cost them. Some had already deserted the faith, and others were tempted to drift away. So yes, this is a critical time for the church. The book of Hebrews is written to a church on the brink of losing its position in society, and that's why it is such a good book for us to study in our day.

But you know what's more dangerous than losing our place and privilege in society? It is more spiritually dangerous to be in a position of privilege in a society, because that is the time that we often grow soft, comfortable, dull. Never has the church been weaker than when it is comfortable, when we're on pause. And that's the reason he pauses; because the church itself has been on pause.

The Problem: It's Hard to Teach a Church on Pause

About this *Jesus being a priest after the order of Melchizedek* *we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, [to put into words that you will understand] since you have become dull of hearing*

- A pause before he moves on with the most difficult teaching in the book that he knows that they are likely to stumble over and strive against.
- The teaching he brings is not difficult by virtue of its inherent complexity, but because of the spiritual condition of the churches he is writing to.
- A new class of introduced here. Within this privileged church we encounter believers who are "dull of hearing"; as one commentator put it, they are characterized by "a slowness and inaptitude for activities of the mind which is within."
 - Two possibilities here:
 - A BIBLICALLY ILLITERATE CHURCH: The church, as a whole, has not been sharpening their spiritual discernment through the constant, in-depth study of God's word. So that concepts that they should be able to grasp have to be "dumbed-down" for them.
 - THE CHURCH OF EMOTIONALISM: The church, as a whole, has not been trained to think deeply about the faith, and is thus swayed through emotional appeal and resists logical and rational argumentation. The author must be careful here, for if he is to advance his thesis, [spoiler alert - that Judaism is dead and the Levitical priesthood is finished], it may backfire completely. "How can you say Judaism is dead? I have family members who are Jewish. You're a hater"
 - We understand how hard it is to speak about deep issues of God because, for the most part, this is our reality. We live in a biblically-illiterate society that has replaced rational how to have rationale debate for emotional appeals. Don't believe me? One of the most absurd things to have come out of this past year is that universities - universities! that should be the place where a free-flow of ideas and rationalism should reign - universities have begun

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censoring certain ideas that are uncomfortable, with trigger warnings and safe-spaces and students that protest and seek to censor any idea that might possibly offend anyone. How do we speak of the Christian understanding of sin, or of judgement, or of hell, or of human sexuality, to a culture that is biblically illiterate, so that they have no foundational understanding of these concepts, AND who see them as threatening and possibly offensive. And its not just out there. It is IN the church. We are part of this problem in our culture. We are biblically-illiterate. We are more driven by emotional appeal than rationality.

- Christianity is to awaken the mind, to arouse a hunger for knowing the faith, for through knowing the faith, you know of God and his ways, you know of Christ and his character, you begin to recognize the Spirit and His voice.
- This is endemic on our North American Christianity. We actually have churches built upon the concept that we will not teach any deeper theology, and we help people stay at that stage of infancy. When the church sits in a place of privilege it is easy to get bored, to become dull.
- “Here’s my problem. I have to take extra care in explaining about Jesus’ Melchizedekian priesthood to you because you are not used to probing the deeper things of God’s word.”

The Prescription: A Church on Pause Must Be Pressed Toward Maturity.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk you have become like those who require milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Here is the prescription: the church is acting like babies, and so they must be pushed to grow up. They’re not just on pause, they’ve regressed. Paul is using a great deal of sarcasm here. Vs. 12 is especially important and we lose the sense of the meaning in many of our modern translations. Only the King James preserve the meaning: you have become like those who need milk. He’s not saying that they need milk, only that they are acting like those who need milk. This passage is dripping with sarcasm. They think that they need milk, but they really need to grow up and partake of the meatier measures of scripture.

- Ill: Noemi drinking milk.
- Ill: 52 year old man “identifying” as a 6yo.

If they continue to live on milk they will not grow up for (vs. 13), for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness - that’s why it is hard to explain spiritual deeper things to this church. They have habitually been bottle fed and never been pushed to grow up.

Verse 12-13: “You are not where I would expect you to be regarding your skill in handling God’s word. You should be teachers by now, but like babies, you remain content to just have others feed you the basics again and again. It’s time to grow up.”

But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Trained by constant practice: the idea is that as we train ourselves through the habit of - not just devotional Bible reading, but serious study of the word of God, we will become skilled in the word of righteousness, discerning good from evil, right from wrong, truth from heresy, which will lead us to live out our faith in a more mature way.

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Someone might object, isn't the study of theology impractical? Doesn't it lead us to becoming Christians with big heads, but little in the way of love or experience? Doesn't knowledge puff up, and make proud? Well, I suppose it can, if study is not united with love and faith, and that is why the author of Hebrews has spent so much time pleasing with them, not only to hear God's voice, and the revelation He has brought us in Jesus Christ, but to respond to God's voice with genuine faith. But one of the big takeaways from the book of Hebrews is that theology does matter, and it matters in regards to unpausing the church and helping people grow in the faith.

John 2:14: "I'm writing to you young men, Because you are strong, because the word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one"

I can't just spoon feed you guys. Challenge yourself to struggle through some of the more difficult to grasp aspects of the faith. You guys are ready to be teachers.

Sermon Series:

- Take notes and study the passage through the week.
- Memorize passages in Hebrews
- Bible study:
 - Reading plan (No-Guilt Bible Reading Plan)
 - Take a book of the Bible. Read a commentary with it.
- Sunday Discipleship Hour
- Learn by doing
 - Some of you are ready to be teachers.
 - Preaching opportunities this year.
 - Adult and Children Sunday School teachers for the fall.
 - Small Group Leaders.

Don't be content to remain in your infancy. See, here's the "Therefore" of chapter 6:

Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.

So let's press on to a more complete understanding of God's word. Let's build upon and go beyond the foundation of teaching you received at your baptism. We never leave the first principles of the gospel behind, yet we need also to progress beyond them into a fuller comprehension of God's plan of salvation in Christ, and or the depths of the riches of salvation.

When we leave the elementary principles of Christ behind, we will be carried along toward maturity (the phrase is passive). For if your emotions change - so if it emotions that are keeping you in the faith what happens during periods of dryness? People change - if your coming to church because you like the people, what happens when they hurt and disappoint you? Society changes, so if your comfortable at church because its is the cultural thing to do on Sunday morning, what happens when the society shifts away? But God and his Word never change. He is the same yesterday, today and forever, and no word of his will ever pass away. So if your faith is built upon the word of God and the knowledge of Him, your faith will not only be sustained, but unease and press on toward maturity.

Hebrews 6:4-6 / A Foundation Without Faith

Verses 4-6 are very controversial with many views. Helps to take a look at the context.

- Remember the author is taking a pause before he really presses on in his main argument. He's got some difficult things to teach them - and not difficult because they are inherently complex, but because those in the churches had become dull in hearing and unskilled in handling God's word.
- Now, the church leader has two options when facing a biblically illiterate and immature church
 - He can indulge their immaturity. Continually just repeat the simplest most elemental concepts of the faith. Never preach on anything controversial. Spout platitudes. Let's just love God, love Jesus, love people. Without ever probing deeply into just who this God is, and precisely how much this faith is going to cost us.
 - He can press them on toward maturity by proclaiming the whole counsel of God. This means that we will encounter some teachings that make us feel uncomfortable or even those that at first glance seem morally wrong because our moral compasses have been interfered with by the world. Yet that will give us good insight as to whether we truly set God and his word over ourselves as our authority, or whether we remain the authority over our own lives. Therefore, false converts are going to be more plentiful in a church that is not preaching the full counsel of God, because they have never had to wrestle with the authority of the word of God. There is much in the Bible that is offensive to our modern worldview. Maybe this should be an upcoming sermon series - "how to offend Canadians".
 1. The bible's teaching on human sexuality is offensive to us.
 2. The bible's teaching on hell is offensive to us.
 3. The bible's teaching on the conquest of Canaan and the destruction of those living there is offensive to us.
 4. The bible's teaching on gender and gender roles is offensive to us.
 5. The bible's ambivalence toward the immediate abolition of slavery is offensive to us.
 6. The bible's teaching on our inability to save ourselves or live objectively good lives is offensive to us.
 7. The bible's teaching on money, possessions, and wealth is offensive to us
 8. The bible's teaching about the demonic idolatrous nature of other human religions and how they keep people in captive and are not able to save is offensive to us.

Take any of these teachings of the Christian faith, and wander into any modern gathering of Christians, and you will identify with the author of Hebrews when he says, "About this I have much to say, and it is hard to explain because you have become dull of hearing." If we stay in the simple teachings of the faith, there may be no controversy, but there can be no maturity, and there is the danger that the church is made up of unregenerate Christians.

So that is what is being illustrated in the first half of chapter six. In verses 1-3, we see that there has already been **a foundation laid in these churches**. *Heb. 6:1 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation.* "Again" means that this ground has already been covered. And he goes on to list precisely what he means by the elemental teachings, or foundation that has been laid. He identifies six elements to this foundation. Some commentators see in these six elements an outline of a baptism catechism, that is, the foundational teachings that a person would receive before or in preparation of receiving Christian baptism. That seems reasonable to me. The first two are connected closely with one another: repentance from dead works and of faith toward God. For one to receive Christian baptism and be welcomed into the church, they must understand the gospel - that it is entirely by grace that we are saved, through faith in Christ, which is a gift of God, not of works, lest any of us could boast. The third and fourth elements are also closely

Hebrews 6:4-6 / A Foundation Without Faith

related, the original language ties them very closely together - instructions about washings (baptisms) and the laying on of hands. The consensus of most commentators is that this is referring to instruction on the nature and meaning of Christian baptism as opposed to Jewish ceremonial washings or pagan baptisms - which would be important for a person seeking baptism - that they understand what they are doing, and instruction about the laying on of hands most likely refers to recognizing the person, ministry and gifting of the Holy Spirit in the believers life. Finally, the foundation contained encouragement regarding the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. This is the catechism, the foundation, the elemental teachings that had been laid down in the churches, most like through the instruction and initiation of new believers as they prepared for baptism. You might be interested to know that this is basically the outline of instruction that we take candidates for baptism through. We make sure they understand the gospel, we talk to them about the meaning of Christian baptism and the person and work of the Holy Spirit, we pray for them usually with hands laid on them that they might experience the full life of the Holy Spirit, and we speak to them of eternal life.

Yet the authors point is that we must move beyond these basics. But here he says something interesting - (3) and this we will do, if God permits. Now, I think this is an important verse to understand what follows. Now why would he say this? Because he knows that some of those who have received this foundational instruction, some of those who have gone through the baptism preparation, and had hands laid on them, and accepted into the church as Christians, he will not be able to proceed with them any further, in fact it would be impossible for him to proceed any further with them, for they have already denied the faith, and it could be that some to whom he is now addressing, who are assembled in the congregation of the saints, who are currently experiencing all the benefit of being in the community of faith, are not only dull of hearing, but are altogether dead. Here it is so important to remember the warning of 3:12:

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

Here's the warning: an unregenerate person, one with an evil, unbelieving heart, can fit right into our church, and no one might know, until their heart leads them to fall away from the living God. Here in Hebrews 6, just as the author identifies 6 elements of the believers foundation, he now provides 6 descriptions of the apostate's Christian experience, I believe this is intentional - to demonstrate for us how close one can be to the faith and still fall away from the living God.

4 For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

A couple of important points, as we look at this terrifying text:

- **These people were outwardly indistinguishable from others in whom the foundation was laid.** These six descriptions seem to relate to the 6 elements of the foundation. They were enlightened - in the context of the author speaking of the foundation laid in the first three verses, this likely means they were taught the faith just as all the others in the church. They were taught the meaning of baptism and the laying on of hands and therefore tasted the heavenly gift and partook in the Spirit, they were taught about resurrection and of eternal judgement, and therefore tasted of the goodness of the word and of the powers of the age to come. They were planted in the same pot. They were instructed in the same church. They participated in the same community life. Yet ...

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- **These people now publicly repudiate Christ.** It is important to understand that these people are not merely dull of hearing, or drifting. They are not backsliding or in a state of prodigal-son type of sin. They are not those who entertain doubts and therefore shrink back from Christ for a season. They are convinced apostates. The language of verse 6 is of public and shameful disgrace - *they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.* Given the situation of the original hearers of this book - remember they were Jewish Christians - they were likely those who had forsaken their baptism, and returned to the temple, and, by returning to the sacrificial system that was to point them definitely once and for all to Christ, were re-crucifying him and holding him in contempt with every lamb they slaughtered. Today, this would be like leaving the faith and setting up a website in which you blaspheme and mock Christ.
- **One can harden their heart so completely that there is no hope of repentance.** This is the terrifying conclusion of this verse, which fits with the rest of the warnings in the book of Hebrews. Remember chapter 3? Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.” See when you’re drifting, you can still repent today, but every day you don’t respond in faith to Christ’s call to repentance is a day that your heart becomes more and more calloused. Your sinful, unbelieving heart is leading you to fall away from the living God, yet if you’re still here, if you haven’t publicly repudiated and blasphemed Christ, there is still hope for you, but beware, lest your rejection of Christ today leads you to a place tomorrow in which your heart is so hard that it might be said of you, it is impossible, in your case to restore you once again to repentance.

The entire teaching is summed up in verses 7-8: *For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. 8 But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.*

the key phrase is ***drunk the rain that often falls on it.*** The constant, faithful teaching of God’s word, not limited to the foundation but teaching the full counsel of God produces two responses, and thankfully one of these responses is normal and one is exceptional. The normal response to the constant, faithful teaching of God’s word is that it produces a crop receiving a blessing from God. This is why we must leave the elemental things of Christ and press on, because a church will experience blessing from God in the harvest of mature, loving, Christ-like saints. Yet on occasion, the ongoing watering of the word of God lands on soil that produces thorns and thistles. This is connected to Jesus’ parable of the soils. Now we see why he says in verse 3: This we will do if God permits. We will move on to teach the full counsel of God and believe that we will be therefore brought to maturity, yet some may respond in a different manner, harden themselves against the teaching, and fall away into apostasy. So the ongoing faithful teaching of God’s word is so important because it leads to a purifying of the church, it is a washing of the church of God with the word of God. Some will be lost, yes. But do you know what is worse than losing a few apostates? A church filled with false believers, extending to one another false assurances, repeating to one another empty promises, leading to much embarrassment and loss at the judgment seat of Christ. Lord, lord, didn’t we do many works in your name? and he will say, Depart from me - I never knew you.

This means that we need to take great care how we listen, how we teach and how we respond to the teaching of God’s word. I can’t tickle your ears. I can’t skip over for uncomfortable passages of doctrine. Did you know the stakes were so high every sermon? For in this room are all the drinking, the dull, and the drifting. So we must press on.

Hebrews 6:4-6 / A Foundation Without Faith

Now, it's so important to hear that this passage ends with encouragement. In fact, the second part of this chapter is one of the most encouraging passages in the New Testament as we'll see next week. But hear this encouragement today:

Heb. 6:9 Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. 10 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. 11 And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

- *Some of you are dead - you need to repent from your dead works and turn to faith in Jesus Christ. You need to be baptized, not simply with water, but with the regenerating baptism of the Holy spirit in which he makes alive your dead heart, turns your heart of stone into flesh, seals you for his kingdom and empowers you for life.*
- *Some of you are drifting. Today if you hear his voice do not harden your heart. Repent and run back to Jesus. Beware of the danger publicly shaming Christ through becoming apostate, for if you hear his voice there is still hope for you. I can't write you off as an apostate, but neither can I give you the full assurance of hope that this passage talks about. Return to Jesus.*
- *Some of you are dull - you need to move beyond your baptism. Press on, be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Seek the better things spoken of in verse 9. Probe deep and wide, the depths of the gospel, the breadth of the full counsel of God.*
- *Some of you are pressing in. Rejoice in the full assurance of your salvation. Consider how you might spur one another on to love and good works.*

Hebrews 6:9-20 / Assurance

If this person who walked away looked just like us and experienced much of the same Christian life that we are, does that mean that we can have no assurance of the faith and should live in fear lest we fall away too?

Now we've talked about assurance before, and we must note that people want to wait assurance in black or white, either you can have full assurance of salvation or no assurance of salvation. Some would argue that anything less than full assurance of salvation, is no assurance at all, for if I can't be 100% certain of my salvation, how can I be assured of it? It's why as I have taught through books like 1 John for example, I prefer the word "confidence", for we can have strong confidence, or weak confidence, and still have confidence. Confidence is something that we feel in light of the evidence we see around us.

Heb. 6:9 Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.

10 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. 11 And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Heb. 6:13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, 14 saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." 15 And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. 16 For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation.

17 So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, 18 so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold **fast to the hope** set before us.

19 We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, **a hope that enters** into the inner place behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

There is a real and lasting assurance for the Christian: Otherwise, the author of Hebrews could not say: *Heb. 6:9 Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.* Notice that later in these verses he states that this assurance of hope is something that he desires each one of us to have.

The Assurance of Hope is not Received Apart from Earnest Faith and Patience. This assurance of hope is not something we receive on Day #1 as a Christian.

- It is something that we show earnestness to receive.
- It occurs as we become "imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."
- It is evidenced through "your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints" - and these things continuing. Assurance is based upon demonstrable evidence of things belonging to salvation - namely faith, love, obedience and patience.

Hebrews 6:9-20 / Assurance

Now much confusion arises when we fuse together salvation, and assurance of salvation and so I want to be clear. Salvation is the act of God in which many miraculous transactions take place in a person's life:

- * We spiritually pass from death to life (Ephesians 2)
- * We are adopted into God's family (Ephesians 1)
- * We are born again (John 1+3)
- * We are justified (Romans 3)
- * We have peace with God (Romans 5)
- * We are new creations - the old is gone! (2 Corinthians 5)
- * We are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1)
- * We become citizens of heaven (Ephesians 2)

That is a supernatural reality of every child of God. From God's point of view, everyone in this room is either "in" or "out" and once you're in, you're in. He knows his own. That's salvation, but that's not assurance, because assurance asks a different question - not does God know if I'm saved, but am I confident that this act of salvation has actually occurred in my life. And in the Bible assurance doesn't come immediately, it never comes from reminding a person that you walked aisle or raised your hand at summer camp, or asked Jesus into your heart, or even were baptized. Assurance in the bible always boils down to this one question, are you continuing in faith, hope, love, and good works.

So a person comes into my office and says, "Pastor Dan, how do I know if I'm saved" or "my sons saved", I'm not going to answer that question for them, because to be honest, I don't know if they are sluggish, or drifting, or acting like the prodigal son who later returns. I can't see into their heart and know what God's doing in there. So I can't make that sort of proclamation, either positive or negative, yet neither can I offer assurance. Here's what I can say, pray for repentance, pray for fruit of salvation to be expressed in the persons life, continually hold out the message: "today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. And I believe that the person who is genuinely saved will return and will endure.

The Assurance of Hope is Rooted in God's Unbreakable Word: This now is such an important passage, because some will charge us of preaching a works-based salvation - we are not, we are preaching a grace-based works-evidenced assurance, but still some will misunderstand. And so the author of Hebrews points us specifically to one whom we are to imitate as one whom "through faith and patience inherit the promises" - namely Abraham.

Heb. 6:13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, 14 saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." 15 And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. 16 For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation.

17 So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, 18 so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

Abraham is such a fascinating model for our faith, and the New Testament directs us to Abraham time and time again, at least in three major teaching passages (Romans 4, Galatians 3, and James 2) And I want to pull Abraham's life together for us.

*** Abraham heard the gospel of grace: unearned blessings**

Abraham is introduced in the Bible in Genesis 12, without any comment on who he is or what he had accomplished, or especially, why he over anyone else should be blessed by God.

Gen. 12:1 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

In Galatians 3:7-9, the Holy Spirit declares that this promise Abraham heard was nothing less than the gospel - that God would make such a promise to an undeserving sinner, to bless him and his family, apart from any act of righteousness on Abraham's part:

Gal. 3:7 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." 9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

And so just as God made a promise in the gospel to Abraham, so God in the gospel make promises to us, name that a descendent of Abraham has indeed come, Jesus Christ, through whom all nations of the earth are blessed.

*** Abraham was justified by faith alone in the promise, before accomplishing any works that might be credited to his account.**

This is what Paul brings out for us in *Romans 4:1-3* *What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."* Now Paul is quoting Genesis 15:7, but making a point about Abraham's whole life of faith, that is that God declared Abraham justified by faith alone. Genesis 15 is now 10 years after Abraham first received the promise, and if you remember, Abraham's faith in the promise during those 10 years were not marked by perfect obedience, in fact the Bible records more failures than victories. He gave his wife away remember, and even hear, in response to a reaffirmation of the promise of God in his life, he tries to take God's promises into his own hands and sleeps with his maidservant Hagar. So yes, clearly we see his faith is working itself out very clumsily and imperfectly. But God is faithful to him, and credits him with righteousness that he so obviously does not deserve. And by God's grace, and Abraham's credit, he never lets go of the promise, even through his sin and imperfect faith, until God finally gives to him the child he has promised Isaac. With with the promise ever more clearly in sight, Abraham's faith is tested more and more. And here is where there is a connection to the themes of the book of Hebrews, because remember, the Hebrews faith is now undergoing an unprecedented challenge.

*** Abraham was given greater assurance by God as his faith was tested.**

And you guys know the story, God asks Abraham to sacrifice, Isaac, the very son of the promise, the very thing Abraham has waited on for nearly 40 years, the very embodiment of the Abraham's faith in God's word, and now God is asking him to lay down even his own Son - will he trust God's word and in God's ability to do something miraculous to preserve His promise. And so Abraham takes Isaac up to Mount Moriah and raises his knife and the Lord provides a substitute, a ram with its horn caught in brambled, and God clearly illustrates to Abraham, that his seed will be blessed by a divine substitution, by a lamb crowned in thorns in place of the children of faith. And it is then 40 years after Abraham first heard the gospel, after 40 years of

Hebrews 6:9-20 / Assurance

walking by faith, imperfectly, that God does something more for Abraham - he reaffirms his promise with an oath, and this is what the author of Hebrews is picking up on:

Gen. 22:15 And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven 16 and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, 18 and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

Now why the oath now? reading through Genesis, this is now the fifth time the promise is restated to Abraham, in Genesis 12, 13, 15, 17, and now 22. Previously, restatements of the promises broadened its scope or more clearly specified the land or the son referred to in the promise, but this restatement gives absolutely no new information, but it does include one new important word, do you see it? *Surely*. I will *surely* bless you, and I will *surely* multiply your offspring. That's what this oath does, after 40 years of walking with the Lord, of walking in the gospel promises, Abraham is given a greater assurance of faith through the oath. Now with that background, let's go back to Hebrews 6:

Heb. 6:13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, 14 saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." 15 And thus Abraham, **having patiently waited**, obtained the promise. 16 For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation.

Now we see how great the word of God is - that when Abraham receives the oath, it is said that he obtained the promise, and this is interesting because later in the book of Hebrews (10:39-40) it is clear that Abraham is among all the Old Testament saints who were *commended through their faith, [yet] did not receive what was promised*. Yet in receiving Isaac back from the dead, as it were, Abraham receives from God the oath, that is the final confirmation from God that the promise will come to pass. Abraham was given greater assurance by God as his faith was tested.

So are we to think that after we go through some great test of faith that God will show up and swear to us an oath? No, because the passage goes on to say that this oath of Abraham's was meant for us as well.

17 So when God desired to show **more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, 18 so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, **we who have fled for refuge** might have strong encouragement to hold **fast to the hope** set before us.**

The oath to Abraham is our encouragement, that God keeps his word. That's the takeaway from the life and example of Abraham - that God's word never fails, for it is impossible for God to lie. God's promise was sure at the beginning of Abraham's journey, and it was proven by an oath at the end. The Assurance of Hope is Rooted in God's Unbreakable Word.

Jesus is Our Hope, Our Anchor In God's Presence

19 We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, **a hope that enters** into the inner place behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

- Hope, here, is not emotional. The anchor is outside of the boat. The thing that steadies us is external to us.
- Hope, here, is not merely in the promises of God, as it was for Abraham
- Hope, here is a PERSON

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New Series today ... heart of theological argument of the book ... Better Things. [prayer]

We need someone beyond ourselves

- * *Justice ... Health ... Forgiveness ... A hug (love)*
- * *Someone we can trust (Making of a Murderer)*
- * *Someone who won't leave us (Joseph - "a new Pharaoh")*

*That someone is ... **Melchizedek**.* That's probably not the name you expected me to say. Don't feel bad if you're not familiar with Melchizedek. He really is a minor character in the Old Testament - He is spoken of in only two passages, all of four verses. I didn't even give him his own square on my timeline - **he is barely a blip on Abraham's square**. Yet as we'll see, the entire theological argument of the book of Hebrews hinges on these few verses, the entire basis for our better hope, rests on understanding this obscure man with a funny name and what he represents in the unfolding of God's plan of salvation. So let's **zoom in again**. We find the story of Melchizedek in Genesis 14, two chapters and less than ten years after God first appeared to Abraham (then Abram) and made the promises to him that we looked at last week. Abraham had already settled in the land of Canaan with his nephew Lot, but after he and Lot parted ways, Lot found himself in the middle of a regional conflict between some local warlords, and Abraham, himself a powerful man at this time, got 318 of his own men together, and rescued Lot from their clutches. Now on the screen I have the passage in Genesis 14 for you to look at, but we'll read from Hebrews 7:1-3, for you can see that the author of Hebrews is merely recapping the text for us. *Heb. 7:1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 2 and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything.*

Here we get a recap of Genesis 14. Now on the surface we might note that this is the first time in the scriptures that a priest is mentioned, or tithes, and we might think that is significant enough, but then the author of Hebrews begins unpacking this for us.

He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. Here we are pointed to the meaning behind the city name - Salem [most think that this was an early name for a city that would later be known as Jerusalem, which we'll get to in a bit] but here we're pointed out that Salem means peace. So Melchizedek is the king of righteousness and peace. But here's where it gets interesting] *3 He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.* Now, although there are some Christians who will take this to mean that Melchizedek perhaps had to father or mother or didn't die, or even was some sort of pre-incarnation visitation by Jesus himself, it is not necessary to go there. All the author of Hebrews is saying is that Melchizedek stands out in contrast to every other key figure in the book of Genesis in that he seemingly comes out of nowhere and fades out of the picture just as mysteriously. And this is hugely significant when we remember **the message of the book**.

Remember Genesis begins with scenes of great blessing, a great failure and a great promise. God blesses all humanity in the persons of Adam and Eve, that they may live in special relationship with him in fullness of life and love. Yet they threw it all away when rebelling against God through the tempting of Satan. And God, though He would have been completely justified to finish them off right there, instead curses Satan, and in his curse of Satan make a promise that has been called **the first gospel**. Basically the promise is this: that through an offspring of the woman - a son of Eve, salvation will come, Satan will be defeated and the curse of death will

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be removed. This is why, I believe, after God is done speaking, Adam immediately turns to his wife and names her Eve - for she shall be the mother of the living. And so everyone of any importance in Genesis is connected to this promise through their genealogy, how are they connected to Eve and thus a candidate for Messiah - and through their destiny - when did they die and thus demonstrate that they didn't accomplish the work of the Messiah. We see this battle playing out in the first generation, **Cain and Able**, and then in the genealogies, for example in **chapter 5**, in which we get this refrain, this dude fathered this dude (the connection to Eve - the hope!) but then, again and again, "and he died". So we are looking for the son of the promise, born of the woman yet does not die. **Yet here in Melchizedek** we have a key figure of which nothing is said either of his origin or his destiny, he's introduced somehow as to stand outside of the promise and the curse. His is a mysterious priesthood, for no one can speak of where he came from or who he passed his priestly office on to after his death, and so there is a sense in which his priesthood continues forever.

Why is this story in the Bible? You can read the story without it. It's such a weird detail to include, considering Melchizedek fades just as quickly from the scene. Now there is a bit more background about this Melchizedek that we need to understand before we move further in the text. It is very significant that this Melchizedek is the Priest-King of Jerusalem, serving the Most High God, and blessing Abraham, the one through whom the Jewish nation would arise. For the book of Genesis was written **by Moses**, as were the rest of the books of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. And by the end of those books, **God is very clear**. 1st, that the promise of the seed, the Deliverer, the anointed One, is going to be passed on through the **Jewish tribe of Judah**. However, God also directed Moses to anoint a priestly line, through his brother Aaron **and his son Levi**, and set up the sacrificial system centred around the tabernacle and later the temple. And so, under the law, you have two lines, the kingly line of Judah and the priestly line of Levi, and the two are separate - they don't cross. Separation of church and state if you will - better, of temple and throne. This was a strict separation of office, so important to the law of Moses that when Saul, the first king of Israel violated that wall of separation, God removed the kingdom from him. Yet, back in Genesis 14, we see a king of Salem, fulfilling both roles, King and Priest, and instead of being reprimanded by the Holy Spirit through Moses, we see Abraham himself, the one through whom all Israel {including the Levites} would come, paying homage to this priest-king, being blessed by this priest-king, paying tithes to this priest-king. Here we should let the **scripture** comment:

***Heb. 7:4** See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! 5 And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. 6 But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. 7 It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. 8 In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. 9 One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, 10 for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.*

And now we come to the last piece of the puzzle of Melchizedek, and we fast forward another 500 years to the **time of King David**. Now David, beyond anyone else in the Old Testament is the embodiment of all the potential of the promises made to Israel. After all through David the twelve tribes are united and strong. Through David, the capital of the Jewish nation has been

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established in Jerusalem. And through David, the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant has been relocated to Jerusalem, and so through David, the people, the monarchy and the priesthood all now have found a resting place. He can look out the window of his palace and see the Levitical priests serving the people before the tabernacle, perhaps even smelling the aroma of their sacrifices.

David was a songwriter, a man of deep faith and reflection on the promises of God. And here we must turn **to Psalm 110**. Psalm 110, written by David, is his greatest Psalm, perhaps the most important Psalm in understanding the identity and office of the Messiah. It is the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament. And it reads:

A PSALM OF DAVID.

1 The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." 2 The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! 3 Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments; from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours.

4 The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

5 The Lord is at your right hand; he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.

6 He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses; he will shatter chiefs over the wide earth.

7 He will drink from the brook by the way; therefore he will lift up his head.

Now Jesus himself makes a big deal of this Psalm. Here's why, and I get this from DA Carson - if you read this psalm not understanding that it is a psalm of David, you'd likely be prone to think that this is a psalm written by a subject or royal courtesan about King David. So you'd read it, "The Lord God says to my Lord, the King". Yet, as Jesus points out in Matthew 22:43, this Psalm is written by King David himself, he must be speaking of someone greater than himself, a King greater than the Davidic King, a king of kings.

And so David is meditating on the reality that, though he is enthroned as king in Jerusalem, there is a greater king to whom he is to give homage, that is the King appointed by God as his Messiah. And so this is a humbling reality for David, at a time at which David has great reason to be proud. Yet David knows a greater king is coming. His own throne is but a shadow of a greater reality to come. And perhaps the Lord uses this to remind David that he is not the first king of Jerusalem, and the Holy Spirit directs him to a prior king over the city, back when it was simply called Salem, also a king to whom other kings paid homage. A great king to whom even David's own ancestor, the patriarch Abraham paid homage: a king by the name of Melchizedek, a king, who is not just a king, but a priest as well. And the Holy Spirit shows David just why Moses includes this story of the man with a strange name in Genesis 14. For just as David's throne is a shadow throne pointing to the Messianic king, so also the Levitical priesthood is a shadow priesthood pointing to the Messianic priest and that someday the office of King and Priest will once again be united in the Messiah just as they once were in the person of Melchizedek. Thus here in Psalm 110:4 *"The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."*

Again, the author of Hebrews explains why the Messiah has to be a priest-king after the line of Melchizedek rather than the shadow priesthood of Levi: **Heb. 7:11 Now** if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further

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need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? 12 For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. 13 For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. 14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

Here we see an argument that the author of Hebrews will return to a number of times. That the Old Testament law contained within itself the seeds of its own passing away. This is so important because you will hear criticism of Christianity, that we ignore and set aside the Old Testament, making it into something it was never meant to be when we replace it with Christ. Yet the author of Hebrews so masterfully show that the Old Testament itself requires us to see that its law and its forms and its priesthood will be set aside when Messiah comes. So it is not Christians making the claim that Jesus has invalidated the Levitical priesthood, the Old Testament itself, in speaking of a greater priest after the order of Melchizedek, makes the claim that the Levitical priesthood will be eclipsed. And again, if a Priest-King is to arise, he has to be of a different priesthood, for every Jew knows that the Messiah will be a son of David, of the tribe of Judah. If He is to be a priest-king he must be of a different, a better, priesthood.

Who gets to be a Melchizedekian Priest?

What is the qualification for ordaining a priest after the order of Melchizedek? The qualification for ordination into this priesthood is not that the candidate be a descendent of David, for then every Davidic king would be a Melchizedekian priest. No, we are given the qualification in verses 15-16:

Heb. 7:15 *This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, 16 who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life.*

The basis for Jesus' ordination to the Melchizedekian priesthood is his indestructible life. Not that's an ordination counsel. Here, one question on the application. If we kill you, would you rise again from the dead? Where does the author of Hebrews get this from? Why Psalm 110 itself:

17 For it is witnessed of him, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."

Heb. 7:18 For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness 19 (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

Heb. 7:20 And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, 21 but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever.'"

This qualification is not something David or the author of Hebrews made up. The Lord swore it to be the case that when He sent Messiah into the world, he would be priest forever, thus the Messiah had to be identified and ordained on the basis of the power of indestructible life. That's a better priesthood, a better hope.

What does this mean to us?

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Heb. 7:22 This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. [We're going to skip over this, because it will be the point of next week message] But today our main theme is why is Jesus - our melchizedekian priest - a better priest?

He'll Never Leave You (X2): He holds the priesthood permanently.

Heb. 7:23 The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, 24 but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.

He'll Never Forsake You: 25 *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.*

He prays for you continually. not a day goes by that He doesn't pray for you and therefore is able to save you to the uttermost.

Jesus Will Never Let Us Down: he will never disappoint.

Heb. 7:26 For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. 27 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. 28 For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

Jesus, our high priest-king after the order of Melchizedek, will never let you down and he will never leave you.

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Today we're going to hit one of the reasons why I was most interested to preach the book of Hebrews. West Wing Meme.

Well we are going to think about those questions today, because they are important questions. these are some of the questions that keep people from exploring and understanding the Christians faith - that call us hypocrites for picking and choosing which parts of the Bible we read and follow, while ignoring other parts of it.

Well, we are going to answer some of these questions today, but we may have to take a what seems to be a round about way to get there, so again, prepare yourselves and hang in there. The path to these answers lies in understanding the Biblical concept of covenant.

What is a Covenant? We are not too familiar with covenants in our modern culture. Though we might speak of a marriage covenant or a church covenant, we may not be completely sure of what that means. What makes a covenant different than a promise, for example? Or a contract? Is any contract a covenant? Lionel Windsor of Moore College in Sydney, Australia helpfully surveys all the suggested definitions of covenant in the literature and summarizes for us: Covenant = an elected relationship of obligation under oath.

Take for example a marriage covenant. A marriage covenant defines now for us precisely what kind of relationship the parties are entering into. Vows are made and exchanged and obligations and duties are delineated toward on another. These marriage obligations are solemnized in a wedding ceremony, in which there are witnesses, oaths, and other traditions.

Covenants - elective relationships of obligation under oath, are God's primary ways of establishing relationships with us. As we've made our way through Hebrews, we've already seen this, though I didn't go into it. God made a covenant with Abraham, which defined the relationship that He would have with Abraham and his descendants. Throughout history, God has made other covenants with his people, defining the terms of his relationship with them, and here's the exciting thing, if you are here today, and know God through the Lord Jesus Christ, God has made a covenant with you, and that is what we are pointed to in Hebrews 7-8. And not just any covenant - a better covenant. **in Hebrews 7:22:** This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. Again, later in 8:6, the scriptures state that Jesus is a mediator of a better covenant.

So through Jesus Christ, we are offered a better covenant, a better relationship of obligation under oath. So if we are offered a better covenant, to what are we comparing this better covenant? **Hebrews 8:8-9** is explicit, and this is God talking: *I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.* So this new covenant is set in contrast to the covenant God made with Israel and Judah during their Exodus from Egypt. This covenant is often called the Mosaic Covenant, because it was given by God **through Moses** as He led the children of Israel. After escaping from Egypt, the Lord



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brought the children to Mount Sainai (also sometimes called Horeb) and there He so majestically established with them his covenant, as recounted for us in **Deuteronomy 4:10-14**: the LORD said to me, 'Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so.' 11 And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom. 12 Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice. 13 And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone. 14 And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and rules, that you might do them in the land that you are going over to possess.

What was involved in **this Mosaic Covenant**? Two major aspects. First:

A Priesthood Ordained: Now I put this first, which may confuse some for the formal instructions and ordination of the Levitical Priesthood seems to be given chronologically in the text of the Old Testament after the giving of the law. Yet careful reading of Exodus 19:22, and 24 demonstrates that there was already a priesthood in Israel before the giving of the law, only that the giving of the law codified their roles and responsibility. Therefore the author of Hebrews can rightly observe that it was under the Levitical priesthood that the law was received by Israel. This priesthood, which we will be looking more at in the coming weeks, dominated the everyday life of the Jewish people, first as they related to the tabernacle, and then later on the temple. You can read about this priesthood primarily **in the book of Leviticus**. And the issue is this - if the people were to live under covenant with this holy God who shakes the mountain, how dare they approach Him who is a consuming fire? And so the entire sacrificial system, with its emphasis on cleanliness and uncleanness, on sin and offerings, was the primary aspect of the covenant that needed to be set in place, lest the people be consumed. The second aspect of the covenant is that

A Nation Established: And here is where we see the promises to Abraham finding their initial fulfillment or realization. Through the Mosaic Covenant Abraham's descendants do indeed become a great nation. Now let's think about that for a second, what does it mean to be a nation? Well, to be a nation means you need three things:

2. **A Ruler:** Here's the amazing thing about Israel, God himself covenanted with them that they would be like no other nation on earth - that He would be their king.
3. **A Realm:** God's covenant with Israel established them in the land of Palestine. As long as they remained faithful to his law, not every Israelite, but the general drift of the nation, they would remain in the land, and blessed beyond any other nation. But if they were to rebel against their king, they would not enjoy prosperity and if they would not repent after God sent many warnings to them, ultimately, they would be removed from the land.
4. **A Rule of Law:** And finally, here is the rule of law, first embodied in the ten commandments as their foundational moral code, and then codified in 613 laws, statutes and ordinances found primarily in **Exodus and Deuteronomy**, as well as Leviticus.

Now we understand how central the Mosaic Covenant was in the life of those Jewish people living in the first century. The Mosaic Covenant defined every aspect of their religious and national identity. It was their way of relating to God, and it was the constitutional law of their nation. It established their obligations to their king, the Lord God. It defined what it means to be Jewish. It is the reason why, to this day, Jewish children at 13 years old celebrate their bar- or

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bat- mitzvah - literally they become sons and daughters of the law as given in the Mosaic Covenant.

All that is background. Now let's go to **Hebrews**. And now you'll see why the author of Hebrews had to warn his Jewish readers that he wasn't sure if they were ready for what he was going to be teaching them. The author of Hebrews is declaring, not only that in Jesus we have a better covenant, but what that means is that the Old Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant is now complete. It's over. It has been fulfilled. It has been eclipsed. It has been surpassed. It is, in the words of the scripture, obsolete and ready to disappear completely.

My old professor explains: "The shock which this must have given a first century Jew is hard to overstate. For a millennia and a half the primary test of a prophet was doctrinal: "Did his message agree with Moses?" All revelation which had come from Judges to Malachi either explained, applied or built upon the bedrock foundation of the Pentateuch. Now revelation has come which demands that Moses be set aside. The skepticism with which this teaching was met is understandable." And so because, as someone said, extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence, we must take care to understand the rationale given in these chapters as to why: **The Old Covenant Must Be Set Aside**

1. **We Have a New High Priest** Heb. 7:11 *Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? 12 For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.* Note especially that last line: *when there is a change in priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.* Here is the theological reason. It is not the priesthood which is dependent upon the Law, but rather the opposite. It was not the books of Exodus, Leviticus or Deuteronomy which give legitimacy to or provided the basis for the priesthood. Rather the laws of those books were given to regulate the relationship between God and his people which was based upon the priesthood which He established. Thus, the Law is subservient to the priesthood so that when the priesthood changes, the laws which regulate that priesthood no longer apply.

An analogous point might be made with a new car and its repair manual. When a new car replaces an old car, a repair manual appropriate to the new car must replace the old manual. According to the author's subject and argument in this chapter the Law was given as a "manual" or document which helped to regulate human interaction with the priesthood. As an administrative covenant it was dependent upon the centerpiece of the priesthood so that when the priesthood changed it had to be changed as well. Thus the author argues that the laws of Moses must be displaced with new revelation which regulates worship appropriate to the new priest. This is the theological center of the book. It is here that the themes of revelation and priesthood meet. New revelation must replace old revelation precisely because of the change in priesthood. The audience must hold fast their confession of Jesus, not only because He is God's avenue of salvation but also because with him the old regulations have become obsolete. In short, the readers must cling to Christ because they have nothing left in Moses to which they can return.

2. **The Old Covenant Was Weak and Useless in Regards to Producing a Holy People** Heb. 7:18 *For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness 19 (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a*

better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. Here we get the pragmatic reason. Perfection was not attainable through the Mosaic covenant. What words the author uses! The Mosaic Covenant was weak and useless to bring anyone to perfection. It was given so that the people could live in God's presence and not be immediately consumed, but it made no one perfect. Yet now we have a better hope, for the one to whom the law pointed has come! And He is a better high priest, one who is able to by the power of the Holy Spirit save completely all those who come to God through him, for as we saw last week, His work of atonement is done once and for all and He is never to die again, and therefore, He will never abandon us, and He always lives to make intercession for us. So we cast the Old Covenant aside and hold fast to Christ, because the Old Covenant was useless to do for us what we needed it to do for us - make us holy.

- 3. The Lord Himself Foretold the Obsolescence of the Old Covenant.** This is the prophetic reason: *8:6 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. 7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. Heb. 8:8 For he finds fault with them when he says: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 9 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. 10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 11. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. 12 For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." Heb. 8:13 In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete.*

There is really nothing I can add here to say. This should settle any argument. The quotation is in Jeremiah 31:31-34 which foretold a day in which God would make a New Covenant specifically to stand in contrast to the Mosaic Covenant. If you are a Jewish person who believes Jeremiah, then you must believe that the Mosaic Covenant is passing away to be replaced by something greater, and the author of Hebrews is pressing us - that something greater has arrived.

- 4. Because History Confirms the Obsolescence of the Old Covenant.** Notice very quickly verse 13 *And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.* Now, I believe here we have access to a historical argument that the author of Hebrews alludes to but had not yet come to pass. What does it mean that the Mosaic Covenant "is ready to pass away". I believe that this is a direct allusion to a prediction made by Jesus Christ that because the children of Israel rejected his Messianic claims, that Jerusalem and the Temple would soon be destroyed so that not one stone of Herod's Temple would be left standing. And what we now know, that the author of Hebrews did not, is just how soon it would be before the nation and the temple would vanish away. For so it was in 70AD, just years after this book was likely written, that the Roman General Tiberias, completely destroyed the city and the Temple. You want confirmation that the Mosaic Covenant is over? Try to fulfill it today. Where is the Temple? Where is the priesthood? Where is the sacrificial system? It's gone!. It's vanished! I was sharing the gospel with a Jewish friend on Wednesday, and made exactly this point.

Hebrews 8 / Covenant

So what does this mean for us?

- 1. We are not under the Mosaic Law** for we are under a new high priest. He has declared all food clean. We are not forbidden to wear mixed fabrics or shave the sides of our temples. So when people point to those levitical laws and ask why I don't follow all of them, I answer, because I'm not Jewish, I'm a Christian! I'm not bound to follow Mosaic Law. Don't let people drag you back to Moses. Beware of the "Christ the Lord is King" Facebook page and the Hebrew Roots Heresy.
- 2. Though we are not under Mosaic law, we're not lawless.** Christ is our king/preist forever after the order of Melchizadek, and he has made a covenant with us, his people, an relationship that He elected and made a solemn oath to sustain, with duties and obligations for us to walk in. We are under His royal law of love, to love him with all our hearts soul mind and strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. In this New Covenant, by the power of the Holy Spirit, he has set his law within our heart. But if you say we're not under Mosaic law, what about the laws regarding homosexuality, or incest, or murder - surely those parts of the law must stand - yes they do! But not because they are part of the Mosaic covenant, but because Jesus tells us that we must not kill, yes, we must not even hate. We must not commit adultery, yes, even lust. Jesus pointed us to God's creation of us as male and female in the image of God, and how God brought the man and woman together and aid, for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and the two shall become one flesh. That's not the Mosaic Covenant - that's God's design in creation and Jesus saying, "Amen, yes!" Be Holy - Jesus both gives you the pattern of holiness and the power.
- 3. We, the church, all who are here gathered who are believers in Jesus Christ, are a New Covenant people.** We are a regenerate people - "God says, I will write the law on their hearts" - this is a picture of the Holy Spirit's regenerating work, bringing us to with and changing us, not from the outside in, but from the inside out. We are a forgiven people - "God says, I will be merciful toward their iniquities, I will remember your sins no more". We are a gathered people - God says that in the New Covenant - And they shall not teach, each one his neighbour and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. In the Mosaic Covenant, which was by its nature an outward national covenant, those who were truly of faith in the Lord were lost in the crowd of idolatry and faithlessness. Yet the church is a New Covenant community of called out people, Jews and Greeks, men and women, slave and free, rich and poor. All who are part of the New Covenant know the Lord. This understanding of the church as a New Covenant community explains our ordinances. Since the New Covenant is for believers, we believe, that the sign of the New Covenant, baptism, should be administered to believers only, for only believers are members the New Covenant. We lovingly disagree with our brothers and sisters in the Lord who see the new covenant as mixed as the old, and therefore baptize unbelieving unregenerate infants, for we see in this a regression to the Old.
- 4. And Finally Celebrate.** Celebrate the New Covenant in the blood of Christ. That God has elected to define a relationship with you. Do you still use that term, DTR? Celebrate. As we sing, we will partake in God's New Covenant meal, the Lord's supper.

The history of human technology can possibly be summarized by our desire as a species to connect. It must be conceded that if this is not the sole motive for technological advance, than surely it is one of the primary motives. How do we connect, how do we gain access to people who are far from us in time or space? The invention of writing was the first major step. Now you could express ideas, literally set them in stone, to be read by future generations. As technology advanced in the form of papyrus scrolls and paper, one could now write a letter to someone living far away. One of the greatest advancements of the Roman Empire, was its postal system, by which a letter could cross the empire on horseback by matter of days. We still have some of the artifacts of this advanced technology - in fact, you're holding it for the New Testament of the Bible is a collection of these very letters, written so that the apostles could have access in time and space to their beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. Another famous letter from that era was a love letter sent to a young woman from a devout Christian in a Roman prison, and as a result, millions of people to this day exchange Valentine's, named after that man.

For thousands of years, the written letter was the standard access granting technology, but over the past 150 years, we have entered into a new age of communications technology. First the telegraph then the telephone, radio then television, email and now texting allowed people access to one another over great distances. Access to faraway loved ones, could for the first time be immediate. Now when my kids want to ask grandma a question, or when Corina wants to see her finance for example, we can connect with Skype, or FaceTime, or get a bunch of friends together on Googlechat. Immediate, face-to-face access. Anyone living in the "letter era" would be amazed at this "new age" of communications. Still, there is nothing better than being in the presence of someone. I don't think technology will ever replicate or replace the experience of being together.

I bring up this idea of access, for it is a major theme in Chapter 9 of the book of Hebrews. Here, in the midst of the central argument of the book, the Holy Spirit proclaims that through Christ, we have entered into a "new age" of access, in which we through Christ have greater access to God himself than any who came before.

So far in the book we have seen that Christ is a better high priest than those who came before, for the prophets foretold that Levitical priesthood was to be eclipsed by a priest who would reign forever after the order of Melchizedek. We saw last week that we are under a better covenant than those who came before, for the Mosaic covenant has been fulfilled in Christ, who has made a new covent with God's people, based on forgiveness and the inward writing of God's law on the heart of those who have been born again by the Spirit. And in **Hebrews 8:1-6** we are told that Christ, by virtue of being a better High Priest, "***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.***" This ministry is described as better in two ways, which we are going to be looking at today, and then the next time we're back in Hebrews.

1. Jesus Christ, our great High Priest offers us a **new and greater access** to the Father, for He is seated at the very right hand of God. *8:1 "Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man"* He is not an earthly priest - he is a heavenly priest. In fact, we are reminded in verse 4, *if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all*, This new and greater access is our theme for today, which is brought out in the first half of chapter 9.

2. Jesus, our great High Priest has made a **new and better sacrifice**, must have something to offer, *3 For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer.*

Let's look at this new and greater access that Christ has secured for us, and we will see that it is something like comparing letters written on papyrus to conversing on FaceTime or Skype. And so in chapter 9, the author of Hebrews reminds us of that old system of access, under the old Mosaic covenant of Judaism. For yes, they had access to God, they even had a place that they could go and meet with Him: **the Tabernacle**.

***Heb. 9:1** Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. 2 For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. [That's the first section]*

***3 Behind** the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, 4 having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. 5 Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.*

Notice what he is describing here - the place. This earthly place of holiness he calls it. Now it itself and in its time, this was an appropriate place for worship, complete with regulations and equipped for all the duties of the priests. And notice, the author is not interested in describing in detail every duty of each priest and how every item in the tabernacle was used and how each item was placed there for a particular purpose. He is not even interested in showing how each item in the tabernacle pointed to Christ, though I have heard really good sermons on that before. But the point that he is going to press as important here is to note that the tabernacle was set up with two rooms. There is a reason that there are these two rooms, something God was trying to tell us.

***Heb. 9:6** These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties,*

***7 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.*

Ok, so now we see that the point of the two rooms was concerned with this idea of access. Who can access each of the rooms and therefore draw closer to the presence of God? No under the old system, the Lord Jesus himself, could not even enter into the first room, the Holy Place, for he was of the tribe of Judah, and as we were told in chapter 7:14 *For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.* So Christ himself, in regards to this earthly priesthood, would have been barred from serving at the altar. Good luck any of us. Yes, Levi. So the Levites had access to the Holy Place, into which they would go to perform their ritual duties. Now even then the access wasn't perfect - not every priest could go into the holy place, even within the Levitical priesthood there was distinctions of roles and special divisions, but the point the author is making here is that the outer room was for the priesthood. Daily they would perform their duties in the outer room, but the golden altar of incense at the front of the curtain, blocked their access to the inner room. Imagine that, knowing how close you are everyday to the very presence of God, only a linen curtain separating you

Hebrews 9 / Access

from Him, yet you were granted no access, and would not be. The only way for any of you and your company to have access to God was to wait. To wait for that one day of the year, the day of atonement, in which the high priest would be appointed to enter in, to access the Holy of Holies, to stand before you and represent you in the presence of God. You see that? All year you wait for the high priest to show up and to represent you before God. Now what the purpose of this system? Why is meant by this?

8 By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing 9 (which is symbolic for the present age).

Verse 9 tells us something amazing about the tabernacle - the word that is translated as "symbolic" in the ESV is the word "Parable". Remember parables, who Jesus loved telling them. The tabernacle is a parable for them in that time (a better translation than the ESV's "symbolic for the present age") What's a parable?- kids definition "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning". Now when we think of parables, we tend to think that the earthly element is more real because it is more tangible, we can see it touch it hear it. But that is not the case here. Earlier in Hebrews 8 were are told that *5 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."* The idea is that the earthly things are only shadowy representations of the heavenly realities. C.S. Lewis used to call this world the shadowlands, in his depiction of heaven in his Narnia series, heavenly Narnia was more real, the colour more bright, the stuff more stuffy. So what's the meaning of the parable of the tabernacle?

8 By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing 9 (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, 10 but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

So the first tent represented the first covenant, under which all the people including the priesthood had limited access to God. This shadowy system taught them two things: first, that their sacrifices and duties were powerless to truly deal with sin in any ultimate and final way. Days and weeks and months and years and decades and centuries passed, and the priesthood remained, performing the same duties, offering the same sacrifices, and never is any greater access to God permitted, for *the way into the holy places is not yet opened*. As great a privilege it was for them to serve in a ministry so close to the presence of God, they needed a high priest to come and open that way in to God's presence once and for all. For generations that was the meaning of the parable - we need a great high priest who will do away with sin once and for all! We need a reformation!

And now we see **the full picture clearly**: Christ has come, the Great High Priest.

Heb. 9:11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 12 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, thus securing an eternal redemption.

Hebrews 9 / Access

Christ did not merely enter into the shadow tabernacle. As a greater high priest, after the order of Melchizedek, of whom the Lord has said, "Sit at my right hand", Christ has passed through the greater and more perfect tent and entered into God's presence once for all.

The first tent signified the first age, the age of the Levitical Priesthood, the age of the Mosaic Law, the age of weakness, the age of endless sacrifice, the age of no access. The second tent signifies the age of the High Priest, the perfect sacrifice, the once and for all access to the presence of God, and Christ has come to usher in that new age, for he has sat down in the heavenly Holy of Holies, where he remains a priest forever.

What does this mean? It Means that since we have a High Priest in the Heavens, **we have greater** Access to God:

Heb. 9:15 *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.*

See, we don't come to God under the Old Covenant, in which none of us could ever approach God, we come to God on the basis of the New Covenant that he has made with us in Christ. This is the new covenant that Jesus offers to all who will come to him in repentance and faith. It is the New Covenant which is sealed with his own blood, having come into effect when he offered up himself unto death. This is the New Covenant that truly saves, truly cleanses truly forgives. This is the New Covenant that we celebrate every week in the Lord's Supper. This is the New Covenant by which we have full access to the Father:

Heb. 10:19 **Therefore**, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Applications:

1. Don't Slip Back Into the Old: it is tempting to let other's represent us before God. Christianity has no formal priesthood but Christ. Do not sit back and be content to let others live a spiritual life for you. Follow Christ into access with God.
2. Take Advantage of Your Access: Draw Near in Prayer: Just as it would be strange for a modern person to not take advantage in modern communication to connect with a love one, take advantage of the access the Christ has secured before the Father. Because he has opened the way, you can draw near with boldness and assurance any time to the throne of God in prayer.

Hebrews 9:18-10:18 / Sacrifice

A New and Better High Priest
A New and Better Covenant
A New and Better Access to the Father
A New and Better Sacrifice

Why did Jesus have to die? We may understand that we are sinners and that somehow we need to be forgiven, but still not truly understand why it was necessary for Jesus to have died in order for God to have forgiven our sins.

A More Costly Sacrifice

The first comparison that is made regards the value of the sacrifice from the perspective of the priest that brings the sacrifice. And to understand this comparison being made, we need to review how the Bible teaches us to tie together the concept of death and covenant. If you remember, a few weeks ago I gave you a definition of covenant that I found helpful, which was an elected relationship of obligation under oath. While I thought that it was a helpful definition, it did lack one important aspect of Biblical Covenants that is important for us today. In Biblical Covenants, there was nearly always an aspect of shedding of blood in the ceremony instituting the Covenant. It is why in the Hebrew phrase for establishing a covenant with someone, is literally the graphic phrase, "to cut a covenant". The most striking example of this is in Genesis 15 in which God "cuts" a covenant with Abraham. Remember, he has Abraham bring to him various animals and they cut the animals in half and arranged them in a sort of path of blood. The idea was that the covenant partners would walk this path together, between the dead animals, the significance being, "May this happen to us, should one of us break covenant with one another."

The author of Hebrews rightly points out that the Mosaic covenant, the Jewish covenant, the one he has been contrasting with the New Covenant in these chapters, was also instituted by a ceremony involving blood.

18 Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. 19 For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, 20 saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you." 21 And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. 22 Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

Thus the first covenant was instituted by blood, and so would the second be as we are told in verses 23-24:

23 Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24 For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

Remember we spoke a few weeks ago about how the old system was a parable pointing us to Christ? That under the Old Covenant, the priests would go about their business in the first room of the tabernacle, so close to the presence of God, but none could enter in. They were put in a position of waiting, anticipating the day when the High Priest would enter in, and that signified

Hebrews 9:18-10:18 / Sacrifice

the entire age of Moses, the Levitical priesthood serving under the Mosaic law, waiting for the time when a greater priest, one after the order of Melchizedek, would enter into to the true temple, not made by hands. Yet just as no high priest could ever enter into the Holy Place without a sacrifice, so it was necessary that the Great High Priest Jesus Christ also have something to offer, in order to inaugurate this new covenant with God's people. Not only that, but verse 23 says that he must bring a better sacrifice. And so Christ has done.

The author of Hebrews makes a little bit of a pun: for in the Greek language, the word for covenant and the word for testament are the same word, as in last will and testament. So the author of Hebrews notes that in order for Jesus to cut this new covenant with us, he had to execute his own last will and testament. And what needs to happen before a will and testament is executed? The person himself must die.

*Heb. 9:15 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. 16 For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. 17 For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.*

This is the first sense in which Jesus' sacrifice is better - it cost him his own life. The blood of the covenants is a reminder to us that forgiveness always costs something. Always. To forgive someone is to release them from taking the burden of sin upon themselves, but it means that the forgiving party himself must bear the burden. No earthly priest ever sacrificed himself for the people, nor was he expected to. And here is the amazing thing about God's covenants, He seals them with his own blood.

Even in the covenant with Abraham, remember, Abraham never walked that path of blood himself, God put in to sleep and walked the path himself, the message being, "Abraham, if I ever break this covenant, I, die. Not only that, but if *you* ever break this covenant, I die." That's a lose-lose God, why would you do that? And so, in making covenants us who cannot keep the covenants, God was writing his own will and testament, which would be enacted when Jesus appeared once and for *all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*.

*But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. 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.*

Jesus' sacrifice was better because it cost him his life. no other priest has ever offered such a costly sacrifice. Not only as Christ's sacrifice more costly, it was also more effective.

A More Effective Sacrifice

*Heb. 10:1 For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? 3 But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. 4 **For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.***

Hebrews 9:18-10:18 / Sacrifice

Here's the picture, under the Old Covenant, the priests could approach God, but they had to approach God in such way that their sins were covered, and so they could only enter into the tabernacle after coming with a sacrifice. The first picture of this covering is found in Genesis Chapter 3. You'll remember the God had told Adam that in the day that they rebelled, in the day that they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, on that day, they would die. And here they are, having eaten of the forbidden fruit. They must have anticipated immediate death. And remember what they tried to do? They tried to cover up their sin, shame and nakedness, with leaves and hide from God. Yet they couldn't hide from God, He sought them out and found them. Yet instead of killing them, ending their lives, God does something curious. First he promises them that the woman will live to bear children and that one of her offspring is going to set things right again by crushing the Serpent's head. So he gives them a promise of hope in a deliverer to come. And you know Adam heard this promise because he turns to his wife and names her Eve, for she will be the mother of all living, "Eve" meaning "life". Life would come from "Eve". After giving this promise, God does something else: *And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.* So there is a death on that first day of sin, but not of Adam or Eve. There is a covering of sin on that first day, but not a man-made covering. Blood is shed, but not their own. God himself covers Adam and Eve through the death of a substitute. *The principle is established on the first pages of the Bible: sin leads to death, but God provides a substitute to cover my sin.* And this covering continues throughout the Old Testament. When Abraham takes Issac up the hill, what is his hope? **God** will provide for **himself** the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." And yes, God does provide a substitute for Isaac. On the night of the passover out of Egypt, what did the children of Israel have to do? Cover the doorposts of their houses with the lamb's blood or their own firstborn sons would die. You know what was normally written on the doorposts of Egyptian houses? The names and images of their false God's. So God was telling them, I am your God, take the blood of the lambs and cover your households with it. The same idea of substitutionary sacrifice covering our sins was at the heart of the levitical priesthood, but the author of Hebrews makes the point that that system was a shadow pointing us to the real lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world (as John the Baptist said of Jesus.) See, the covering *anticipated* the cleansing.

Day that you wake up and go to work or class, and you don't have time to shower, so you put your hair in a pony tail, or throw on a baseball cap, or spray perfume or cologne on, but all day, though you may have covered up your uncleanliness, you can't wait to go home and get in the shower and be clean. Your covering anticipates your cleansing. And that is what the old system anticipated: because the blood of bulls and goats, were only able to cover and not able to cleanse, a greater sacrifice is anticipated. This is not a surprise, it was foretold in the Old Testament that one would come to do away with sin in his own body - look at verses 10:5-7 - the author of Hebrews sees the words of Psalm 40:6-8, written hundreds of years before Christ came into the world as being on his very lips:

Heb. 10:5 Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; 6 in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. 7 Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'"

Jesus willingly offered himself in obedience to the Father and in fulfillment of every prophetic word in the Old Testament, he laid himself down, remember in the Garden on the night of his betrayal,

Hebrews 9:18-10:18 / Sacrifice

you can hear the echo of Psalm 40:7 - I have come to do your will - in his prayer "Not My Will But Yours's be Done."

Heb. 10:8 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), 9 then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second. 10 And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all [not for all people, but for all time]

Finally, Jesus offers a **A More Complete Sacrifice**

Heb. 10:11 And every priest stands [remember- this was written while the temple still stood and the priesthood still continued] daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, 13 waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. 14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. 15 And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, 16 "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds," 17 then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." 18 Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

See this is our great High Priest, he has offered a better, more effective, sacrifice: He is able to make perfect those who draw near to God. He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1. We are under the new covenant. We can't go back to the old ways. We have a new and better priest, therefore we are under a new and better covenant, we have new and better access to God, through a new and better sacrifice. Don't ever let anyone try to persuade you that we could ever go back to the old law, go back to the old sacrifice, go back to the old covenant, go back to the old priesthood.
2. If you are here today and you don't know Christ, it could be that the Holy Spirit is right now calling you to draw near to God through Jesus Christ. The first murder in the Bible God said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. Cain had killed Abel, but we've done worse, we murdered the very Son of God, and His blood is calling out, "Repent!" Until now there has been a veil over your eyes whenever the word of God is read or preached, but now for the first time you are seeing tears in the veil and the new and living way is being opened to you. Walk forward. Come to Christ. Draw near to God. Bring him your sins, all of them, and confess him and Lord. Call on him and be saved.
3. Never, doubt the effectiveness of the sacrifice of Christ. We still believe that we must atone for our sins. The difference between a Christian and an unbeliever is the practice of repentance when we sin, for our sin should drive us to Christ, because we understand that he has paid it all. if you shrink back from Christ when you become aware of your sin, you are still trying to save your self. It is finished. Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe, sin had left its crimson stain and he washed it white as snow.

Hebrews 10:19-25 / Let Us Draw Near

A lot of life comes down to this question: are you in or are you out? When I was in Junior High I was consumed with being in the in-crowd. In high school I was defined by being a member of the basketball team, in the choir, in the school play. Of course then I had to apply for colleges, would they accept me in? Or would I be out? Applications for jobs followed - in or out.

These are life defining moments, identity building moments, because we do in fact define ourselves by the groups that we are included into. If the in-crowd accepts me, I'm popular. If the basketball team accepts me, I'm a player. If I get into Carleton, I'm a Raven. If I get that job at that firm, I'm an accountant. If Citizen and Immigration let me in, I'm Canadian.

Over the past few months the English Congregation has been working through the book of Hebrews. In **Hebrews 10:19-22** we have one of the climatic statements of the entire argument of the book:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God.

We have confidence to enter" - one commentator translate this words as "we have authorization to enter" and the idea is that any confidence we feel in coming to God comes from our right to be there, which was secured for us through the work of Christ. Have you ever been somewhere in which you know you probably shouldn't be? You know that feeling - what if someone finds me here? But if you are granted authority to access, that feeling goes away. And here is the point, we have a right to be there, because Jesus our High Priest has granted us access.

This was not always the case, in the Old Testament of the Bible, **not everyone could approach God's presence**. No Gentile could approach God in the Temple. No woman could approach God in the Temple. Only the priests, descended from the tribe of Levi, could enter into the Temple, but even they could not enter fully into the presence of God, for a veil divided the temple in two. Only the high priest could enter into God's presence, once every year. While the people waited outside, the high priest would bring an offering for the sins of the people. The offering reminded God's people how their sins had separated them from God and how sin leads to death. That is still true today and every generation - our sins have separated us from God, and we cannot enter into his presence - we are shut out. Through the death of the animal sacrifices, God considered their sins to be covered, and thus the high priest could approach God in the Holy of Holies. Yet these sacrifices only a temporary covering. They could not remove sin and perfectly cleanse the worshippers. They had to be repeated day after day and year after year, the work was never done.

Yet the this Old System was to prepare the people for the time when God would make a New Covenant with His people through the Messiah. For the prophets foretold of a greater priest who would come, who would enter into God's presence once and for all, and make a new way for people to enter into God's presence. And that is in fact what Jesus Christ has done. Through the offering of his own body as a sacrifice to God, he dealt with sin in a new way, once and for all. In his resurrection and ascension to heaven, He has shown himself to be a new and greater High Priest who entered into God's presence and is now seated at God's right hand where he still lives and prays for us. And that's the point of these verses: In Jesus Christ, a new way to God has opened up to us; the veil that once separated the people from God has been torn in two through the death of Christ, and now we have authorization to enter in. As we read on, we find three applications right in the text:

Hebrews 10:19-25 / Let Us Draw Near

Draw Near

22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

The first application is this: we must take full advantage of this new and living way Christ has opened up for us by confidently drawing near to God. What does this mean? It speaks to the essence of what it means to be a Christian. A Christian is a person who follows Christ into the presence of God. And our basis for following Christ into God's presence is that the finished work of His sacrificial death has been applied to us personally. Here's the reality - under this New Covenant, it is not enough to let another go into God's presence for you, no parent or pastor or priest can go in for you, you must draw near yourself.

Notice first the two verbs in the second part of the verse. These verbs are in what is called the perfect tense - which is a geeky grammar way to say, they describe a present state that has come about by something that has occurred in the past. So what has happened? When we came to faith and trusted Christ, God ordained us, each one of us, to be his priests. That's the language that is used. See in the Old Covenant, the priests were ordained in a ceremony described in which they were first washed with water and then blood of the sacrifices were sprinkled over them. In the New Covenant, the order is reversed. When a person comes to Christ by faith, their evil conscience is sprinkled clean by the blood of Christ, they are completely forgiven. That's the inward reality. They are then soon baptized, washed clean in pure water, the outward picture of their inner cleansing. And so when we come to Christ in faith and baptism, we are ordained to be His priests. As God's priests we are granted authorized access into God's presence.

Therefore, let us draw near! If you are not a Christian, draw near to God through the way of Jesus Christ. If you are a Christian, you are authorized entry into God's throne room. If you haven't been baptized yet, be baptized as a priest of God.

The second application is this: Carry On, or as the verse says, "Hold Fast".

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

This is the major application of the entire book of Hebrews, as it was written to a people who were beginning to face challenges and opposition from the society on account of their faith. Some of them were considering giving up and going back to their former way of life, in their case Judaism. The argument of the book of Hebrews is that once we have tasted of the better things of the gospel of Jesus Christ, there is nothing to go back to. So we are encouraged to carry on in our confession, that is to continue to live in and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Next month our church is hosting its fortieth anniversary, with the theme "Carry On, Break Through" and one of the reasons we chose that theme is because we hope to continue to walk in the faithfulness to the gospel as the generations who have come before us in the church. We want to "Carry On" their legacy. And this is a noble thing, to carry on in the paths of those who have come before you. And indeed, later in the book of Hebrews, in chapter 12, we read of the great cloud of witnesses who came before us, and are pointed to their example in the faith as one to follow. But here the motivation for Carrying On is even made more simple - because He who promised is faithful. God has made an oath to us, that "He would never leave us and never forsake us", and that "those who trust in Him will never be put to shame" for "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Our hope is in His faithfulness. We carry on because He carries us.

Hebrews 10:19-25 / Let Us Draw Near

As things turn bleaker for Christians in our culture, that is going to be the test. Sure it is easy to follow Christ when all is well, but do you trust his faithfulness when your faith is challenged? Remember, our hope is not in this world, but our hope is already seated at the Father's side. As the song says:

Before the throne of God above
I have a strong, a perfect plea,
A great High priest whose name is Love
Who always lives and pleads for me

Carry on, holding fast to Jesus, the High Priest of our confession.

Finally, We Together Seek to “Break Through”

Debra and I were talking about this passage on Thursday and I was telling her about how this passage speaks to our ordination as priests in the presence of God. And she asked a good question, like she usually does, and said, if we are ordained as priests, what work has God ordaining us to do? Well, my mind went to a few other passages, most quickly to Romans 12:1-3, in which we are told to present ourselves as living sacrifices to God, holy and acceptable to Him, for this is our [can be translated] priestly service, but then I quickly came back to this very passage - here verses 24-25 is a description of at least part of the priestly work that God has ordained us to do:

24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 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.

This is the priestly service that God has called each of us Christians to perform:

1. To come together as the body of Christ: *25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some.* Just as the Old Covenant priests gathered together around the physical Temple, we New Covenant priests are to gather together, not around any physical Temple, but when we gather together, we are the temple of God. You can't perform your priestly duty as a Christian if you forsake the gathering together.
2. To provoke each other to love: The ESV says “stir up”, other translations say “provoke” or “spur”. The word is not usually positive. Generally, the word would be used when we incite one another to anger. Yet here is our high priestly duty, to agitate each other, not to anger, but to love and good works. And not only are we to agitate each other, but it is our priestly duty to consider how to agitate each other, so that when we gather together we are not just coming to church to consume and to be taught by some pastor, or to have our felt needs met, but if you are a child of God, and have been sprinkled by his blood, and have been washed in the pure water of baptism, you are ordained a priest of God and it is your duty when we are the church gather together, it is your priestly duty to consider, to contemplate, to come with a plan, as to how you might agitate, spur one another on to love and good works - notice finally, because some of us need to hear this, especially because we have our AGM today, that this priestly provoking is to be encouraging. Some of you may be like, great! My spiritual gift is provoking people, ok, but provoke people to love and good deeds in a positive encouraging way.

Break Through: Here is the “Break Through” part of our 40th anniversary slogan: *all the more as you see the day approaching.* It is our prayer as a church family, as our priestly duty as the people of God, to not only carry on in our confession, but to consider how to grow in love, to grow in good works, to grow in encouragement, to grow in maturity, to grow in faith, until Christ returns for us.

Heb 10:26 One of the scariest verses in the Bible

*For if we go on **sinning deliberately** after receiving the knowledge of the truth, **there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins**, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.*

Why is this verse so scary.

There is a false panic about this passage.

There is a real warning about this passage.

The false fear

The false fear often arises when we strip this verse from context and make it say something other than what it is actually saying. Let's walk down that road a little. *If we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth.*

- *First, we fear that this passage is talking about true Christians:* We think that because we see the word "we" and note that it says, "*after receiving knowledge of the truth*". Here is where a little Greek can hurt us, the word is not just knowledge, but full, deep, experiential knowledge. And we hear that and fear that this is talking about those who have come to a full, deep, experiential relationship with God and yet now are under condemnation. I'm going to show you that while this passage may be fearful to those who profess to be Christians, this is not necessarily speaking of those who are truly born again.
- *Second, we fear that we all fit the description of "sinning deliberately after coming to knowledge of the truth."* Let's be honest with ourselves. Have you ever, since coming to faith in Christ, sinned deliberately. Of course you have. Of course I have. Sin is an act of the will. Oops, I accidentally sinned again. And some might say, well the ESV doesn't say "sinning deliberately" it says, "go on sinning deliberately" and I'm not sure that helps us much, for while the Bible does make a distinction between a lifestyle characterized by sin and the lifestyle of a believer who, while fighting against the flesh, stumbles and falls into sin from time to time, I'm not sure that helps us here. For guess what, could any of us say that since becoming a Christian we do not struggle against besetting sin, continual sin, ongoing failure?
- *Third, we fear that the passage is saying that "Jesus' sacrifice will no longer cover us"* - It says, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. So perhaps this is saying that God is removing the covering of the sacrifice of his son from our lives and now we are plunged back into our sin once again. We failed him far too many times. We've used up his grace.
- *Fourth, we fear that this passage is saying that damnation is the outcome of the failed Christian life, and that salvation once lost can never be regained.*

Now the view of the Christian life encapsulated in this reading of the passage is terrible. There could not be any hope, or confidence, or assurance here. For how much sin is too much? When did you cross the line? What if I've lost Christ's salvation, and can't go back because his blood won't cover me any more. What kind of God is this who tells us his children to forgive our brothers seventy times seven, yet is ready to cast us away, when we fall short of his grace?

Here is why reading the Bible in context is so important. There is a fearful warning in this text, but we must be careful to hear what this text is warning us of, lest we cower in front of a false God. **So let's take another look at this passage.**

Notice **the word "for"** - such an important word - we see that this warning in verse 26 is providing a reason as to why what is said before is so vital. And what has been said before? Well last week we heard the call to draw near to God through the new and living way Jesus

Hebrews 10:26-39 / No Longer Any Sacrifice for Sins

Christ has opened for us. **The truth revealed in verses 19 to 25** is this, since we have such a great high priest who has opened up that new way for us, we therefore are to follow him into that access to God. We saw how verse 22 spoke to the priesthood of all true believers, that through the cleansing of our sins by Christ's blood and the consecration of our bodies in our baptism, we are God's priests, granted access to the presence of God. The call **in the following verses** is to come to God through Christ, carry on in our profession clinging on to Christ, and coming together regularly considering how to spur one another on in Christ. So, if that is the call, then, the call provides us with basis for understanding the warning that comes after the call.

So let's **read the warning that way**: For if we don't draw near to God through Christ, Hold fast to Christ, or neglect the Body of Christ - in other words, **if we reject coming to God through Christ** - after receiving knowledge of the truth - now again, context is important. What truth? Well we've now read through the entire book of Hebrews, and we've been pointed to many truths.

- Christ is the great Apostle: There has never been and there never will be a greater revelation of God, than the incarnation of Jesus Christ, who is the very Son of God.
- Christ is the great High Priest: That is, He is the High Priest that all other priests looked toward. He made a sacrifice that eclipsed all other sacrifices. His work is finished and He offers us a new Covenant.

So here's the warning: if you know the truth that Christ is the great Apostle and High Priest, and yet you sin deliberately by not drawing near to God through him - in other words **if you deny the truth that Jesus Christ is the Apostle/Priest sent by God**, then the third statement makes sense: there no longer remains any sacrifice for sin. Because we have just seen that Christ has made the sacrificial system obsolete. **There is no other means of access to the Father but by Christ.** There is no other blood that can be shed to remove your sins than Christ. This has been the key truth revealed in chapters 7-10: Judaism is over, it has been fulfilled in Christ and there is nothing to go back toward. You cannot get to God by going around Christ. To trust in any other sacrifice, to trust in any other system of drawing near to God, is to spit on the sacrifice of Christ. **Look at verses 28-29**: to try to draw near to God apart from Christ is to "trample underfoot the Son of God" to "profane the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified" and to "outraged the Spirit of grace". Remember who he is writing to, professing believers who are being tempted to go back to Judaism, who are considering leaving the New Covenant, for the Old, but the Old is over! **There's no sacrifice left.** Again, How prophetic is this book! For perhaps less than two years after this sermon was circulated, the Temple was destroyed. So for the past 1900 years, there literally has been no sacrifice to turn back to.

So here is the real warning. Don't mix up a fake warning in the text, but miss the real. The real warning is this, **just as the first Covenant contained a blessing and a curse**, so also does this New Covenant. Guys, I cannot just preach Christ to your felt needs, I need to call you to repentance, for you either must draw near to God through Christ, or you reject his call and are under his wrath. This is not a game. I pray for you youth and young people especially, as you grow up hearing the word of God and it might become boring. The reason we have youth fellowship, Sunday School, is not because we think Jesus is cool and He can make your life better - it is because Hell hangs in the balance. And the curse of the covenant is that those who are closest to heaven, through the preaching of the word, are often bound to hell through their willful disobedience to the word. That is the willful, deliberate sinning spoken of in verse 26.

Hebrews 10:26-39 / No Longer Any Sacrifice for Sins

So there is a sober warning in this text, but not intended to scare off those who are truly in Christ, it is intended to shake the souls of the false professors, the ones who wear their faith as a badge, but not inwardly. If you hear today and your heart is not soft toward God, you should tremble. If you hear his word, and do not make a constant practice of repentance and coming to God in confession and prayer because Jesus had boldly opened the way to the Father, then you should weep and mourn. And you might say to me, if that's the case what confidence can I have that my faith is genuine, that I am truly a child of God, well I'm glad you asked, because the Holy Spirit, as He does so many times during the course of this book of Hebrews, finishes his thought with a word of encouragement to those who are truly faithful.

We see in this word of encouragement in verses 32-39 three pictures of genuine faith, that should fill us, not with trembling that we shrink back before God, but with genuine hope, and confidence so that we continue to boldly seek the Father.

Genuine Faith Endures Hard Struggles and Scorn

But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, 33 sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.

Do you have a testimony? Has your faith been challenged? Praise the Lord for those friends who mock our beliefs, and those parents that condescend. Praise the Lord for the media that assails, and the governments that imprison. Praise the Lord for this one thing, because it is through the testing of your faith that you develop endurance, and have a testimony to fall back on, that the Lord is Good. I thank God for my Dad's scoffing. I thank God for my mom's tears. For I've got a testimony of endurance. Have you thanked God for the trials that He has brought you through so that your faith might be proved genuine? Thank him for the struggle.

Genuine Faith Holds Things Loosely and God's Promises Tightly

34 For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

Here we get a picture of how genuine faith carries the believer through persecution and suffering. For the genuine believer holds loosely to the things of this world while clinging tightly to God's promises of a better and abiding world to come. This is a preview of the next chapter and a half. Faith holds on to the promises of God in spite of the struggles of life.

Genuine Faith Lives To the End and Beyond

35 Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. 36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. 37 For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." Heb. 10:39 But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

I love how the encouragement here fittingly points us toward the return of Christ - Genuine faith lives to the end and beyond. We may go through trials now, but we hold on to this world loosely and God's promises tightly, and when we think of the return of Christ, we are not of those who shrink back in fear, but we look forward to that day because genuine faith lives to the end and beyond.

Hebrews 11:1-3 / Faith is the SUBSTANCE

Today we are starting a new series, “By Faith” still in the book of Hebrews, but we’ve turned a corner. Last week’s message, the final message in our series “Better Things” from Hebrews 7-10, brought up the subject of faith, which is not the main concern of Hebrews chapter 11. If you remember, last week was the conclusion to the main theological section of the book of Hebrews, and it ended on a somber warning, Draw near to God through Christ, for there are some who are church goers, but do not really have the life of Christ in them, and though they remain among us for a while professing to have Christ, they later turn and trample on Christ and outrage the Holy Spirit. Now that brings up a pretty important pastoral question: What is genuine faith and how do I know I have it? How can I have confidence that I will persevere and that I’m not just fooling myself? That I’m not just a church goer, but a true child of God?

That’s what this series is about. In Hebrews 11, God first defines for us who faith is and then describes faith for us through the biographies of saints of old. He gives us picture after picture as examples to inspire us, and help us to see what faith looks like. Some of us are theoretical learners, but some of us are concrete learners: we need pictures, we need stories, we need examples - that’s Hebrews 11.

Now we’ve got to be careful a bit as we jump in, because we see right away that verse 1 is a challenging verse to understand, and I can demonstrate how challenging it is to understand just by putting up some different English translations for you:

Now faith is		
THE CONFIDENCE IN WHAT WE HOPE FOR	[NIV]	
BEING SURE OF WHAT WE HOPE FOR	[NET]	
THE ASSURANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR	[ESV, NASB]	
THE REALITY OF WHAT IS HOPED FOR	[HCSB]	
THE SUBSTANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR	[KJV, NKJV]	
assurance about what we do not see	[NIV]	
being convinced of what we do not see	[NET]	
the conviction of things not seen	[ESV, NASB]	
the proof of what is not seen	[HCSB]	
the evidence of things not seen	[KJV, NKJV]	

Notice that the NIV, NET Bibles, ESV and NASB generally put the emphasis on our subjective experience of having assurance, or confidence, or being sure or convinced, or having conviction. This makes sense to us English readers because it’s generally what we think of if we talk about having faith. However, the other translations, the HCSB and both KJV’s take a different approach altogether, and one that doesn’t make as much sense to us perhaps, because they speak of faith not as a conviction or feeling of assurance we have, but as itself a reality or substance or evidence

and proof. So we can tell just by looking at these various English translations that we’ve got some work to do.

Now why is this important to get right, this definition of faith? Counter-apologetics group, nearly all of them described faith in the first, subjective way, often in a very condescending sense, and some of them even quoted this verse in Hebrews for support. This is quite common:

- “Faith consists in believing when it is beyond the power of reason to believe.” - Voltaire
- “Faith is believing in something when common sense tells you not to” - Miracle on 34th Street.
- “Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence.” - Richard Dawkins
- Faith is the excuse people give for believing something when they don’t have evidence. - Atheist personality Matt Dillahunty

So is **this** what the author of Hebrews referring to? This sort of blind faith, faith in place of reason or in place of common sense, of closing our eyes to what we can see in the hopes of what we can’t? I don’t think so. I definitely doesn’t sound like the gospel any of the apostles preached. They didn’t say, just believe and you’ll get some sort of warm tingly feeling, no they

Hebrews 11:1-3 / Faith is the SUBSTANCE

preached evidence and fact and history - the guy you killed raised again from the dead, we saw him, we ate with him, we touched him, therefore bow your knee to him that he might forgive you.

So **what is faith?** Let's learn a Greek word together. Faith is the hypostasis of things hoped for. What's this word, hypostasis? Hypostasis is a very important theological word, for it means, **the very essence of a thing**, what a thing substantially is. It is used earlier in the book of Hebrews, speaking of Jesus - **he is the exact imprint of the father's** hypostasis. OK, so it looks like the KJV was on to something using the word, substance, the substance of things hoped for. The problem is, what does that mean? How is faith the substance of things hoped for? To understand, we've got to get into the world as the author of Hebrews has presented it to us. For we have seen in Hebrews a very unique worldview that we'd do well to quickly remind ourselves: **here it is summed up for you**

The True Form of the Realities (The Heavenly Reality - invisible to us)

- Hebrews 8:1: one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, 2 a minister in the holy places, **in the true tent that the Lord set up**, not man.

The worldview of Hebrews does not begin with what is seen or what is made by hands, but it begins with what is unseen to us and unmade - he speaks here of the "true tent that the Lord set up." Again and again in the book, the Heavenly form is the true reality, after which the things we see were patterned. This is made explicit in the case of the tabernacle and sacrificial system, which are called

The Shadow of the Realities (The Tabernacle System)

- 8:5 They [the levitical priests] 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."

Now, the point of Hebrews 7-10 was that this shadow system pointed to Christ, who is the:

The Better Hope of the Realities (Christ)

- Heb. 7:19 (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

The law was to point us to a better hope. To show us the holiness of God and to convict us of our own sinfulness and to point us to away from ourselves and toward God's Messiah, who was to come at the appointed time:

- Heb. 9:11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 12 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, thus securing an eternal redemption.

So Christ was that better hope. He was the fulfillment of all that the Old shadowy system pointed toward. He is the new and better priest, who makes a new and better covenant with us opening up a new and better means of accessing God, through his perfect and finished sacrifice of himself. He sits now enthroned in heaven until He returns to make His invisible reign visible.

Hebrews 11:1-3 / Faith is the SUBSTANCE

Yet what can we see Him doing now? We can't see the heavenly true form of reality, and so we can no longer see Christ, for he has ascended to that realm. How can we see, truly see what God is doing now? By Faith -

The Substance of the Realities (Faith)

- Heb. 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen

The **true forms** of God's realities are not visible to us, we cannot see into God's throne room, for example, yet they are realities nonetheless, and faith is the what happens when those realities burst into our lives - they begin substantially changing us. So while we can't see God's realities, we can see faith. **So here is our definition of faith:** Faith is the tangible expression in our lives of God's invisible realities, mediated by the work and word of Christ. In other words, the King James version had it right, "**Faith is the evidence of things unseen.**"

You don't believe me? You wanna see faith? The substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things unseen? I'll show you faith. The rest of Hebrews 11 is story after story of men and women of old demonstrating their faith in these unseen realities, so that their faith itself is evidence of those realities. And God was pleased with them, they did not shrink back, they had genuine faith: **Hebrews 11:2 says:** By faith the people of old received their commendation. Some of you have asked me as we've been going through Hebrews, what about the saints of old, before Christ, how were they saved? The same way we are, by God's invisible reality, mediated by the word and work of Christ who would come, breaking into their lives and producing in them tangible, substantial faith. **Though they could not clearly** see through the shadows, their faith was substantial evidence of hope in Christ.

See reality is not merely what you can see. This is what the Word of God produces in us - substantive faith, evidence for God where before there was nothing; visible, demonstrable, tangible realities pointing toward the unseen God. When we hear the word of God, and he gives us faith it is as if He is speaking us into a new creation. In fact God says in 2 Corinthians, "if any man be in Christ, he is a new Creation, the old is gone, behold the new!" this is what God does with his word - He makes visible things out of things unseen. He's been doing this from the beginning - in fact it seems the author of Hebrews is telling us that all creation itself is a metaphor for how God gives faith, for "***By faith we 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.***" When the word of God was first spoken in Genesis 1:1, the universe sprang into being. The promise in the Gospel is the same, that if you hear the word of Christ speaking into your heart, he can bring visible, tangible, substantial faith where once there was none. This is why as we saw last week the author of Hebrews pointed us back to our testimonies of faith as the tangible evidence that we are "not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls."

Has there been any substantive faith in your life, evidencing the invisible realities of God? If you once made a decision for Christ, or filled out a card or raised your hand or even were baptized, are you a new creation? Travis had the substance of faith.

Are you living by faith now? Boldly, tangibly, out-loud? Is your life the evidence of the power of the word of God in the work of Christ? The only way to see the substance of faith is through trials and challenges and times in which you can't see but keep going.

Hebrews 11:4-6 / Faith Offers Right Worship

What does faith look like? Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen. Faith is the invisible reign of Christ made tangible, visible, substantial, in the lives of people like us. We can't see Christ reigning at the right hand of God, but we can see his reign transforming the lives of people. The invisible reign of God changes men, changes women, transforms families, shapes society, impacts history. That's evidence that God and all these invisible reality are real.

And so we are directed to a multitude of examples of how by faith these simple men and women "conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight" even while enduring hardships, facing death and persecutions and mistreatment. That's the substance of things hoped for. That's the evidence of things unseen. That's faith.

And so we're introduced to our **first example** of life transforming faith in 11:4, and appropriately we are directed back to the first generation of humanity after the fall, the first son of Adam, a man named Abel. Heb. 11:4 *By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.*

Faith sacrifices self unto God and thereby lives a life death cannot touch. Let's unpack this a bit by **going back into** the story of Abel and Cain. What is it that made Abel's sacrifice more acceptable to God?

Gen. 4:1 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." 2 And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. 3 In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4 and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, 5 but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. 6 The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."

Gen. 4:8 Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. 9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" 10 And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground."

Now what is it that made Abel's sacrifice more acceptable than his brother's? Well, notice that neither Genesis or Hebrews tells us exactly what it was about Abel's sacrifice, but two suggestions have been made, one focusing on the outward act of sacrifice and the other focusing on the inward heart of worship. Let's look at the inward heart issue first:

Worship is always primarily a heart issue: Look at the Lord's response to Cain, "sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." That's a heart issue. Worship is the outflow of the heart, and the heart mastered by sin, cannot offer to God a right sacrifice of worship. It doesn't matter what you bring him, if your heart is wrong, if you are letting sin dominate and control you, your worship is nothing but filthy rags. David understood this. In his

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repentance after his terrible sin against Bathsheba and Uriah, David knew that there was no sacrifice he could make if his heart wasn't right. He wrote: *Psa. 51:16 For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

You cannot bring an appropriate sacrifice if your heart isn't right before him. You can look religious. You can perform spiritual acts. You can sing songs of praise and come and take communion and perform acts of mercy and feed the poor. But if you covet sin in your heart, and are not seeking to master it, but allowing it to master you, your worship is in vain. Cain was just as devout as Abel, he as just as religious as Abel, yet his heart was not right. But there's more. A right heart before God will express itself through obedience, through worship that is a reflection of the heart.

Worship expresses the heart through appropriate offerings: See, worship doesn't stop at the heart. God says to Cain: *If you do well, will you not be accepted?* Now what is difference between the two brothers' offerings? Obviously, one involves the shedding of blood, plainly it involves death. Is this important? Yes! Remember this is just Genesis 4, but already in the story we've are pointed to the connection between sin and death and God's acceptance of the shedding of a blood off a substitute, to cover over sin. Remember God had told Adam and Eve that on the day that they disobeyed his command they would surely die, and when they did disobey they for the first time experience shame and guilt and tried to cover themselves and run and hide from God. Why hide? Because according to God's word, they expected immediate and ultimate judgement from God. Yet when God called them out, he did something completely unexpected, instead of condemning them, he promised a redeemer - one who would come and make things right once again. And instead of killing them, giving to them the promised penalty of death, he instead covered them in the animal skins. So yes, their sin did indeed lead to death on the day of their disobedience, but not their own death. God allowed for a substitute to stand in their place, a death so that they could live. this all happens at the end of chapter 3, and if we read our Bibles like the Hebrews read theirs, without the chapter breaks and divisions, we connect these stories more naturally. Cain, out of the wickedness of his heart, brought God a sacrifice of his plenty. The fruit of his works. A religion of self-validation, self-justification, self-righteousness. Abel, his heart transformed by the grace of God, brought God a sacrifice of his poverty. A bloody sacrifice that pointed out the reality of his sin. A sorrowful, humble sacrifice. A sacrifice that reminded him that he should be dead, accept God allows him to live. A religion of repentance, self-emptying, self-denial.

This is what the author of Hebrews has been reminding us of again and again, that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin, and that these bloody sacrifices recorded in the Old Testament, were to point us forward to Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate and final substitute, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He has done it, he has made the final blood sacrifice, therefore, if anyone comes to Christ, he is perfectly clean from the inside out, perfectly forgiven, perfectly covered, perfectly righteous. And notice Hebrews 11:4: through this act of faith displayed through this appropriate sacrifice, Abel was commended by God as righteous. If God commended Abel as righteous for offering a sacrifice pointing to Christ, how much more does he commend us righteous who are in Christ!

Now we must note that there remains an acceptable sacrifice for God's people today. Not a sacrifice of blood, for Christ has paid it all, but there still remains an appropriate heart response to God, in view of God's grace toward us. **Romans 12:1:** *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by*

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the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. The last two words are translated many different ways in your English Bibles: spiritual worship (ESV, NRSV); reasonable service (NET, KJV); spiritual act of worship (NASB); true and proper worship (NIV)

Sometimes it is hard to convey the full meaning of a concept in one language to another in just a few words, so here is the full meaning of the Greek. In view of what Christ has done, namely that he was a high priest who offered his own life for us, it is logical, it is reasonable, it is proper, for us then to respond in the same way, by bringing to Him our own lives, offering them as a sacrifice to him, this now is our priestly worship. This defines worship for the Christian. Worship is not the songs we sing to God, worship is the life we bring to God. Faith brings your entire lives to God as an offering, and this is not unreasonable, for Christ gave his entire life for you. Faith believes Christ when he says: Matt. 16:24: *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?* Faith proclaims with the apostle Paul, Gal. 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* Faith offer to God my future, my career, my family, my friendships, my relationships, my sufferings, my successes, my sexuality, my children, my finances, my everything, my life. Take it Lord, take it. It's not mine. You made me, you bought me, you own me, you love me, and you know best for me. What is a result of a life like that? Death cannot touch you.

We know what happened to Abel - he was hated, he was persecuted, he was killed. But death couldn't touch him. **Hebrews** puts it this way: *“And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.”* If you've already offered your life to God, if you've already trusted your future, you family, you finances, your friendships, your everything to him, what can anyone take from you? They slander your reputation, so what? Christ knows me. They mock you and make fun of you, so what? Christ accepts me. They betray you and steal from you, so what? Christ will never leave me, and has more for me than they could ever take. They kill you to silence you, so what, I'll still live and my faith will still speak.

Think of how this spoke to the Hebrews, the Christians were losing their place of privilege in their society and they started seeing their property plundered, their businesses shut down, their brothers arrested, but if they've already given everything to God, what is all that? Take from me the things you can see, and I'll trust all the more in what can't be seen and what you can never take. I know whom I have placed the trust of my life in, am I am more than persuaded that He is able to hold my life in trust, until the day when my faith becomes sight.

Guys, our culture is becoming more and more outwardly and energetically hostile toward our faith. Businesses are being shut down, property is being plundered and we don't expect things to go in any different direction any time soon. Are you holding on to what the world can take from you? If you are, you've got something to lose. But if you're not holding onto it. If you've already offered it to God, then there is nothing anyone can take from you, not even your life.

Faith sacrifices self unto God and thereby lives a life death cannot touch.

Hebrews 12:1-3: Run the Race of Faith

Sports. Sports are inspiring. You guys know I enjoy the NBA. Sports are inspiring. Sports remind me that no matter what the odds, there is always a chance for a comeback. **LeBron James**. The Olympics are about to start, get ready to be inspired.

Here's the problem though with the fleeting inspiration of sports. I'm not LeBron James. I personally will not likely achieve great sports success again in my life, not that I really ever have. But today's passage in Hebrews speaks of a sort of athletic event, a race, that we all who are Christians do have the opportunity to experience.

Heb. 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 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.

Heb. 12:3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

The message today is entitled **Run With Focus**, The entire metaphor is that of a race: "let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" - that is the main verb in this section. This race is obviously the Christian life and therefore it will teach us how we are to run and not grow weary, how we are to run and make it all the way to the end. In this passage we are encouraged by consideration of three things. We are going to consider our race, we are going to consider the crowd and we are going to consider our champion.

Considering Your Race

1. Your Race is Unique to You: Track and Field, you run your own event.

This is what we saw in chapter 11. Individuals running their own unique race that God had marked for them.

11:33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. 35 Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. 36 Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— 38 of whom the world was not worthy— wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

2. Our Race is Unique to Us: Remember, he is speaking to a whole church. A church at a unique time and place in history, facing unique challenges together, particularly the challenge as to where now they sit in relation to society around them. We too, thought we surely have individual races that God has marked out for us, we run together the unique race here as the church in Canada.
3. Our Race is Not Unique at All: There are things about the race we run that are not unique to us but that we share with all others who have run this race before us.

Hebrews 12:1-3: Run the Race of Faith

- 1. The Race Needs Preparation:** Aaron Rodgers: “The game is won in the film room”
Going into a game confident to win, because you have trusted in your preparation. The specific preparation spoken of in this text, is of removing any hindrances to our race, be they weights and burdens set upon us by others, any encumbrances to our progressing onward in faith, or any sin of our own that ensnares and entangles us.

Now, how do we do this? How do we lay down these burdens and find forgiveness and freedom from our sins? *Hold that thought, I'll come back to this later.*

- 2. The Race Needs Endurance:** You gotta understand, this race is not a sprint, its a marathon and it is going to take endurance. This is a danger for those who faith is still energized by the zeal of youth. At some point, the mountain-top experiences and vibrant worship services and energy from the the music and the social support from friends, at some point the race outlasts our youthful energy, and we are left with nothing but Christ and the endurance he has trained into our hearts, by his word and His Holy Spirit. Will you stand and endure on that day?

Young people - run with focus, considering your race.

Run With Focus, **Considering The Crowd**

let's go back to verse 1: “Therefore, since we are surrounded [2x] by so great a cloud of witnesses.” Now what's he saying about this crowd - why the focus? I used to think this was a guilt or shame thing. Like, all the other Christians, the saints, they are watching you, waiting for you to mess up. Like, if I lost my temper at my sister, Martin Luther was up in heaven going, “Dan! Darnit! Messed up again!”

The emphasis in v 1 thus falls on what Christians see in the host of witnesses rather than on what they see in Christians. These are people who finished their races. who endured to the end, and we got a stadium full of them. right, that's what chapter 11 was about. These men and women hung in there, they kept running, they won. And now that their races are over, they've taken their seats and are now cheering us on! This is a supportive crowd, like the ones at a political convention.

Consider the crowd. The crowd of victors. It can be hard when the crowds that we see, society around us, is turning against the church, turning against the gospel, turning against the Lord. You go to school and see the crowds, you go to work and see the crowds, you feel alone, like you're the only one in your school, like you're the only one in your workplace, like you're the only one in your home. Look up! See the crowds. Remember that one of the themes of the book of hebrews, especially this section, is that the things unseen are more real than what is seen. The invisible crowd is more real than the crowd.

2Kings 6:15 When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” 16 He said, “Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” 17 Then Elisha prayed and said, “O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.” So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Hebrews 12:1-3: Run the Race of Faith

How do I see the unseen crowd? Encouragement reading the lives of saints, both within and outside of the Bible. In history and now.

1. See the unseen crowd 2. Gather together with the seen crowd.

10:22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 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.

Run with focus, considering the race; Run with focus, considering the crowd

Most of All, Run With Focus, **Considering Our Champion**

Let's read this part **together again:** *2 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.*

Here is our primary motivation and encouragement to continuing running our race and running with focus. Because Jesus has already ran his race, and He won victory for all of us.

Here Jesus is called the founder and perfecter of our faith. We've seen these words used of Jesus before in chapter 2:10 uses a unique word to speak of Jesus, the ESV translates it as "founder" but the word was far more descriptive. In Greek writing ἀρχηγὸν was used of heroes, people who founded cities, they opened the way or established a beachhead, like a navy seal who storms the bunker to take control of the stronghold. The idea is that Jesus is our hero/Our Champion who has opened a "new way" for us, eternal life in heaven!

He not only secured victory for us, but he set the pattern for us as to what our race will look like. Do not think our race will be easy, when his race led him to the cross. Notice again, the word "endured". We are called to run with endurance, here Jesus is said to have endured the cross. Now some have said, so what, Jesus endured the cross for three hours, I've been enduring cancer for three months, I've been enduring loneliness for three years. This phrase "endured the cross" speaks to more than the hours on the cross, it speaks to his entire life of rejection that led him to the cross. Conceived to an unwed mother. As an infant his family fled as refugees to a foreign land, only returning when those who sought his life had died. He grew up in a working-class home in a small village, where he could not escape the glares of judgement and rejection. His ministry was described in the book of Isaiah: he was despised and rejected of men. He didn't hang on the cross for three hours, he lived the rejection and shame of the cross his entire life. At one point in his ministry, when he knew the time had come, he set his face toward Jerusalem, and told his disciples, you want to follow me, take up your cross and come join me, and he resolutely ran his race toward the cross. Along the way, he again faced scorn and rejection, until even one of his closest companions betrayed him. And all along he knew the terror that awaited him, the terror of the wrath of God against sin being poured out on himself, an innocent. He endured the cross with every step he took toward Jerusalem.

Hebrews 12:1-3: Run the Race of Faith

Theology Matters: A God who is victorious through suffering gives meaning and encouragement to my suffering. A God who stood rejected, stands with me when I am rejected.

And in running his race, he showed us how to run ours - remember I said I'd get back to it?

1. He Ran For the Joy set before him. The Christian life is about pursuing joy. But not transient moments of happiness, but about the joy of shalom, Peace with God our creator, and peace with one another and peace within ourselves. The is the joy that the persons of the Trinity shared before the incarnation, and it is the joy that Jesus pursue and that he promises to share with us. Again, the worldview of Hebrews helps us here - the true joy is the joy unseen that the Son shared with the Father and the Spirit before Creation. Every joy we experience is but a shadow joy, a joy that echoes and points to the joy that we can experience in with God in its fulness if we are of those who long for his coming. This is what C.S. Lewis described as being "Surprised by Joy" - that if this world just was a bunch of random chance, molecules smashing into one another, evolution blindly guiding molecules into matter, at what point did joy and beauty enter? To what do joy and beauty point? *If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.* So many of us think that pursuit of God and pursuit of joy are two separate pursuits. They are not. Run for joy and you run for God. Run for God and you find joy. You will find your heart restless until you find your rest in him.
2. He Ran Angry [not at people but at shame] ESV - despising the shame, NIV - scorning the shame. I don't care what people say, I don't care who laughs, I don't care what they do to me, I don't care if they exclude me, I crucify shame. If you can learn to crucify shame, you can live free. Chinese honour/shame culture.

Run with focus, considering the race; Run with focus, considering the crowd
Most of All, Run With Focus, Considering Our Champion

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. 4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

Hebrews 12:4-13: Endure Discipline

I can imagine that French gymnast Samir Ait Said may be feeling this way this morning - he has trained his whole life for his dream of making the olympics, and on the first day of competition, he horrifically snapped his leg on a bad landing. His Olympic dream is likely over.

Is God punishing me? Maybe you've been looking for a job again and again for months. Maybe you've hit a string of "bad luck". Maybe you just have a terrible cold. Is it something I've done? Is God punishing me?

Or sometimes the thoughts might turn even darker. If God were punishing me, that would at least mean that He cared. Maybe God's just simply walked away. He's left me to this, all alone. I pray and hear no one. I stumble through this struggle, and I lift my eyes up to God, and where does my help come from? Silence. God has forsaken. God has abandoned me.

Perhaps some of the Hebrews were thinking this way. Things had been going well, the church was growing, after initial persecution from the synagogues, they had entered some years of relative stability and security. In those years it was easy to see God's blessing and they grew comfortable, and perhaps even a bit spoiled. Yet now, times were growing darker. For no reason, it seemed, the community around them was turning on them. The government, which had always been understanding of their unique relationship to the Jewish, now was turning on them, and the rights and freedoms that they once enjoyed were being slowly eroded. Some of them had already lost their businesses. Some had been jailed. And on the horizon a new threat emerged. The Emperor Nero, who had always been a bit of an unstable narcissist, had begun instituting policies and issuing proclamations that seemed to be targeting Christians. The churches were in a state of alarm. Some were abandoning their faith, returning to the safe haven the Judaism of their fathers still offered. Those who remained in the churches were losing heart. Why was God punishing them? Why had God abandoned them?

Hebrews 12:4-7

This is a very encouraging passage, but you almost wouldn't catch that if you read many English translations. Though I love the ESV that we use here at the church, I'm convinced that the translators of the ESV have badly missed the tone of this passage. And I think it has something to do with how we North Americans view discipline and punishment. Here the NLT captures the tone of this passage much better.

4 After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin. 5 And have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said,

"My child, don't make light of the Lord's discipline, and don't give up when he corrects you. 6 For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child."

7 As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father? 8 If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all. 9 Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever?

Hebrews 12:4-13: Endure Discipline

That's the tone this passage would have conveyed to the original hearers. **Its an encouraging passage, not a condemning passage.** "Rather than evidence of God's inattention, therefore, the difficulties that the hearers face are actually a sign that they are true children of the Father." And thus, these challenges are actually causes for rejoicing and the source of encouragement. The present trial is not a indicator of the Father's absence, it is an evidence of the Father's care. Therefore, **Be Encouraged By God's Fatherly Care** This is the point of reminding them of the lines from the book of Proverbs. In the book of Proverbs you have a Father training his son in wisdom. Chapter 3 is one of the high points of the father's encouragement: you may remember the famous verses: *Prov. 3:5 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. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.* These verses seem written to be destined for Facebook walls and twitter posts. Yet, the author of Hebrews points us a few verses later in the chapter for our encouragement: "My child, don't make light of the Lord's discipline, and don't give up when he corrects you. 6 For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child."

Understand the nature of the Lord's discipline

We've got to work a little here to **understand the nature of the Lord's discipline.** Some of us, particularly those of us seeped more in Canadian Western culture, may find it difficult to embrace the Lord's discipline as a good thing, because we only associate discipline with punishment. In fact, in English, the words are often used interchangeably. The thing is, the word translated as "**discipline**" that the Spirit uses again and again in this passage, Paideia in the greek. You know this word, if you've used an encyclopedia, or even wiki-pedia. An encyclopedia ia a general training in knowledge. For **that's the sense of discipline that this word takes** - moral and mental training. While the proverb quoted also spoke of chastening, which would include the idea of being disciplined (punished for doing something wrong) - that is not the word or the sense that is being brought to the fore here. Here the focus is paideia, that positive training, that bringing the child up in the way that he should go. This is the same word and concept as in Eph 6:4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline [paideia] and instruction of the Lord. So we're not talking about punishment hear, we're talking about the trials that God directs us through, as a training ground for us, because He loves us as a Father loves his children, and trains them through discipline.

Let the Lord's discipline fulfill its purpose in you **So what is the purpose for which our Heavenly Father is training us?** Why does he allow these trails to remain in our lives?

10 For they 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. 11 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.

God's discipline/training is better than our earthly parents because, guess what, we sometimes get things wrong. We do what seems best to us in order to raise our kids. We sometimes don't have the right outcome in mind, and even when we do have the right outcome in mind, we don't always know the right way to train or discipline our kids. But God knows what he is doing when He sets trials in front of you, he knows what it will take to train you, he knows how much you can take, and he knows the perfect end toward which he is seeking to guide your life. What purpose

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do these trials produce? **That we might be holy as God is holy.** That the peaceful fruit of righteousness may be produced in our lives.

What does this mean? It means that we are not strong enough for heaven. God, through this training/discipline, is fitting us for heaven.

The question, when we face trials is not, God, when will this end, but, How are you using this to produce holiness in me? Perhaps when we understand that question, the end of that trial is soon to come.

Be strengthened through the Lord's discipline

Heb. 12:12 Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.

Run with endurance. Run with focus, Run with discipline. The metaphor in verse 12 speaks to running with strength and encouragement, but others have observed that these same things could be speaking of prayer, and generally in the Christian life, that ran is in fact run on the knees with hands lifted up to heaven.

The idea here is that we get back up, and and as we **continue to run this race**, God strengthens us, heals us.

Hebrews 12:14-29: The Formation of the New Covenant Community

Why join a church? We're getting near the end of this book. The theological argument of the book is that now that Jesus has appeared to inaugurate the New Covenant, the Old Covenant associate with Moses has been fulfilled and thus abrogated. We might now be tempted to think that the difference between the Old and New covenant is that whereas before God dealt with the people of Israel as a nation, he now deals with us as individuals. After all now, instead of being represented by a priesthood, we can all now follow our High Priest into the Holy Heavenly places, we can directly access the Father and approach the throne of Grace.

Just as in the Old Covenant people related to one another and had responsibilities toward one another within the community, so now also in the New Covenant do we relate to one another and have responsibilities toward one another within the community. You can't be united with Christ in the New Covenant without also being united with the church, the New Covenant Community. This passage is one of the most powerful passages in understanding the rationale for joining oneself to a local church and the obligation that we have toward one another as members of a local church. The passage does not name the church, but it describes a covenant community.

Now whereas the ESV connects verse 14 to the paragraph that precedes it, verse 14 begins a new unit of thought, that speaks to our **responsibilities within the covenant community** that Christ has established.

14 Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

The text is introduced by a imperative command which governs the rest of the passage, but many English translations miss the emphasis, setting "with everyone" as part of the object of the sentence, as if this is an individual call to live at peace with all the others. Yet here I follow William Lane, who has written the most esteemed modern commentaries on Hebrews, notes that every time the author of Hebrews uses the Greek construction found here, he means "along with", so that the with everyone is part of the subject of the sentence, "Together with everyone, pursue peace and holiness". Now obviously, not everyone is pursuing holiness and peace - unbelievers are not for example, pursuing the holiness and peace of the Lord. So the phrase likely "has reference only to persons within the community of faith. It signifies **"together with all the other believers"** pursue peace and holiness. Thus there is a Mutual Shared Pursuit among the brothers and sisters of the New Covenant Community.

Secondly, there is a **Mutual Shared Oversight** which is alluded to in the second part of verse 14: *without which no one will see the Lord*, and is unpacked in the following verses:

15 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; 16 that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. 17 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.

Before we unpack these verses, we've got to **go back in time** a little bit, because as I'll show you, these instructions don't come out of nowhere. Come back with me to **Deuteronomy 29**. In Deuteronomy 29, Moses is leading the people of the nation of Israel in a ceremony to renew the covenant that God made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt. This covenant was made with that first generation who came out of Egypt at Mount Sinai, when God

Hebrews 12:14-29: The Formation of the New Covenant Community

called Moses up to the top of the mountain, and then the entire mountain was wrapped in smoke and fire and lightning and terrors, with the voice of the Lord shaking the mountain, so that the children of Israel could see a glimpse of the glory and terror of the Lord. They were so terrified that when Moses came down from the mountain, they told Moses, ‘You speak to us; don’t let God speak to us like that any more, lest we die.’ You’d think that that experience of God’s majesty and power and holiness would have left a lasting impression on that generation, yet they turned against God in the wilderness, and rebelled against his word, so that God did not let that generation enter into the restful land promised to them. Now here in Deuteronomy, the next generation is gathering to enter into the land, and so Moses is standing before them once again, pointing them back to the covenant that God had made with their fathers.

*“**You are standing today** all of you before the LORD your God: the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, all the men of Israel, 11 your little ones, your wives, and the sojourner who is in your camp, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water, 12 so that you may enter into the sworn covenant of the LORD your God, which the LORD your God is making with you today, 13 that he may establish you today as his people, and that he may be your God, as he promised you, and as he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. 14 It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, 15 but with whoever is standing here with us today before the LORD our God, and with whoever is not here with us today.*

Note here before we go on that this covenant ceremony is to re-establish them as his people. The covenant forms the community. Now let’s keep reading and see if any duties or obligations are spelt out in regards to how the members of the covenant community are to relate to one another:

***18 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, 19 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. 20 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. 21 And the LORD will single him out from all the tribes of Israel for calamity, in accordance with all the curses of the covenant written in this Book of the Law.*

What do you notice about **these duties**? They are precisely the same obligations that are listed in the book of Hebrews! The author of Hebrews is paraphrasing these instructions to the Old Cov. Comm. and prescribing them to us in the New Covenant Community.

We are to watch out for any dead branches

- See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God;
- 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.

We who are bound to one another by the covenant of God are called to watch out for one another that every one of us continues in the faith and has truly been born again by the grace of

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God. The phrase “see to it” is the word *episcopountes* - meaning oversee. Its the word used to describe the work of elders, bishops and pastors who have a specific official duty to oversee the community, but here each member is given the charge to oversee and keep watch over one another. Specifically, watching over one another that no one falls away. The covenant community is to be a believing community, but not everyone who is joined to the covenant community truly has a believing heart. So the church is to be pure - filled with only believers, but also purifying, continually calling one another to faith and repentance.

We are to watch out for any divisive roots

that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

- Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit

It is helpful to compare the two passages, because it is clear in the Deuteronomy passage that the “root of bitterness” described here is a person, who gains influence in a congregation and causes trouble. These are the wolves in sheep clothing, that Paul warns us about in Acts 20, that rise up from our own ranks to lead people astray. These may not necessarily cause trouble through their teachings, but perhaps through their attitudes, where they go bitterness and division follow.

We are to watch out for any deviant fruit

- 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.
- 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.

These two verses give us a very clear picture of the type of false-believer we are to watch out for in our midst. This is a person who looks like one of us, and remains in the church considering themselves to be participating in the blessings of the New Covenant, even when their hearts are far from God. They walk in the stubbornness of their own heart, all the while presuming the blessing of God, even while they have never truly repented. Ultimately, they are like Esau, who sought the blessing, but never found repentance. When Esau’s blessing was taken from him, he cried out with loud tears, give me the blessing Father, but never sought to repent.

Notice I called this **Mutual Shared Oversight (X2)**. The emphasis of both of these passages is that each member of the community is to oversee the attitudes, practices, and spiritual walk on one another. While each one of us is charge to watch over one another, the Covenant Community of the church must be administrated in a manner that members understand and expect the church to keep watch over them. We pursue peace and holiness together (our mutual shared pursuit) by seeing to it that not one of us is led astray (our mutual shared oversight).

Let’s turn now to the **rationale for these obligations of the New Covenant Community**.

Heb. 12:18 For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest 19 and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose

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words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. 20 For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." 21 Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear."

22 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, 23 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, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

The basic rationale is that **since New Covenant is greater and more substantial than the old**, how much more are we in the New Covenant community to keep watch over each other in our share pursuit of peace and holiness. Remember, in the book of Hebrews we've seen time after time that the seen things are secondary and less real than the unseen things of heaven, which are primary and lasting. If the Israelites trembled at Mount Sinai, how much more should we tremble who have been brought to the feet of the unseen Mount Zion. If the Israelites trembled at the sound of the trumpet of the angels, here we have made our procession into the city of God in a festal gathering of angels innumerable. While the first covenant enrolled the people into the nation of Israel, we who are truly born again make up the invisible assembly of the firstborn with our names enrolled in heaven. Even Moses trembled before God, whereas Jesus Christ our great high priest boldly entered in and mediated this New Covenant. Whereas the blood of Abel cried out from the ground seeking justice the blood of Christ cries out, "Grace"!

If the first, inferior covenant brought the children of Israel into community with one another and called them to a shared mutual focus and shared mutual oversight, how much more does Christ's superior New Covenant call us into the same sort of community.

Finally, similar to the Old Covenant which came with blessings and curses, so too does this New Covenant, and this is how the passage concludes, with **a warning and promise** to those assembled.

Heb. 12:25 See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. 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. 26 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." 27 This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, 29 for our God is a consuming fire.

A warning is issued to those hypocrites who presume blessing without repentance. Being a member of the body of Christ does not replace a listening obedient heart of faith. Yet today you can find a place of repentance, trust in the finished work of Jesus and his blood.

A promise is issued to those faithful who rest in the unshakable kingdom of God. What an encouragement to those Hebrews who saw their world shaking around them. What an encouragement to us, when we see the world crumbling around us, that God's kingdom cannot be shaken.

Hebrews 13:1-3: New Covenant Community Standards: LOVE

If Christ has initiated a new covenant and the Old Law is abrogated/ended/fulfilled, are we now lawless? Some accuse us of being lawless because we proclaim with the author of Hebrews that the Mosaic law is over.

Hebrews 13 - **the standards of the covenant community**. Fundamentals we are to gather around.

- A church of generosity
- A church of worship
- A church of purity
- A church of submission
- Today: A church of love

Heb. 13:1 Let brotherly love continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. 3 Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.

Heb. 13:1 Let brotherly love continue. Continue: strong imperative: “must continue” - this is something from the Old Covenant that must continue on into the New. So what did the Old Covenant say about Love? Here we want to **see Leviticus 19** Remember Leviticus 19 is the **heart of the Mosaic Covenant** in which God was forming the people of Israel as a nation under his law. And in **Leviticus 19:18** God speak of neighbourly love, in words quoted by Jesus: *Lev. 19:18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.*

Now Leviticus has a lot to say about the practical ways that this neighbourly love was to be applied in the covenant community. Remember, Israel was a nation, so these laws were enforced by the government. We are not a nation, we don't enforce these laws in the same way, but when we read them, I think you'll see some of the practical ways love is to continue into our community.

- * **Leviticus 19:9-10:** That we think of the poor when we are conducting our business
- * **Lev 19:11-12:** That we would not steal or lie to one another
- * **Lev 19:13a:** That we not oppress our neighbour or rob him
- * **Lev 19:13b:** That we not take advantage of our employees
- * **Lev 19:14:** That we not mistreat the disabled
- * **Lev 19:15:** That we work for justice in our legal systems
- * **Lev 19:16:** That we not slander one another
- * **Lev 19:17:** That we not hate one another
- * **Lev 19:18:** That we not take revenge on people

That's a pretty comprehensive list as to what it means to love our neighbour, and here we are told that even though the Old Covenant is over, love must continue. Christ did not come to put an end to love! Love that goes beyond legislation. We live not by legislation but by the leading of the spirit. But I'll tell you, be careful that you don't rationalize laziness and selfishness with the excuse - the Spirit isn't leading me. Don't spiritualize your selfishness. If you have something, and your brother needs something, the Spirit is leading you to give it. If you're doing something that hurts your brother or oppresses your brother, the Spirit is leading you to stop it.

The second command is **found in Heb 13:2** *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,*

Hebrews 13:1-3: New Covenant Community Standards: LOVE

Hospitality: is an interesting word. The word is an exact mirror image of the word in verse 1, and we miss that in English. In English, **love of brother is “philadelphia”** from Philos (love) and Adelfos (Brother). It is the love of insiders. Here is then another way in which the New Covenant is greater than the Old, the old made them neighbours in a society together, the New makes us brothers. Here in verse two the word **“hospitality” is “philaxenia”** from Philos (love) and xenos (stranger, foreigner, other). This concept was also found in the Old Covenant, also in Leviticus 19

Lev. 19:34 You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

In the Old Covenant they were to love strangers because they had been strangers in Egypt. Not only must brotherly love continue on into the New, but also love of stranger. This is the **Love of outsiders**

The word is translated hospitality, because the English translators understand that just as philadelphia expresses itself in practical concrete actions, so does philaxenia.

How do you show love for the stranger? By bringing them in, by caring for their needs. a great example of this is Abraham, in Genesis 18.

Gen. 18:1 And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. 2 He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth 3 and said, “O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. 4 Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, 5 while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.” So they said, “Do as you have said.” 6 And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, “Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes.” 7 And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly. 8 Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

2 However, do not neglect to show love for strangers at the same time; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

We fail to love the stranger because we are often afraid they might be demons.

Love the Lowly

3 Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.

The believers are now directed to specific opportunities that they have to show fellow believers love. Continue to remember prisoners, as if you were imprisoned with them; and remember the oppressed, since you also are in the body. The meaning is: **as if you it were your body**. Justice

Am I demonstrating love to the brothers and sister in practical ways?

Am I opening up my life to outsiders in practical ways?

Am I making particular efforts to remember the lowly and mistreated?

Hebrews 13:4: New Covenant Community Standards: Marriage and Sexual Ethics

What defines us as God's Covenant people? What transfers from the Old Covenant into the New? Hebrews 13 - **the standards of the covenant community**. Fundamentals we are to gather around and that we're going to be exploring over these five weeks.

Last week we started with what is obviously of most importance: Love. Love must continue. Love transcends the covenants because God, whom we are in covenant with, is love. Whereas in the Old Covenant love was legislated as Israel was a nation, now in the New Covenant we are a family, and we love as led by the spirit, yet in practical ways. We love insiders as family, we love outsiders as to bring them in, and we love the lowly incarnationally - that is we consider their suffering as our own.

Today, our **focus is on marital and sexual purity**. Now obviously the Old Covenant had a lot to say about marriage and sexual purity. And again we'll see that there is a lot of continuity into the New. You sometimes hear it said, well the New Testament never teaches against certain sexual practices - but we are in covenant with the same God, and He is the same yesterday, today and forever. So we'll see a lot of transferability and continuity, but again, just like we saw last week when we spoke about love - the Old Covenant was more specific because it was laying down laws for a nation, whereas now again we are a family guided by love.

4 Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

Let marriage be held in honour among all

- Honour: The word honor means **precious** or valuable. Paul uses it of "precious stones" (1 Cor. 3:12). Peter uses the word to describe the "precious blood" of Christ (1 Pet. 1:19) and God's "precious and magnificent promises" (2 Pet. 1:4).
- **Among All:** Marriage should be held in honour by all in the covenant community.
- Holding marriage in honour is indeed connected to the Christian world view. It is interesting that the author of Hebrews focuses on marriage as one of the five things the covenant community must hold on to as they begin to experience more and more pushback from society. It is interesting because today, it is mostly our Christian convictions about sex and marriage that are provoking pushback from society.
- Skeptics Group: Imagine a world in which there is no rape, no sexual assault, no std's, no sexual human trafficking, no aborted or abandoned children. A world in which every child is born into a stable home in which the parents are committed to one another and growing in intimacy with one another. A world of no no home-wrecking affairs, no cheating, no divorce, no broken hearts. Where women were honoured and protected and not treated merely as sexual objects. A world in which children were not viewed as inconveniences, but valued. Imagine how society would flourish, how our economies would thrive, how our need for health care and mental health care systems would diminish. Sounds good right? Sounds like something our society would want to strive for? The pushback I got from these undeniable facts was shocking to me.
- Marriage is a worldview issue. We gain no hearing in the outside world when we try to argue for a biblical ethic out there, when we dishonour marriage in here. That is hypocrisy. So we are to honour marriage.
 - By making to little of marriage (abuse, divorce)

Hebrews 13:4: New Covenant Community Standards: Marriage and Sexual Ethics

- By making too much of marriage: (idol, making spouse a saviour)
- * Singleness: To hold marriage in honour is not to dishonour singleness. Jesus was single, Paul was single. But we do not need to set marriage and singleness against one another, as if to honour one, is to dishonour the other.
- What is marriage?: The bible gives a consistent, unified picture of what marriage is.
 - **Moses:** *Gen. 2:24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*
 - **Jesus:** *Matthew 19:4 He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 and said, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"? 6 So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."*
 - **Paul:** *Eph 5:31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*
- Marriage is **1. created by God, 2. to unite man and woman together 3. as husband and wife 4. together until death.** It consists of three elements:
 - **Leaving:** The wedding ceremony.
 - **Weaving:** the old word used to be cleaving, but it now means exactly opposite of what it used to. It means to bind together, here in marriage, to bond together. The married life
 - **One-Flesh:** The Spiritual Bond which is expressed through physical intimacy. This is where physical intimacy enters the picture and where it flourishes. Because sex is designed to illustrate and deepen the oneness of the relationship.

Exact opposite of our culture: Hook Up, Shack Up, Break Up

Now that we understand the connection between sex and marriage, we see the connection made back in **Hebrews 13:4:** Let the marriage bed be undefiled

- Some people think that the Christian teaching is that we are good and that sex defiles us. That is exactly the opposite of what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches sex as God intended it for us is good and that we defile sex.
- Marital sex is pure because God designed us for it. In fact **God commanded sex.** The first command in the Bible is to "be fruitful and multiply."
- **We defile sex when we remove** it from its context in marriage. This is where we see the warning in the second part of verse 4. This is important. God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. Notice the two words here, adultery is the dishonouring of marriage and defiling of sex that occurs that involves someone who is married. Whereas sexual immorality, *pornos* in the greek, is all other the dishonouring of marriage and defiling of sex involving anyone, yes this includes unmarried consenting adults.
- Consent is not the only factor.
- Someone might say, well how far is too far? Here, the Old Testament may help us again. There is an idiom that is used again and again in the Old Testament for sexual activity.

Hebrews 13:4: New Covenant Community Standards: Marriage and Sexual Ethics

Sometimes they would refer to sexual immorality (around 25 times) as “uncovering the nakedness of” another. That’s a good place to start - Don't touch or look at parts of other's bodies that are normally clothed, unless you are married to them. I should add, for “pleasure or intimacy” or someone’s going to say, what about a doctor? *Uncovering nakedness to stimulate pleasure or intimacy.*

- This includes pornography: **Porn addiction: r/tribe**
- The **warning is serious**: God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

1Cor. 6:9 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, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. 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.

- Marriage points us to the gospel. Look again at what the apostle Paul writes: *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”* 32 *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*

Christ is the man who left his Father’s side to come and find for himself a bride. Because it is not about marriage at all - it’s about the gospel - the good news of Christ. The world cannot accept the concept of a Christian marriage, because the world does not accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is why we honour marriage - because marriage honours Christ!

Hebrews 13:5-6: New Covenant Community Standards: CONTENTMENT

What transfers from the Old to the New. Now I made a video on our Facebook page.

- Love
 - Love of Insiders
 - Love of Outsiders
 - Specific Application: Love of the Lowly
- Marriage and Sexual Ethics
 - Honour Marriage
 - Do not Defile the Marriage Bed
- **Contentment: Money**

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." 6 So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"

What transfers? Contentment. The command to find our security and satisfaction in the Lord rather than in our possessions or our pocketbook.

The Holy Spirit here speaks of this contentment in two ways, first negatively and then positively:

- Keep your life free **from love of money**: "Love of money" = *a philo argoron* = *not love silver*. This is the third word he uses in this section with the *phila* prefix. This points us to a heart issue, our orientation toward our possessions. This was not a concept expressed in the Old Testament, but we are warned about it often in the New. :
 - **Love of money may cause us to reject Christ**: Luke 16:12 And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? 13 No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." Luke 16:14 The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. 15 And he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.
 - **Love of money may cause us to wander from the faith and experience pain**: *1Tim. 6:8 But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.*
 - **Love of money will increase in the last days** 2Tim. 3:1 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. 2 For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,
- The other phrase "**and be content with what you have**" is the positive command. Be content with what you have. I can think of two reasons as to why a person might not be content with what they have. You are either **longing for what is not yours**, or **longing for what was once yours**.

Looking for things that have not, is the type of coveting and discontentment that we often experience here in the prosperous West. I wish I had a bigger house, a bigger car, and nicer wife. God spoke against this coveting in his law:

Hebrews 13:5-6: New Covenant Community Standards: CONTENTMENT

- *Ex. 20:17* “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”
- *Deut. 5:21* “ ‘And you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife. And you shall not desire your neighbor’s house, his field, or his male servant, or his female servant, his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.’
- *Deut 7:25* *The carved images of their gods you shall burn with fire. You shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them or take it for yourselves, lest you be ensnared by it, for it is an abomination to the LORD your God.*

This is an important commandment. It’s the only one of the ten commandments that obviously dealt with the heart. Now to be sure, all the commandments dealt with the heart. Jesus took the other commandments, like don’t murder, and don’t commit adultery and turned them inward, don’t hate and don’t lust, but he didn’t have to do that with the command about coveting, because the command about coveting was already internal. It was the signal or the hint that something deeper was going on with the other commands. The other thing interesting about the command to not covet is that, on the surface of things, it doesn’t seem all that wrong. Why is it a sin to want what you don’t have? Our entire economy is built upon the premise that we want what we don’t have. coveting seems so natural, perhaps this is why the apostle Paul said “I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” “ So again the law was pointing us to a spiritual reality about ourselves that we wouldn’t have understood otherwise. And here we see why the command to not covet is so important, because coveting is more than desire something, it is ultimately showing our discontentment with God’s provision for us in our lives. So beware of discontented coveting.

Yet I think there is something more going on here. Perhaps the Hebrews are not just longing for what was not theirs, but they were also **longing for what was once theirs**. Remember that the church has just started experiencing the first tastes of societal disapproval and persecution. In Hebrews 10:32 we are told that they had already experienced reproach, prison, and “joyfully accepted the plundering of your property”. See the call to contentment is that much more meaningful when we understand that these are people who had started to lose what they had for the sake of Christ. This call to contentment could be strengthening them for another round of persecution, because persecution always hits the pocketbook first. Persecution doesn’t start with beatings and martyrdom. It starts with being excluded from certain professional organizations. With being passed over for promotions. With being told that you are not a team player. With having your business closed down. With others not wishing to do business with you. With your law school not being accredited. With your degree rendered meaningless. Persecution will hit our pocketbook first. Many cultural observers believe that this sort of pocketbook persecution is coming soon to Canada. And if and when it happens we will see if we who our God is, if we are indeed trusting in the Lord or if we are trusting in our savings and our securities.

One of the reason I believe this passage is speaking of this pocketbook persecution is because of how he grounds his exhortation to be content: **for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”** This is actually the answer to the question of what transfers from the Old Covenant to the New - what transfers is *The Covenantal Presence of the Lord*. See, the words “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” are significant for a couple of reasons. The are significant because of how emphatic they are, and because of when this promise was given.

Hebrews 13:5-6: New Covenant Community Standards: CONTENTMENT

The words are located in Deuteronomy 31:1-8, and they are spoken twice, in verse 6 and 8

Deut. 31:1 So Moses continued to speak these words to all Israel. 2 And he said to them, "I am 120 years old today. I am no longer able to go out and come in. The LORD has said to me, 'You shall not go over this Jordan.' 3 The LORD your God himself will go over before you. He will destroy these nations before you, so that you shall dispossess them, and Joshua will go over at your head, as the LORD has spoken. 4 And the LORD will do to them as he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when he destroyed them. 5 And the LORD will give them over to you, and you shall do to them according to the whole commandment that I have commanded you. 6 Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."

Deut. 31:7 Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, "Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it. 8 It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."

side Note: The early Christians believed in inspiration. The author of Hebrews equates the words Moses penned in the Bible as being spoken by God himself.

First, the emphatic nature of the encouragement. ou mh, Most emphatic way of saying - it will never happen. He says it again and again in these three verses.

Second, when this is spoken. In Deut 31, God is through Moses giving his final words to the Covenant Community of Israel re-establishing covenant with them as they are about to enter into a hostile land. This is His promise to them, in emphatic terms, that He will go with them and they need not fear, because of His presence among them. God acknowledges that there will be opposition - the nations will rage against them, they will need to be strong and courageous, but they are His people and He is their God and His promise to them cannot be broken.

That's what carries over from the Old Covenant to the New. Just as God was with His covenant people then, He is with His covenant people now. Just as He promised to be with them in the face of opposition then, He promises to be with us in our pocketbook persecution now.

6 So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" This is from **Psalm 118**. Let's **read it together**. Again, covenant God, *Hesed* love

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." 6 So we can confidently say,

*"The Lord is my helper; I will not fear;
what can man do to me?"*

Hebrews 13:7-14: New Covenant Community Standards: WORSHIP

Everybody remembers the powerful story of Jesus with the Samaritan woman.

19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

The book of Hebrews announces the eradication of the Old Covenant forms of worship. This is the time of which Jesus was speaking about. But what does it mean for us to worship the Lord in Spirit and Truth. As part of my sabbatical, I worshipped at a bunch of different churches. And there were some that were similar, but some were quite different. Some seems to be a place directed toward believers' worship of God, others seemed to be targeting unbelievers. Some were very formal and traditional. One church I went to had a fog machine and pulsating lights and electric guitars; other used hymnbooks, and I know of some churches in the city that use no hymn books and only sing or almost chant the psalms. If you go outside of evangelical churches, you may find some churches that use incense. Some pray to saints in their services. Some use images as tokens of worship. Some take the Lord's supper every week, some once a month - I was in one church that did it once a year, if you missed it too bad.

What form should our worship take? We know that different churches approach things differently. We accept the tradition of the church we grew up in, or just attend a church because our friends are there or we like the pastor's message's or we like the music. But if you were a Jewish person, this was a huge deal. Under the Old Covenant God prescribed very specifically how worship of him we to be undertaken. And people died when they did not approach God according to His prescription. One thing we are taught again and again in the Old Testament is that we don't get to determine how we worship God. God is God, and He demands our worship of Him be according to His rule. Think about this, if I'm going to see Justin Trudeau, I can't just waltz into the government buildings downtown and approach him any way I want, I could only enter his presence if I approach him in the way he requires. How much more for the God of the universe.

The Spirit directed the author of Hebrews in chapter 13 to say some things regarding our worship. This makes sense because he has argued in the book that the Old Covenant and its outward forms has been fulfilled in Christ and set aside, so how do we worship now? And in verses 7-16, we in fact find some words to us regarding our corporate worship.

Heb. 13:7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.

Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. 9 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. **10 We have an altar** from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. 11 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. 12 So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. 13 Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. 14 For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to

Hebrews 13:7-14: New Covenant Community Standards: WORSHIP

come. **15 Through him** then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. 16 Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Our Corporate Worship is: Word-Centred For Jesus is Our Enduring Confession

Heb. 13:7 *Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.* 8 *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.* 9 *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 preach the word authoritatively

This is why the Word is central. We preach the word. Not because it is our words, but because it is God's words. The full counsel of the word of God to make the simple wise unto salvation. Not just self-help type messages, but words that form lives and churches.

We preach the word fearlessly

Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. The outcome of their faith - is written pretty ominously. The word means their escape. they preached fearlessly until death, through trials, until God removed them out of their trials

We preach the word enduringly

8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Verse 8 seems like it just a slapped into the middle of the passage - where does it come from? but read it together with verse 9: *Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings,* Here's the point - Jesus doesn't change. He is the same, and so there must be continuity between the message we preach today with what was preached then. We take care to go back again and again to the scriptures, and we are suspicious of novel approaches to the Word of God. We would disagree with churches who are always looking for a fresh word from the Spirit, if by that they mean a "new" word.

Our Corporate Worship is: Table-Centred For Jesus is Our Sustenance

10 We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. 11 *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.* 12 *So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.* 13 *Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.* 14 *For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.*

This section is a bit tricky. He's talking about food, and altars and going outside of the camp. This was an important part of worship under the Old Covenant. When sacrifices were made, the law provided specific instructions of who were to prepare the sacrifices, of how they were to be made, and then, instructions regard who could eat the meat. No one but the priests could eat of the sacrifices. And remember, the some among the original readers were tempted to give up their confession in Jesus and return to the former system. And so, in the context of talking about these ceremonial meals that they are tempted to turn back toward, we are reminded that we have an altar from which they have no right to eat.

Jesus, our meal, is divisive

There is a division around the table because Christ is divisive. We have to really consider how we worship God, because over the past twenty years there has been a very new and very

Hebrews 13:7-14: New Covenant Community Standards: WORSHIP

calculated shift in who we consider who our gathering is for. For the first 2000 years of the church, believers gathered to worship God and to edify and instruct one another. Unbelievers were welcome to observe the worship service, but it was evident that the worship service was directed toward God and the saints. Yet in the past generation, there has been a shift within evangelicalism and we've started organizing our worship services to be directed toward the unbeliever. Yet look at the language here - we go outside the camp, we go outside the gate, we have no place in the city, but we gather here to look for the lasting city.

A meal of reproach

It's not only a meal of division, its a meal then of reproach, a meal in which we share in the reproach of Christ. So our worship is allegiance oriented around the person of Christ, and his sacrifice for us.

A meal of expectation

we seek the city that is to come. John Piper calls this, Pilgrim worship. We are in the city during the week, living on mission, loving our neighbours, seeking the welfare of the city, but that is not our city. So on Sunday, we gather here as pilgrims to seek the city that is to come.

Many, many commentators throughout church history have seen here an illusion to the Lord's Supper, and the point is that this meal we share is a divisive meal. Only those who have identified with Christ, have the right to share in it. In fact, in the early church, as close as we can understand from liturgy we have found, they would have had the Lord's Supper every time they gathered, but before they would eat together, they would excuse all the unbelievers.

The two ordinances of the church are allegiance ordinances. In baptism we profess our allegiance to Christ and identifying with his reproach, and in the Lord's Supper we continually identify with him. This is why we moved a few years ago to celebrate the table weekly.

Praise-Centred For Jesus is Our Joy

15 Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Sacrifice of praise, praise from the heart, praise through the lips. *This idea of a sacrifice of praise comes from that great Psalm, 107, which encourages us, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.*

Has God made any difference in you life, offer up prayers of thanksgiving and songs of praise. Christians are a praying people. Christians are a singing people.

Not emotionless. *"the fruit of lips the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.* And Jesus is our Joy - our praise is the fruit of our confession, that is, when we confess Jesus, something happens within us inwardly that turns into outward praise.

Not emotionalism: the emotion arises not from a throbbing bass line, or a pulsing snare drum, but from Jesus

What does this look like in church? It looks like Ephesians 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving

Hebrews 13:7-14: New Covenant Community Standards: WORSHIP

thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We could do more prayer, more praise, more spontaneous testifying even in our service, all must be done in order. English Congregation Lunch today. Time of grace.

Generosity-Centred For Jesus is our Model

16 Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

We bring the sacrifice of praise, we also bring the sacrifices of good works and generosity directed toward each other. The word “share what you have” is the word - koinonia - the word we often translate as fellowship, but is better translated “partnership” - the idea is that part of our worship, part of our pleasing sacrifices, is sharing with one another, to meet one another needs. The early church actually took offering as part of their worship.

1Cor. 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. 2 On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. 3 And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem.

1. The churches are directed to do this. 2. It happened on the first day of the week (when they met). 3. people put something aside 4. not prescribed, but as each prospers. The temple system prescribed a tax called a tithe, but, I believe that is set aside, so in the NT the prescription is as each prospers. 5. it was to help meet the needs of the saints, of churches and the expansion of the church.

Now be careful, we are not limiting good works and sharing with one another to the offering taken during the worship service, just as we could not limit or doing good to the worship service.

Jesus is our model, he always pleased the Father, and so his life transforms us and this we please the Father by emulating his love and generosity.

Now that you understand a little better of why we worship as we do, let us continue to worship our Lord together.

Hebrews 13:17: New Covenant Community Standards: LEADERSHIP

Heb. 13:17 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.

Affirmed by the Scripture: *While Jesus is shepherd and head of the church, and every believer a priest, there remains a place for visible and active leaders in the church.*

Now you might think, who would challenge that? Doesn't it seem obvious that institutions require some sort of leadership? Well, apparently not to everyone. There was a man who visited our church a number of years ago, He was a nice guy, but he moved to Ottawa and came to us out of some interesting church background in which they affirmed no church leadership at all, because Christ was there only pastor, and every believer was a priest. When I showed him some of the passages referring to leaders in the New Testament, he bristled and when I challenged him further, he finally admitted that the New Testament speaks of leaders in the church, but that they were "invisible leaders". I wish I would have read Hebrews 13 with him at the time - how do you remember, and submit to and obey and greet "invisible leaders"?

And so the first thing this passage does is affirms church leadership. Now the word in verse 17 is not the regular word used in the New Testament to describe those in oversight positions in the church. It is a generic term, used in the Greek Old Testament to speak of anything from heads of families, to kings and rulers. Most likely this term is used because Hebrews seems to be a sermon that was to be circulated among many different churches, and perhaps different churches had different titles for how they referred to their leaders (elders, deacons, pastors, born members, bishops, overseers). However, it is significant that the word is used **in Deut 1**, when Moses selects wise, understanding and experienced men to serve as heads of tribes and alleviate the burden of organizing and leading the people. And so it would seem that this sort of organizational leadership transfers into the New Covenant. In any case, these leaders are **affirmed by the scriptures**.

Advantageous to You: Skipping over to the end of the verse, we get a glimpse of the function of these leaders and their usefulness to the church. The final few words of the verse speak of these leaders as being advantageous to you, the body. But why? Found in the middle of the verse: *They are keeping watch over your souls*" This is the primary function of church leadership in the New Testament, the word **is an interesting one** because it has to do with a watchfulness that causes one to lose sleep, like a watchman in the night. They stay up late to ensure your safety. Now this could be a Sunday School teacher preparing her lesson into the wee hours of the night, or a youth leader who responds to a text in the middle of the night, or a pastor sitting with a family in intensive care, going on day three. Aren't you glad for leaders in the church who display the love of Christ in those ways?

Most likely however, the passage is referring to a select group of leaders in the church who are entrusted with care of the body, called in various places in the New Testament "elders" or "overseers". The words elder and oversight are used together in Acts 20, when the apostle Paul calls the elders of the churches near Ephesus out to the beach in Miletus and charges them, and in 1 Peter 5:1-5:

Acts 20:26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, 27 for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. 28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to

Hebrews 13:17: New Covenant Community Standards: LEADERSHIP

care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

1Pet. 5:1 So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. 5 Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

- **They are well trained in the Word to protect the church against twisted teachings**

One thing that is obvious is that the present leaders in the church, would continue in the ministry of the leaders that the author of Hebrews mentioned in verse 7 - the leaders who laid the foundation in the church by speaking the Word of God in the past. Thus, leaders in the church today would be of similar character and function to those evangelists, prophets and apostles who originally spoke the word.

- **They care for the souls using tools of exhortation, encouragement and prayer**

The best example was when we went out to Capital Hill Baptist Church in Washington DC. We joined their prayer meeting and saw their elders care for the souls.

- **They set an example to the flock as they follow Christ**

Titus 1:5 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— 6 if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. 7 For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, 8 but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. 9 He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. **These leaders are Advantageous to You:**

Accountable to God and to the Church: "As those who will have to give an account." Now some have read into this passage a meaning that goes to far as to the role of these leaders; that these leaders will have to give an account of every soul. that is not the likely meaning. The meaning is that they will have to give an account regarding their faithfulness in carrying out their ministry in the church. This harmonizes with what Paul teaches elsewhere in **1 Corinthians 3-4.**

1Cor. 3:5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 8 He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

1Cor. 3:10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. 11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is

Hebrews 13:17: New Covenant Community Standards: LEADERSHIP

Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13 each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

1Cor. 4:1 This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. 3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. 4 For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

James 3:1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

Obey: Πείθεσθε: It certainly means “obey” - but it is not the word normally used in the New Testament when one is called to obey another in an authority position. In fact, this word is more regularly translated “to be persuaded” - it is not an obedience out of respect for a position of authority, but the obedience that is won through persuasive conversation and that follows from it”. Thus, the authority of leaders in the church is not absolute authority. We see this in the New Testament itself, the authority of church leadership is not absolute, but is subjected itself to the gospel of Christ and the Word of God. We see this when Peter comes to Antioch in Galatians.

Gal. 2:11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. 13 And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. 14 But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

In fact, Paul gives Timothy instructions for how to discipline a church elder according to the Word of God. Their authority in the church is not absolute. There, sadly, is a lot of abuse.

1 Timothy 6:19-20 Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. 20 As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.

I believe this is one of the reasons that it is important to **have multiple elders** in a church, so that they are accountable to one another, so that they share the load, so that you don't have one loose cannon calling the shots and setting up his own kingdom. Every time in the new testament church leaders are described, they are always plural, even if it is talking about only one church.

Leaders are Accountable to God and to the Church

Affected by Our Attitudes: *Let them do this with joy and not with groaning,* The congregation can help to prevent the burn-out of their leaders by being teachable, trusting, and yielding to them. In other words, the leadership of the church is affected by our attitudes.

What does this mean for Our Church Body At OCBC:

1. **Pray For and Encourage Our Leaders:** It is a tireless task.
2. **Identify and Pray For New Leaders and New Board:** One way you can help them is to begin using your gifts. A lot of our leaders wear multiple hats. Some are burning out.
3. **Train and Mature Our Leadership:** We need more leaders who handle the word well and oversee the souls in our congregation.

Ultimately, the goal would be to have a plurality of elders trained in the word and overseeing the entire church. Right now, as you know we operate under a pastor/deacon model in which most (not all) of the spiritual oversight falls upon the pastors, and most of the administrative management falls upon the board of deacons. And I must say, our deacon board does very well with the deacon-type of work they are called to do. They are less equipped to do elder-type of work (such as resolving theological issues in the church or extending personal oversight), even though they are called upon to do so from time to time. We've been making this work for 40 years, but I believe that if we were to align our church more with what God prescribes in his word, we would have more joy in our service and it would be advantageous to the congregation. So ultimately, the goal would be to have OCBC align with the Bible's description of church leadership.

However, structural change is difficult and does not happen overnight. So how do we get closer to there from here? Well, for our part in the English ministry, we need to begin training and maturing our own leadership, to be well-trained in the word and experienced in overseeing the congregation. I am writing a proposal to the EMT and to the Board that we identify a group of potential leaders to begin theological and practical training to serve as leaders within the English congregation. We would bring them before you, the congregation, so that you would know them and understand the process and observe their progress as leaders within the congregation. Some will be serving on the Ministry Team, some on the church board, but at the end of the process they would be affirmed as leaders by the congregation. We still need to work out details through our English Ministry Team and our Church board, but I want you to start thinking and praying about this leadership development, who you see serving the church through this sort of ministry and whether you yourself might be willing to serve in this way.

BENEDICTION

Heb. 13:20 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.