

April 8, 2018 AM
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THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS:
1. “The Superior Ministry of Jesus”
Hebrews 1:1 – 6

Introduction:

This morning as we open God’s Word we are beginning a study of the Letter to the Hebrew Christians. This study on Sunday mornings will be a paragraph by paragraph walk through this amazing letter of exhortation and encouragement! The author writes with deep love and passionate heart-cry to a people who were in danger of **Falling Away** from their sincere devotion to **Know** and **Follow** Jesus in life!

There are so many things we are going to be learning together as we study this magnificent letter. This morning, as we begin, I want to help you to see and understand the broad brushstrokes the author is painting. The writer seeks to enable the reader to see the powerful truth that everything that matters in our salvation is seen in and done by Jesus on our behalf. The **Saving Action** of God Almighty in the human heart, soul, and spirit made alive, always **Originates** in **Heaven** and is always in and through who Jesus is and what He has done on our behalf!

What the Hebrew Christians to whom the author is writing were doing was walking the dangerous path of bringing their salvation experience into the human arena and what they had done and were doing for God. They were perilously close to apostasy, falling away from their sincere faith relationship with Jesus Christ, precisely because they were focusing on their works and deeds for God as the proof of their salvation.

The Hebrew author again and again points them back to the **Centrality** of the **Ministry** of Jesus Christ for us and our acceptance of His work on the Cross on our behalf as the foundation stone of our salvation. The Hebrew author writes about the primary truth: What we do for God in works and deeds is always a result of having opened our hearts to receive the ministry of the Holy Spirit within us, motivating us to **Loving Obedience!**

John 14:15 – 17a *“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of Truth.”*

John 14:18a – 21 *“Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”*

It is the holy, self-emptying, other-oriented love of God poured out into us that moves us to obedience to His commands! Romans 5:5 *“And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us.”* Always and forever the truth remains, the love of God dwelling in and burning in a human heart is the proof of our salvation. Our works and deeds we do must flow from the **Constraint** of **Love!**

II Corinthians 5:14, 15 *“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore, all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”*

When we reduce our salvation experience to what we are doing in the human arena we get into the shaky ground and murky waters of our **Human Religious Effort** to please God once we have been redeemed. It is as though we are saying to Jesus: “Thank you so much for saving me, Lord Jesus! Now I can pretty much take it from here!”

That is the essence of the negative side of religious living. It puts the focus on us and what we are doing instead of the clear and simple ministry of the Spirit of Jesus working in our hearts! That is precisely what these Hebrew Christians were doing and it broke our author’s heart to see what was happening to their earlier sincere devotion to know and follow Jesus.

They were focusing on their efforts at getting it all together for God and that focus created a danger to their souls. It could lead the astray from the simplicity and the superiority of what Jesus had done and desired to do in them. They were becoming self-important, and had begun to supplement what Jesus did on the Cross. They were living “**Jesus And**” something else. In their case it was Jesus-and-angels, Jesus and Moses, Jesus and the Law, Jesus and the Priesthood.

This letter is written by a man of God who knew the Old Testament Scriptures and the priesthood and sacrificial system extremely well. It is written as a **Word of Encouragement**, and exhortation of the heart to remove the add-ons to what Jesus Christ had done, is doing, and will do through His “once-and-for-all” sacrifice for sins! The author will brilliantly argue that who Jesus and is and what He has done for us is superior and sufficient to all add-ons!

The author of the Book of Hebrews was a person who knew, spoke, and could communicate in writing classical Greek because that is the language of this letter. In other words, the author was **Classically Trained** as an orator in Greek thought. The author did not write in the street Greek, koine Greek of the day Paul and the other authors of the New Testament wrote in.

The author was also thoroughly trained in the Levitical Priesthood and sacrificial system. He has key thoughts guiding his mind and key texts he quotes from memory as he writes. The author knew and understood, with keen awareness and insight, how thoroughly the Lord Jesus Christ had fulfilled the Levitical demands of the Law! There are two key texts in the Letter to the Hebrews that will enable us to see in a nutshell what the author holds as central as he writes. You will want to have these two key texts in your thinking as we study this great book of the Bible:

Hebrews 4:14 – 16 *“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*

Hebrews 10:19 – 22 *“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is*

his body, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”

As we study this great book what God has on His heart for us at Cedar Grove is to fix our eyes on Jesus, to remain rooted and founded in our need to **Know His Saving Works!** This is not just our initial salvation experience, which is being forgiven of sins and washed in the blood of Jesus, but is also being set free from the dominion of fleshly, selfish desires.

It is in the heart of God that you and I will stay centered in and focused on the superior ministry of Jesus on our behalf. The Spirit of God desires to take us deeper in spiritual insight and understanding of just who Jesus really is and the profound and powerful nature of what the Son of God was providing for us on the Cross!

I. The God Who Speaks to Human Hearts Differently:

Hebrews 1:1, 2 *“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.”*

The Hebrew author begins his incredible work by telling us the Lord God speaks to different people very differently. It is as though the author can see right into our hearts and minds and tells us things that we really need to hear and understand about the Lord our God and His revealing Himself to us in ways that we can know and understand.

First, he says God **Spoke** in many and varied ways to human hearts in the past by the **Prophets**. The fact is the prophets whom God called into His work with Him in the Old Testament used many varied and wide-ranging methods to communicate with their hearers. But the fact they all sought to adhere to was that they were responsible to enable their hearers to know who God is and what God is thinking and saying to them right now!

--Some of the prophets – Isaiah, Micah, and Amos – spoke powerful words that thundered the voice and the call of God to His people beckoning them to embrace deep and thorough repentance of evil ways. They thundered about the coming judgments of God on the nation of Israel and the land of Judah because they had turned away from following God. Judgment was coming and it would be at the hands of the evil people the Babylonians no less!

--Some of the prophets – Joel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah – used imagery and painted verbal pictures of what was in store for a people who had forsaken the Lord and had turned away from following God’s will and ways to following after wooden and stone carved idols. They spoke of the great evil the people had done with graphic images of what worshipping their fertility gods and goddesses had done to their hearts and minds!

--Some of the prophets – Jeremiah and Hosea – used graphic language to call out the people of Israel and Judah as spiritual adulterers. God spoke through these two men as having betrothed the people of Israel and Judah to Himself. They were His beloved and

He was the One who truly loved them from their earliest days! They spoke repeatedly about how the people of Israel and Judah were like wicked and brazen prostitutes who had worn themselves out worshipping their gods and goddesses as other lovers.

Second, he says the word the prophets brought to the people of God was **Fragmentary** and **Incomplete**. They used everything at their disposal to communicate what God was speaking to them. They sought to be faithful to the Word of the Lord as it was revealed to them. But it was always being heard through a solely human instrument, capable of knowing only so much of the heart and mind of God at one time.

Third, he says now, in these last days, God is **Speaking** to us by His **Son Jesus**. What the author wants us to know is that Jesus is the final word to the human heart in terms of salvation from our sins and deliverance from the fleshly self-interest that we all struggle with in our own heart, soul, and mind. What Jesus did on the Cross and by His resurrection from the dead is our spiritual victory over sin, self-interest, death, and all the powers of Hell!

Fourth, he writes that what Jesus Christ has come and spoken, His life, His teachings, and His finished work of salvation on the Cross is the **Complete Revelation** of the heart of God to the human **Heart**, **Soul**, and **Mind**! Everything that you and I need to know about the nature of God, the will, and the ways of God, in the human heart, it's all made available to us in Jesus.

II. The Different Ways God Reveals Himself to Human Hearts:

Hebrews 1:3a *“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word...”*

One of the many things that touch me deeply about the revelation of the Lord God Almighty to the human heart, soul, mind, and recreated spirit is there “no cut and dried, ironclad, this is the way He always does it” pathway God uses to reveal Himself to us! The Lord loves each one of us as an individual because He **Created** us to be **Unique**. He knows everything about each one of us and He chooses to reveal Himself and relate to us as individuals.

I love how David expresses God’s complete knowledge and understanding of each of us, so much so that the Lord knows how to communicate with us in the exact way we can hear Him best! David writes in Psalm 139:2b – 4 *“You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord.”*

And verses 13 – 16 *“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”*

In some of our lives, God reveals Himself to us using the **Path** of **Inward Fellowship** with God. In this pathway of revelation to our hearts, God the Holy Spirit speaks to us, convicts us of our need, convinces us of His truth, and leads us to deepening intimate fellowship with the Spirit of

Jesus. This pathway of the heart leads the believer to be so indwelt by the Spirit of Jesus that to go on living is knowing we are in Christ Jesus and He is in us!

This is the Christian pathway of revelation God created in the Apostle Paul's life, an intimacy and mystical with Christ that was all-consuming to Paul's heart and life! Paul walked in an intimate relationship with Jesus that motivated him to serve Jesus in holy love regardless of the cost of discipleship!

In some of our lives, God reveals Himself to us using the path of **Calling** us to **Obey** His standards, to walk in His will for our lives and then **Empowering** us by His indwelling Holy Spirit to meet the standard. It was the pathway of God revealing Himself to the believer showing that believer what a life that loves and honors Jesus looks like and the Spirit of Jesus filling that believer's life enabling them to walk in obedience to the call.

This is the pathway of revelation God created in the Apostle Peter and in the Lord's brother James. These two men of God called people to the standard of holy and righteous living and preached about people having an encounter with God that empowered them to live it!

In some of our lives, God reveals Himself by illuminating the **Mind** of the **Believer** to **Know** the **Truth** of God that sets them on a journey of deep desire to know and do His will for them. There are some believers who must know and understand or they will perish! In this pathway of revelation to our hearts, God the Holy Spirit exhorts us and convinces us of truth, and the illuminated mind believes and receives the truth of God that transforms the thoughts and the attitudes of that life.

This is the pathway of revelation God created in the Apostle John's mind, heart, and will. John wrote words that had to be put on paper with pen and ink. In John 1 he wrote about who Jesus as the Word of God from eternity, the instrument of creation, Jesus becoming a human, the incarnate Christ, and how people were forever changed when they believed in and received Him as Savior and Lord of their lives!

And in still others of us, God reveals Himself in an experience with Jesus Christ that gives the believer **Open Access** to **Know** and **Walk** with God in personal communion with Him. In this pathway of revelation, God leads us to know that Jesus Christ has destroyed all of the barriers to knowing God. We have been accepted at the "Blood-bought Mercy Seat of Jesus!" We have acceptance at the Throne of Grace.

This is the pathway of revelation God created in the heart of the author of the Book of Hebrews. The Hebrew writer's heart and mind are dominated by the images of legal barriers being destroyed and open access to His living presence now living in the heart of the believer!

The Lord God treats each of us as unique and an individual. He walks us on the path of intimate communion with Him, inward union and fellowship with Him; or calling us to obey and giving us the enablement to obey Him in love; or illuminating our mind to long to know and walk in the truth; or in the destruction of barriers to knowing Him and open access to His presence dwelling in our lives!

So do you see yourself in one or several of these pathways of revelation as God the Holy Spirit speaks to you in various ways?

III. The Superiority of the Ministry of Jesus for Us All:

Hebrews 1:3 – 5 *“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father?’ Or again, ‘I will be his Father and he will be my Son?’”*

The Hebrew author tells us Jesus is the **Radiance** of the **Glory** of God. If we want to see and understand what God is like we need only to look at Jesus. Jesus is the light of the world, the eternal Son of God come into the world to show us who God is and what God desires for us all!

The Hebrew author tells us Jesus is the **Exact Representation** of God’s **Being**. Jesus the Son of God is the one person in whom dwelled two natures: The nature of God and the human nature. He would tell His closest followers in the upper room discourse, “If you have seen me you have seen the Father.” When we want to know how God feels about any issue, look at how Jesus faced that issue!

The Hebrew author continues to build his case for the glorious ministry of the Lord Jesus. Here he says Jesus is the **Sustainer** of **All Things** by His powerful Word. He definitely wants the reader to see and understand that in Jesus everything was created, is sustained, and is perfected. He is true and rightful Lord all that is!

And his final hinge-pin in His case for the superiority of Jesus Christ over everything else is in the next clause: Jesus’ **Action** on the Cross is the **Purification** of our **Sins** and it is final, because He sat down at the right hand of the Almighty in heaven once it was all completed. The author wants to reader to know that their “Jesus-And-Something-Else” thinking is absolutely wrong in every way.

He wants them to know that there is only one way for sins, sinful desires, self-interest, and offenses done to us to be purified from our hearts. And he wants the readers to know it is a finished work. When Jesus made purification for their sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Father God! It is accomplished for everyone who believes and receives His gift of life!

No earthly priest could do this and no amount of law-keeping could do this. Sin can only be purged from our lives in one way! The purification for sins was accomplished in the broken body of Jesus nailed to a Cross bearing our sins. Forgiveness and purification of sins happen solely by the precious blood of Jesus once-and-for-all sacrificed to purify us of all unrighteousness!

I John 1:8, 9 *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us of all unrighteousness.”*

THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS:

1. "The Superior Ministry of Jesus"

Hebrews 1:1 – 6

Introduction:

We begin our study of the Book of Hebrews this morning! The author writes with deep love and heart-cry to a people who were in danger of **F**_____ **A**_____ from their sincere early devotion to know and follow Jesus.

He writes to enable people to see and understand the truth that the saving action of God done by Jesus for us all **O**_____ in **H**_____ in the heart of God.

He points the readers to the **C**_____ of the **M**_____ of Jesus. He speaks the primary truth: What we do for God must always be as a result of having the Holy Spirit inspire us to **L**_____ **O**_____!

John 14:15 – 17a and 18a – 21

Our good deeds must be rooted in the Holy Spirit pouring out His love into our hearts, Romans 5:5. It is always about the **C**_____ of **L**_____.

When we reduce our salvation to what we are doing we get on the shaky ground of **H**_____ **R**_____ effort!

These Hebrew Christians were becoming self-important, supplementing what Jesus did for them on the Cross: A "**J**_____ **A**_____" something else mentality.

The author writes as a **W**_____ of **E**_____ ... As one who was **C**_____ **T**_____ in Greek oratory ... And as one who knew and understood well the Levitical Priesthood and sacrificial system.

There are two key texts in the letter: Hebrews 4:14 – 16 and 10:19 – 22

As we study this great work, the Lord wants us all to fix our eyes on Jesus, to stay rooted and founded in in our need to **K**_____ His **S**_____ **W**_____.

I. The God Who Speaks to Human Hearts Differently: Hebrews 1:1, 2

The author begins by telling us the Lord speaks to different people very differently. He tells his readers God tailors the message to each of our hearts in ways that make it easy for us to hear it, receive it, and understand it!

First, God **S**_____ in many and varied ways by the **P**_____.

--Some of the prophets spoke thunderous judgments

--Some of the prophets spoke in imagery and pictures

--Some of the prophets spoke about Israel's apostasy in vile sexual images

Second, the prophets spoke words that were **F**_____ and **I**_____.

Third, in these last days God is **S**_____ to us by His **S**_____ Jesus.

Fourth, what Jesus has come and communicated is the **C**_____ **R**_____ of the heart of God to human hearts, souls, and minds.

II. The Different Ways God Reveals Himself to Human Hearts: Heb. 1:3a

The revelation of God to us uses many different pathways to our heart. The Lord **C**_____ us to be individuals, **U**_____ in His sight. He knows everything about us: Psalm 139:2b – 4 and 13 – 16

1. In some of our lives God speaks to us along the path of **I**_____ **F**_____ with God.

2. In some of our lives God uses the path of **C**_____ us to **O**_____ His standards and **E**_____ us to be able to meet the standards.

3. In some of our lives God uses the path of illuminating the **M**_____ of the believer to **K**_____ the **T**_____ of God.

4. In some of our lives He chooses the path of enabling us to understand we have **O**_____ **A**_____ to **K**_____ and **W**_____ with Him!

III. The Superiority of the Ministry of Jesus for Us All: Hebrews 1:3 – 5

The author says Jesus is the **R**_____ of the **G**_____ of God.

He tells us Jesus is the **E**_____ **R**_____ of God's being.

He builds His case for Jesus' superiority by saying Jesus is the **S**_____ of all **T**_____.

And his final argument for the superiority of the ministry of Jesus is Jesus' **A**_____ on the Cross is the **P**_____ of our sins and it is a final, completed action. Jesus "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."

There is only one way for purification from sins and self-interest. I John 1:9

Discussion Starter Questions for Home Groups

1. The Book of Hebrews is written to address the issue of falling away from our walk with Jesus by faith. How does falling away happen? Is it gradual or sudden?
2. What do you think about the truth that our obedience must always be as a result of the Holy Spirit motivating us with His love poured out in our hearts?
3. Why do you think people tend to make our salvation experience with Jesus about our human efforts instead of focusing on Jesus' finished work for us all?
4. Why do people tend to slip into what the Hebrew Christians were doing, adding to what Jesus had done for them, "Jesus And" something else?
5. The Old Testament prophets spoke a similar message in a variety of ways. Why is it important to know that truth?
6. In the message we focused on four different paths God uses to reveal Himself to His people. Have you thought about what kind of learner, hearer you are? How does God speak most clearly to your heart?
7. In the message we ended the study of the first paragraph of the letter by looking at the superiority of Jesus' ministry. What was you "take away" from the truths we learned there?
8. Read together aloud Colossians 1:15 – 23 and discuss insights you have regarding the superiority of the ministry of Jesus.
9. Read together aloud Colossians 2:6 – 23 and discuss insights you have from things that stand out to you in that discourse about Jesus our Lord.
10. What pathway of revelation of the truth from Scripture speaks more clearly to you? Do you know how you most clearly hear and receive the truth about the Lord God and His will for your life?