



Context

Author: Debated, but ultimately unknown; knew Timothy, but was not an eyewitness to Jesus; knew his readers/hearers; likely a transcribed sermon

Date: probably prior to 70 AD

Recipient: “to the Hebrews,” Jewish Christians and, also, Gentile Christians who were drawn to the Jewish religion

Theme and Purpose

Jesus Christ is greater than any angel, priest, or old covenant practice. Christians must not forsake the great salvation that Jesus has brought about. They must hold on by faith to the true rest found in Christ, and they must encourage others in the church to do the same.

Hebrews has two primary purposes: to encourage Christians to endure, and to warn them not to abandon their faith in Christ. These warning passages appear throughout the book. The pastor encourages faithfulness, love, and sound doctrine. He does so by carefully teaching the OT in light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. The pastor shows the superiority of Christ and his new covenant over angels, Moses, the OT priesthood, and the OT sacrificial system. These are so inferior to Christ that it is futile to return to them—or to go anywhere else. Rather, believers should hold fast to their faith. The background of such exhortations must have been the hearers’ need to continue enduring amid persecution and the trials of life. They appear to have grown less attentive to Christian instruction, and some apparently have ceased regular attendance at their meetings. The pastor reminds them of their past faithfulness and love despite persecution.

Ultimately, the pastor’s words of encouragement and exhortation are rooted in his teaching about Jesus Christ. The Son of God became the heavenly high priest, who offered himself as a sacrifice once for all. Christ obtained salvation for all who approach him in faith, and such faith perseveres until it receives the promised eternal reward.¹

¹ “Introduction to Hebrews,” ESV Bible, <https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/introduction-to-hebrews/>

Outline of Hebrews

Note: Sermons on each passage will be preached on the Sunday following the reading

Week of Monday, May 10, 2021	Hebrews 1:1-4
Week of Monday, May 17, 2021	Hebrews 1:5-14
Week of Monday, May 24, 2021	Hebrews 2:1-4
Week of Monday, May 31, 2021	Hebrews 2:5-9
Week of Monday, June 7, 2021	Hebrews 2:10-18
Week of Monday, June 14, 2021	Hebrews 3:1-6
Week of Monday, June 21, 2021	Hebrews 3:7-19
Week of Monday, June 28, 2021	Hebrews 4:1-11
Week of Monday, July 5, 2021	Hebrews 4:12-13
Week of Monday, July 12, 2021	Hebrews 4:14-5:10
Week of Monday, July 19, 2021	Hebrews 5:11-6:3
Week of Monday, July 26, 2021	Hebrews 6:4-8
Week of Monday, August 2, 2021	Hebrews 6:9-20
Week of Monday, August 9, 2021	Hebrews 7:1-10
Week of Monday, August 16, 2021	Hebrews 7:11-28
Week of Monday, October 11, 2021	Hebrews 8:1-13
Week of Monday, October 18, 2021	Hebrews 9:1-14
Week of Monday, October 25, 2021	Hebrews 9:15-28
Week of Monday, November 1, 2021	Hebrews 10:1-18
Week of Monday, November 8, 2021	Hebrews 10:19-25
Week of Monday, November 15, 2021	Hebrews 10:26-39
Week of Monday, December 27, 2021	Hebrews 11:1-7

Week of Monday, January 3, 2022	Hebrews 11:8-22
Week of Monday, January 10, 2022	Hebrews 11:23-31
Week of Monday, January 17, 2022	Hebrews 11:32-40
Week of Monday, January 24, 2022	Hebrews 12:1-13
Week of Monday, January 31, 2022	Hebrews 12:14-29
Week of Monday, February 7, 2022	Hebrews 13:1-6
Week of Monday, February 14, 2022	Hebrews 13:7-19
Week of Monday, February 21, 2022	Hebrews 13:20-25

Week of Monday, May 10, 2021

Hebrews 1:1-4

1 Long ago God spoke to the ancestors by the prophets at different times and in different ways. 2 In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. God has appointed him heir of all things and made the universe through him. 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of his nature, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. 4 So he became superior to the angels, just as the name he inherited is more excellent than theirs. -- Hebrews 1:1 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

O – Observe what it teaches

P – Practice this in your life

E – Express this in your prayers

Weekly Devotional

“He was not merely a chip off the old block. He was the old block itself.”

– Edmund Burke

My kids have been playing in a flag football league for the past couple of months. It has been so much fun for Kate and I to watch them play. It has also been an interesting experience for myself. I feel, in many ways, that I am watching miniature versions of myself out there playing. They are so much like I was at that age. I see Abe's uncertainty. I see his unwillingness to ask questions out of fear of looking like he feels, confused. I see Abe's desire to keep the attention off of himself and focus it on those around him instead. However, I see his entire demeanor change to “game time” when the ball is snapped; becoming focused and intent. I see myself in Holden, too. I see his natural athleticism. I see how he soaks up everything around him, linked so closely to his desire to be the best. I also see his desire to control the whole game and how that sometimes means he gets caught out of position and unprepared. My boys are certainly their own people, but, in many ways, so much like me. Their mannerisms and attitudes are expressions of their father.

That is an inadequate picture, but an illustration nonetheless, of what the writer of Hebrews is telling us here in this letter. My boys may have parts of who I am within their nature. They may reflect portions of who I was as a young boy, but they are not exact reflections of who I am or was. The author of Hebrews is telling us something very different about Jesus Christ. He writes “The Son is...the exact expression of his nature.” Jesus is an exact expression of the nature of God, because Jesus, Himself, is God. While my sons may one day contradict and go against me, Jesus cannot go against God because it would mean going against His very nature and character.

Taking this further, this passage points out that “The Son is the radiance of God's glory.” The word used here for radiance certainly refers to the light of God that Jesus calls Himself in John 8, “light of the world.” Jesus radiates light that can shine into the darkest corners of this world and, personally, our hearts in order to expose lies and impress truth. However, in this sense, the word for radiance here goes deeper to mean that Jesus is the perfect reflection of God's glory, both metaphysically and morally. Jesus is literally the physical manifestation of the immaterial character and glory of God.

It is in this recognition of Jesus Christ as God and His literal sameness with the Father that the author tells us about the role of Jesus in the created and salvific order. All of Creation was created by the Father through Jesus and nothing was made without Him (John 1:3). It is also through Jesus that the Father offers the forgiveness of sins and gives the gifts of faith and new life. These things are the practical application of the nature of God, through the Son. And it is this supreme nature of Jesus' role in the Trinity that we see His placement in Heaven, on a throne, next the Father, and above the angels in every way. That is the man, Our God, who came to this world to save us and offer us relationship with Him!

Read Also:

Hebrews 1	[helps understand context of the book]
Hebrews 2	[helps understand context of the book]
John 1:1-18	[Jesus is God]
Philippians 2:5-11	[the Father exalted Jesus]
Colossians 1:15-22	[the centrality of Christ]
John 8:54-58	[Jesus identifies Himself as God]
Genesis 18:1-3; 32:24-30	[Christ appears pre-incarnation]
John 14:8-11	[Jesus reveals the Father]
Psalms 2	[the coronation of the Son]

Group Discussion Questions – Theological Considerations

- Define Christophany. Define theophany. What are some examples from Scripture?
- If Jesus could appear as a man on earth at any time, why did He have to go through the process of the virgin birth, childhood, life, etc?
- Is this passage referring to Jesus in relation to God the Father or God the Trinity?
- When did Jesus' appointment as heir take place and when did He receive His inheritance and name?
- What is the Trinity?
- Who are the persons of the Trinity? What are their roles?
- What is cessationism and continuationism in regard to spiritual gifts? Does this passage point to a cessation of prophecy?

Group Discussion Questions – Digging Deeper

- How have you seen your children in yourself? How have you seen yourself in your parents? How can you see the character of the parent through the children?
- How does knowing Jesus tell us about the nature and character of God, both the Trinity and the Father?
- Jesus places His character on us as well (ex. He is the light of the world, but calls us the light of the world). How does this inform us of who we are to be and how we are to live?
- For the purposes of this question, assume that the spiritual gifts of tongues and prophecy continue to this day. What would this practically look like? Would it differ from the ways we see it in Scripture? How do we see the church get this wrong? Right?

Week of Monday, May 17, 2021

Hebrews 1:5-14

5 For to which of the angels did he 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? 6 Again, when he brings his firstborn into the world, he says, And let all God's angels worship him. 7 And about the angels he says: He makes his angels winds, and his servants a fiery flame, 8 but to the Son: Your throne, God, is forever and ever, and the scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of justice. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; this is why God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of joy beyond your companions. 10 And: In the beginning, Lord, you established the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands; 11 they will perish, but you remain. They will all wear out like clothing; 12 you will roll them up like a cloak, and they will be changed like clothing. But you are the same, and your years will never end. 13 Now to which of the angels has he ever said: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool? 14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve those who are going to inherit salvation? -- Hebrews 1:5-14 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

O – Observe what it teaches

P – Practice this in your life

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Weekly Devotional

“ Our lives are not polished and shiny and set up on a mantle. They are cluttered and complicated. We get tired. And frustrated. But the preeminence of Jesus can't be an 'out there' sort of thing that we save for special days at the library. We must bring this home to the everyday. And one of the simplest ways to do that is to talk about Jesus, a lot. We should talk about Jesus often and be clear about his identity, resisting every temptation to make him peripheral, secondary, or assumed. And we may find that talking about Jesus often brings his preeminence to have a deeper bearing on our lives. It helps to remind us of his role in two things we deeply care about — the gospel and the glory of God.”

- Jonathan Parnell

In this passage, the author of Hebrews is making clear that Jesus Christ is superior to the angels. His audience would have primarily been Jewish and would have had a great deal of respect for angels. They understood their role as messengers and servants of God and the importance of that work. The author makes clear that while angels serve an important and powerful purpose in the plan of God, they are not to be elevated to a higher position than Christ. Jesus is superior to all things including beings as powerful and important as angels.

In our culture today we still run the risk of viewing angels through an improper lens. Some of that confusion is based on what we have seen in movies that have portrayed angels in an inaccurate light. Others have tried to assign an unbiblical function to how they interact with people or what their ultimate purpose is. Both issues underscore the importance of why we should be grounded in God's word to determine the proper view of something like angels. However, the greater danger today for believers is not that they might improperly elevate angels, but that they might elevate some other good thing improperly.

The point in this passage is not that angels should never be studied or discussed, or their function seen as unimportant. The point is Christ is to be preeminent in our lives and our view of all created things. From that vantage point our lives are correctly prioritized to function in a God honoring way. As an example, let's look at the role of families in our culture today. God has given us a wonderful blessing in the way he designed families to function and relate to each other. You see the way his design for marriage gives us a beautiful example of Christ and the church. His design for parenthood gives us a glimpse of his love and care for us. The design and function of the family is extraordinarily important part of God's overall plan. One today can not overstate the impact this can have on a society as we are witnessing the devastation that occurs when people try to redefine what God has ordained.

Because of this it is critical we understand from God's word what his design is for family and how we are to function. We should spend time studying this, discussing it, and seek to apply it to our lives. Families are an important part of the plan of God. However, we should never elevate the importance of our family above our view of Christ. We should never sacrifice our conviction to Christ on the altar of family. Does your family's schedule, your family activities, the things your family values most demonstrate that Christ is supreme? Those relationships like every other thing in our lives should be ordered in such a way that they bring attention and honor to Christ.

While family is just one example of a good thing, designed by God, that can be improperly elevated, there are many others as well. As we think about the supremacy of Christ in our lives, we need to ensure all other things reflect that truth, in our family, our work and our worship.

- Contributed by Eric Foster

Read Also:

Hebrews 3	[helps understand context of the book]
Hebrews 4	[helps understand context of the book]
Psalm 2:7	[reference in Hebrews 1:5]
Deuteronomy 32:43	[reference in Hebrews 1:6]
Psalm 104:4	[reference in Hebrews 1:7]
Psalm 45:6-7	[reference in Hebrews 1:9]
Psalm 102:25-27	[reference in Hebrews 1:12]
Psalm 110:1	[reference in Hebrews 1:13]
Luke 2:8-14	[example of angels as messengers and worshipping God]

Group Discussion Questions - Theological Considerations

- In what ways is Jesus Christ superior to the angels?
- What is his relationship to angels?
- How do the angels serve the Son?
- How do the angels serve the church?
- Was there ever a point in history where Jesus was not the Son of God? Why does this passage make it sound like there was?
- What are angels? How do they differ from God? From man?

Group Discussion Questions - Digging Deeper

- How does the ministry and spiritual warfare of angels on behalf of the church serve as an encouragement to your faith in Christ?
- What things in your life do you consider supreme? How does your life, bank account, calendar, and more prove these things?
- How does the reality of Christ's superiority over all things change the way you view those things?
- How does Christ's supremacy affect the way you live your life day to day?
- How do we get angels wrong?
- What is the practical application of knowing angels exist and what/who they are?

Week of Monday, May 24, 2021

Hebrews 2:1-4

1 For this reason, we must pay attention all the more to what we have heard, so that we will not drift away. 2 For if the message spoken through angels was legally binding and every transgression and disobedience received a just punishment, 3 how will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? This salvation had its beginning when it was spoken of by the Lord, and it was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 At the same time, God also testified by signs and wonders, various miracles, and distributions of gifts from the Holy Spirit according to his will. -- Hebrews 2:1-4 (CSB)

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Weekly Devotional

“Perseverance is stubbornness with a purpose.”

– John Shipp

As a preface, Kate is not a big fan of when I do this, but, nonetheless, I find it funny. When we are in the car as a family, there are times when everyone has a face buried in a screen whether texting, playing a game, looking at something on Google, or whatever. I will occasionally mess with them by drifting to the side of the road and hitting the rumble strips which jolts everyone back into being present in the car. As we all know the presence of those rumble strips is not for messing with your family, but for safety. They are there to bring the driver of a drifting vehicle back into a state of alertness. Without these strips, there is a very real danger to the driver who has drifted from the road. Another example is to picture a boat traveling upriver against the flow of the current. The pilot of that boat must remain alert with his hand on the steering, constantly aware of his position to the shoreline and the obstacles ahead. He must pay attention to the instruments on his panels. He must know the course so that he takes the right path when he encounters a fork in the river. If he relents, even for a moment, it is possible that he could hit the shore or a rock, lose his bearing, find himself going with the flow rather than against it, or find himself traveling the wrong river altogether.

That is the warning here in this passage from the author. This is the first of five warning passages found in this letter. This warning points to the danger of spiritual drift. The danger that we could neglect the salvation given by God, testified to by angels, proven by the Spirit, and witnessed to by believers. The wrath of God is nothing to be trifled with, but is the very real consequence of forsaking the offer of salvation. However, this warning is not just for those who do not receive salvation, but also to those who have it but neglect it.

The author of Hebrews clearly tells us that we must pay close attention to the words of truth given to us through God and His messengers. The danger is taking our eyes off these truths is that we can drift from it. We can drift from the truth. When that happens, we end up going with the flow of culture, rather than against it. We can also find ourselves turning to a gospel that is false. We can turn to a works-centric salvation. We can turn to liberal theology that leads people away from God and towards destruction. Instead, we must remain alert always to the words and truths given to us. We must persevere on the course on which God has placed us. The way is narrow, and we must guard against the desires of our sinful flesh that can so easily lead to drifting; drifting to our own destruction.

This means that we must remain alert and we must persevere in the truth. That means, not only that we know the truth, but that we know what is false. We must develop the gift of discernment so that we, not only see the truth, but can spot the lies. We must know Scripture well enough that we can weigh what we see and hear against the absolute standard of truth, the Word of God.

Read Also:

Hebrews 5	[helps understand context of the book]
Hebrews 6	[helps understand context of the book]
1 Peter 5:8-9	[remain alert]
Proverbs 7	[remain alert and do not stray]
Romans 15:14-21	[teach each other the truths given to you]
Acts 14	[testifying to the truth through signs and wonders]
2 Peter 1:3-15	[we have everything we need for life and godliness]

Group Discussion Questions - Theological Considerations

- What is a saint?
- What is the perseverance of the saints?
- What is orthodoxy? What is orthopraxy? What is the interaction between the two?
- What is the will of God? How do we seek it?
- What is the law? What is the just punishment for transgressions of the law?
- What is a miracle?

Group Discussion Questions - Digging Deeper

- Even with right understanding, what else do we need for right living?
- What are some of the protections you have in your life to make sure you are staying the course?
- How have you seen spiritual drift happening with an individual or a church?
- What has been the result of spiritual and theological drift?
- Is the author of Hebrews saying that one can lose their salvation?
- What does it mean to neglect salvation? For unbelievers? For Christians?
- When have you found yourself outside the will of God? Inside it? What was the practical result of each? Spiritual result?
- What does it mean that every transgression received just punishment?
- What is a miracle you have witnessed?
- Why is it said that salvation is the greatest miracle?

Week of Monday, May 31, 2021

Hebrews 2:5-9

5 For he has not subjected to angels the world to come that we are talking about. 6 But someone somewhere has testified: What is man that you remember him, or the son of man that you care for him? 7 You made him lower than the angels for a short time; you crowned him with glory and honor 8 and subjected everything under his feet. For in subjecting everything to him, he left nothing that is not subject to him. As it is, we do not yet see everything subjected to him. 9 But we do see Jesus — made lower than the angels for a short time so that by God's grace he might taste death for everyone — crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death. -- Hebrews 2:5-9 (CSB)

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Weekly Devotional

“Modern politics has become little more than shirking responsibility and blaming somebody else.”

– Ross Perot

I used to be enthralled by politics. I'd spend hours diving into the nuances of political theory and how different viewpoints could be applied practically to different issues. I even thought that I would love to go into politics myself. I was idealistic and thought I could make a difference. However, the older I got and the more I observed the world of politics, the more I became disenfranchised. It was a result of the growing realization that regardless of campaign promises or party affiliation, ideology took very little time to go out the window once someone was in office. As best as I could see, finger-pointing is the natural conclusion of faltering ideology in a two-party system. Rather than taking responsibility to failed policies or for unfulfilled campaign promises, it is too easy to blame somebody else, especially while out on the campaign trail.

I do not know why that realization came as such a surprise to me, though. This is the natural state of us as a human race in a broken, sinful, and fallen world. In the very beginning, man was created to hold dominion over Creation and all that was in it. Man was created to act as kings over the entirety of the world. When God created man, He blessed him and commanded him to subdue the entirety of the earth, rule over all the animals, and that all of the earth had been given to him for his use and benefit. God made Adam king of Creation. The author of Hebrews tells us that here in this passage, “You made him lower than the angels for a short time; you crowned him with glory and honor and subjected everything under his feet. For in subjecting everything to him, he left nothing that is not subject to him.” God made man lower than the angels to show that he could do more with less when less was fully committed to Him.

However, as we soon find out, Adam was an insufficient and poor king. “As it is, we do not yet see everything subjected to him.” If God created Adam to rule over the earth, why do we not see that? It is because Adam abdicated his responsibilities to Creation, to his wife, and to God and, in the process, he blamed his wife for his own failures. He shirked his responsibility and blamed somebody else. In doing so, this first Adam failed, relinquished his ruling authority over to Satan, and willingly subjected himself and all of humanity to slavery to Satan. However, this did not catch God by surprise, nor did it change His plans. God still planned to bring His kingdom rule over the earth through a man; through a second and greater Adam. As the author writes, “But we do see Jesus.” Jesus, came to live on this earth, for a time made lower than the angels, as a man. Jesus Christ, the ultimate King and the greater Adam, walked this earth not as king over it. Instead, he stands as King today, “crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death.” Jesus, in all his perfection, had full rights to point the finger and pass the responsibility on to those who truly earned it. Instead, he bore the burden of sin and shame himself on the cross, taking that responsibility on himself so that, one day, the Kingdom would be perfectly aligned.

Read Also:

Hebrews 7	[helps understand context of book]
Hebrews 8	[helps understand context of book]
Genesis 1:26-30	[God created man to rule over earth]
Genesis 3:12-13	[finger-pointing at the Fall]
Psalms 8	[quoted in this passage]
1 Corinthians 15:20-28	[God put everything under Jesus' feet]
Psalms 144:3	[similar to Psalm 8; quoted in this passage]
Job 7:17	[similar to Psalm 8; quoted in this passage]
Revelation 5:8-14	[the slaughtered lamb receives honor and glory]

Group Discussion Questions - Theological Considerations

- What is Creation?
- What is the Fall?
- What is Redemption?
- When did or when will judgment happen?
- What does it mean that Jesus is a greater Adam?
- If Eve was the first to eat of the fruit, why is it that the sin of all mankind is placed on Adam?
- How did Adam's sin condemn us all?
- How does *imago Dei* inform us of our intended role as rulers of the earth?

Group Discussion Questions - Digging Deeper

- If you were king over all the earth today, what is something you would do?
- How does your answer to that last question betray doubts you have about God's goodness, His sovereignty, or His plans?
- How does that shadow the sin that had Satan cast out of heaven?
- What is a time you have seen someone in a position of power abdicate their responsibilities and place the blame on somebody else? Talk about a time that you have done that.
- Answer the question found in Psalm 8:4, Psalm 144:3, and Job 7:17.
- If God was not caught off guard by Adam's sin and had planned all along to bring redemption through Jesus, why did He give man the responsibility of being rulers of the earth in the first place?
- How would you respond to this claim from unbelievers: "If it is true that God planned all along to bring redemption through Jesus and created man knowing that he would sin, thus bringing disease, struggle, pain, and death upon themselves, doesn't that make God some kind of sadist that enjoys watching people suffer?"
- Also, respond to this common question: "If God is truly in control, why doesn't He just snap His fingers, destroy Satan, and bring an end to all this pain?"

Week of Monday, June 7, 2021

Hebrews 2:10-18

10 For in bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was entirely appropriate that God — for whom and through whom all things exist — should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. 11 For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, 12 saying: I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters; I will sing hymns to you in the congregation. 13 Again, I will trust in him. And again, Here I am with the children God gave me. 14 Now since the children have flesh and blood in common, Jesus also shared in these, so that through his death he might destroy the one holding the power of death — that is, the devil — 15 and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death. 16 For it is clear that he does not reach out to help angels, but to help Abraham's offspring. 17 Therefore, he had to be like his brothers and sisters in every way, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in matters pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people. 18 For since he himself has suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted. -- Hebrews 2:10-18 (CSB)

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Weekly Devotional

“You’ve become the very thing you swore to destroy!”

– Obi-Wan Kenobi

In 2003, Anaiah Rucker, 10, and her sister, Camry, 5, were walking to their school bus stop and needed to cross a street in Madison, Georgia. While doing so, a truck headed straight at them without slowing down. In a split-second reflex, Anaiah pushed her younger sister to safety and took the blow of the truck. Anaiah survived, but suffered a broken neck, deep internal injuries, and two broken legs, one of which had to be amputated. But she has no regrets, saying Camry "was too young to be hit like this, and if she got hit, she wouldn't hardly be alive. She would be... gone forever."

Jesus Christ did something similar for those who would become his brothers and sisters as well. Prior to our salvation, we were standing in front of a semi-truck barreling down on us. We were already dead, headed for destruction. However, in his own perfect timing, Jesus Christ stepped out of heaven and took on flesh, so that he could die in our place. He took the blow of Satan in the physical torture that led to his physical death. However, that temporary victory for Satan was ultimately what became his own undoing. Jesus saved us from death and destruction, dying in our place.

In doing so, he became the thing that he came to destroy. Jesus came to destroy death by taking on death. Jesus came to destroy sin and flesh by taking on flesh and becoming sin. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that “He who knew no sin, became sin, so that we might become his righteousness.” Jesus became one of us, so that he could take on the things that destroyed us, so that he could save us. “Therefore, he had to be like his brothers and sisters in every way, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in matters pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people. For since he himself has suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.”

Jesus died in our place. But he took that a step further. He died as a propitiation for our sins, an atoning sacrifice that washed us clean. However, he also resurrected so that he could give us eternal life. He called us his brothers and sisters and shared his own inheritance with us. I have heard it said that “the crucifixion without the resurrection was just an execution.” It is not just his death that saves, but also his resurrected life. His death removed our guilt by paying for the debt himself. His resurrection gave us life by raising from the grave.

It is amazing! Our God knows what it is like to be us. He left heaven to take on the mortal flesh and bone and blood of man. He faced temptation and trials. He felt pain and he mourned. He dealt with hunger, poverty, anguish, disappointment, and more. He knows where you are and what you are going through, not only because he is God, but also because he is man.

Read Also:

Hebrews 9	[helps understand context of book]
Hebrews 10	[helps understand context of book]
Psalms 22:22	[quoted in this passage]
Isaiah 12	[verse 2 is quoted in this passage from the LXX]
Isaiah 8:17-18	[quoted in this passage from the LXX]
Psalms 18:2	[quoted in this passage from the LXX]
Luke 4:1-13	[the temptation of Jesus]
Romans 11:36	[all things exist through Christ]
2 Timothy 1:10	[Jesus came to abolish death]
Philippians 2:5-11	[Jesus became like his brothers]

Group Discussion Questions - Theological Considerations

- What is the Septuagint (LXX)? How do we handle textual differences between the Septuagint and the original languages/manuscripts?
- What does it mean that Jesus was tempted? Does that mean that it was possible he could've sinned? If not, does it mean that he really wasn't tempted at all?
- What was required for man to receive forgiveness and eternal life?
- What role does each person of the Trinity play in salvation?
- What is the high priest in Scripture? How did Jesus fulfill this role?

Group Discussion Questions - Digging Deeper

- How do you take comfort in knowing that God knows what it's like to be us?
- What do you think of the saying "The crucifixion without the resurrection was just an execution?"
- Donald Grey Barnhouse once posed this question, "What would a city look like that was completely ruled by the devil?" He answered it by saying that every lawn would be mowed, every child in school, the speed limit obeyed, no bridge would have graffiti, marriages would remain intact, and every church would have a beautiful building. However, the gospel would not be preached or proclaimed in any place or from any pulpit. Thoughts?
- How do you fight temptation?
- How can you support those around you facing temptation?
- When have you seen someone sacrifice themselves for someone else? How does this compare to the sacrifice Jesus made of himself?

Week of Monday, June 14, 2021

Hebrews 3:1-6

1 Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession. 2 He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was in all God's household. 3 For Jesus is considered worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder has more honor than the house. 4 Now every house is built by someone, but the one who built everything is God. 5 Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's household, as a testimony to what would be said in the future. 6 But Christ was faithful as a Son over his household. And we are that household if we hold on to our confidence and the hope in which we boast. -- Hebrews 3:1-6 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

O – Observe what it teaches

P – Practice this in your life

E – Express this in your prayers

Weekly Devotional

“Upon that place stood a Cross, and below at the bottom there was a tomb. I saw in my dream that just as Christian came up to the Cross, his burden came loose from his shoulders and fell off his back. It began to tumble and continued to do so until it came to the mouth of the Tomb. It then fell into the Tomb, and I saw it no more.”

– John Bunyan in “The Pilgrim’s Progress”

We are being asked to consider Jesus, or another way of putting that would be to think about, meditate on, or study Jesus. Specifically, to think about the greatness of Christ compared to Moses. This comparison like all the others throughout this book highlights just how superior Christ is, and how secure our hope in him remains. This meditation on Christ plays a role in how we can persevere and live a faithful life.

Our Christian faith like many other worthwhile things in life takes discipline and focus to stay committed. Anyone who has had any type of long-term relationship can testify to the fact that maintaining that requires some work. There needs to be a source of motivation deeper than those things that can so easily change. Otherwise, when that change does occur, the relationship breaks down and falls apart.

Marriage is the perfect example of this type of relationship. We have all heard stories of a couple that encountered some serious difficulty in their marriage. Perhaps it was the loss of a job or a severe illness, and the circumstances of their life together changed drastically. For those couples that are faithful examples of commitment no matter what they face there is a common theme. They choose to put each other ahead of themselves. It was not about what can they do for me, but rather how can I serve them. So that when they first got married and every day after that, they choose to love each other through that lens. So that when the emotions of the honeymoon period ended, when life became difficult, and things changed, that choice did not. They entered the relationship with a correct perspective about what that commitment really meant.

There are some similarities to this and our walk with Christ. Sometimes people decide to follow Jesus because they got caught up in the emotions of a moment, or because they believed their circumstances would be greatly improved. When the emotions fade, or the blessings don’t materialize, they walk away from Christ. Their decision to follow him was not based on an accurate understanding of who he is and what he promises.

Many times, when we first believed, first placed our faith in Jesus, we are filled with a deep passion to live this out and tell others about this great hope. It felt easy during this time to be faithful, many have referred to this period as being on fire for the Lord. As time passes those emotions fade and the real work begins. It is in those tough moments of life that our faith is tested, and God will begin to shake loose our misconceptions about Christ. For this reason, we need to often think about or consider Christ, who he is and what he has done. We need to ensure we know the Jesus of the Bible, not the Jesus that our culture has created. The more clearly we see Jesus, the greater our desire to stay committed will become, even in life’s toughest moments. The greatest news here is that our real hope is not in our ability to hang on, but a confidence in what Christ has done. Let’s consider Christ every day as we strive to live faithful lives.

- Contributed by Eric Foster

Read Also:

Hebrews 11	[helps understand context of book]
Hebrews 12	[helps understand context of book]
Numbers 12:7	[God speaking of the faithfulness of Moses]
Romans 3:3-4	[the faithfulness of God]
John 3:14	[another comparison between Moses and Christ]
John 11:25	[the hope found in Christ]
James 1:12	[encouragement to remain faithful]
Ephesians 2:19	[members of God's household]

Group Discussion Questions – Theological Considerations

- What is meant by Jesus being the “apostle and high priest of our confession?”
- How does the passage explain Jesus is greater than Moses?
- What is meant by believers being the household of God?
- Think typology: How is Moses a type for Jesus?
- Define glory.
- What is our confession?

Group Discussion Questions – Digging Deeper

- How can we ensure we have a correct understanding of who Jesus Christ is?
- What are some misconceptions you once had about Christ? How did God correct those views?
- What does a faithful disciple of Christ look like in our time?
- Who has been an example to you of a faithful life?
- What is the word used in verse 1 to describe the “brothers and sisters?” How does this inform our lives and attitudes in the context of the local church family, in your own family, and in the world?
- What is the role of Jesus in the household of God? What was Moses' role? Which role do we fulfill?

Week of Monday, June 21, 2021

Hebrews 3:7-19

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 ancestors tested me, tried me, and saw my works 10 for forty years. Therefore I was provoked to anger with that generation and said, "They always go astray in their hearts, and they have not known my ways." 11 So I swore in my anger, "They will not enter my rest." 12 Watch out, brothers and sisters, so that there won't be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage each other daily, while it is still called today, so that none of you is hardened by sin's deception. 14 For we have become participants in Christ if we hold firmly until the end the reality that we had at the start. 15 As it is said: Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion. 16 For who heard and rebelled? Wasn't it all who came out of Egypt under Moses? 17 With whom was God angry for forty years? Wasn't it with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, if not to those who disobeyed? 19 So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. -- Hebrews 3:7-19 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

O – Observe what it teaches

P – Practice this in your life

E – Express this in your prayers

Weekly Devotional

“If you can’t be a good example, then you’ll just have to be a horrible warning.”

– Catherine Aird

In the midst of a crisis, whether it be public health, natural disaster, or otherwise, you want to know that the people running the show can be trusted to make intelligent decisions. In order to do that, you trust that they have the very best tools, resources, people, and information available. However, in an effort to make quick decisions, people make stupid mistakes. In England, in 2020 during Covid-19, one such cautionary tale arises. In order to compile lists of positive test results for contact tracing, Public Health England used Microsoft Excel to create these logs. However, PHE made the mistake of using the XLS file format rather than the newer XLSX format. The difference? XLS is capped at a total of 65,536 rows whereas XLSX is unlimited in the number of rows. The result is that roughly 16,000 positive test results disappeared. That meant that contact tracing did not happen, allowing infected individuals to continue along their normal patterns of life, and, in effect, infecting more people that would infect more people. It has been estimated by a couple UK economists that the number of deaths from this error was in the ballpark of 1,500. All of this because someone did not upgrade their Microsoft Office. This is a horrible warning, an anti-example of how to handle a crisis.

In this passage, we see the author of Hebrews use an anti-example of faith. We are giving this cautionary tale as a picture of what not to do when it comes to our hearts towards God. The author directly states that the Spirit of God has pointed to the Israelites as a horrible warning of what not to be. During the exodus from Egypt, God used Moses to lead His people out of slavery and oppression. He was leading them towards the land that He had promised to give to the descendants of Abraham. During this exodus, God sent the ten plagues on the Egyptians, parted the Red Sea, issued the Ten Commandments, provided daily food through manna and quail, healed leprosy, made bitter waters sweet, and performed so many more miracles. Yet, when the time came to enter into the Promised Land, the Israelites balked. Rather than entering the land and allowing God to destroy their enemies there as He had promised, they sent in spies. The spies, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, issued a dire report that the people of the land would certainly destroy the Israelites. Rather than trusting in God and entering the land, the people hardened their hearts and chose to trust the divided words of man over the whole provision of God.

As a result, these untrusting, unfaithful Israelites died and never experienced the rest that God had promised to their people. Their hardened hearts led to unbelief. Their unbelief led to their own destruction. This is a horrible warning and a cautionary tale for us as well. Do not harden your hearts to the promises of God and to truth. Do not allow sin to lead to unbelief. Do not trust in the divided words of man when you have already seen and experienced the whole provision of God. His provision of grace and mercy and love and justice is perfect and whole. Do not harden your hearts to those things. May we never take for granted the gospel that offers salvation by grace alone through faith alone.

Read Also:

Hebrews 13	[helps understand context of book]
Psalms 95	[quoted in this passage]
Numbers 13-14	[rebellion of God's people referenced in this passage]
Matthew 11:25-12:8	[finding rest in Jesus]
Revelation 14:13	[we will rest in the Lord eternally]
Proverbs 28:14	[do not harden your heart]
Exodus 7:3; 8:15	[Pharaoh's heart was hardened]

Group Discussion Questions – Theological Considerations

- Think about typology. How is the exodus a type for salvation?
- Who hardens the hearts of man?
- What is sin? Are some sins greater than others?
- What is the wrath of God? How is it satisfied?
- What is perseverance?

Group Discussion Questions – Digging Deeper

- How have you overlooked the grace of God in your life?
- When is a time you did not trust God fully?
- What is a cautionary tale you can think of in life? What is an example of one you've seen when it comes to faith?
- What is a miracle you have seen in your life?
- If the deceitfulness of sin hardens hearts, how should we approach sin in our lives?
- Do you have a faithful believer to whom you confess sin in order to prevent the hardening of your heart?
- How do you encourage others to faithfulness?
- This passage uses a dire warning of God's wrath, a sort of "fire and brimstone" message. Do you think it's effective to use these types of messages and warnings in our conversations with others today?
- What are practical steps you can take to persevere in your faith?

Week of Monday, June 28, 2021

Hebrews 4:1-11

1 Therefore, since the promise to enter his rest remains, let us beware that none of you be found to have fallen short. 2 For we also have received the good news just as they did. But the message they heard did not benefit them, since they were not united with those who heard it in faith. 3 For we who have believed enter the rest, in keeping with what he has said, “So I swore in my anger, ‘They will not enter my rest,’” even though his works have been finished since the foundation of the world. 4 For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in this way: “And on the seventh day God rested from all his works.” 5 Again, in that passage he says, “They will never enter my rest.” 6 Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news did not enter because of disobedience, 7 he again specifies a certain day — today. He specified this speaking through David after such a long time: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” 8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. 9 Therefore, a Sabbath rest remains for God’s people. 10 For the person who has entered his rest has rested from his own works, just as God did from his. 11 Let us, then, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall into the same pattern of disobedience. -- Hebrews 4:1-11 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

O – Observe what it teaches

P – Practice this in your life

E – Express this in your prayers

Weekly Devotional

“If you get tired, learn to rest, not to quit.”
– Banksy

I have struggled with my weight for the decade. I have had swings in my weight as large as 75 pounds at a time, but more than 115 pounds total between my highest and lowest weights. I have struggled to maintain one weight for any period of time longer than a year or two. It's not that I don't want to be healthy. It's that the work that goes into breaking old habits and pushing forward in the new ones is really difficult work. After a while, the effort becomes too much and I give up. I think this is a common thing that happens in those who try to reverse unhealthy lifestyles. This up and down and back and forth is common, hence the terms “yo-yo dieting” or “weight cycling.” It feels good to see the wins and the weight loss. However, when the going gets tough, it becomes increasingly difficult, you grow weary, and you give up.

The same is often true of the Christian life. Christians often go through periods where they seem to be on-fire for the Lord. They are passionate about their faith. They spend regular time in the Bible and in prayer. They share their faith with others. They engage others in the local body in worship and fellowship. They give and serve sacrificially. Then there are periods where making time for the Bible and prayer can feel like a burden. Periods where the time constraints of worship, groups, and serving come up against the stress of work, home, and family. Times when giving back to God financially comes up against the financial pinch of debt and emergency expenses. Often, in those more difficult times, it becomes easy to forget the spiritual fulfillment experienced in those “on-fire” times. It becomes easy to give up and take the seemingly easier route of compartmentalizing your faith from your life.

God knows this about our nature. That is why He set the example for us. After the work of Creation, six days of work creating all things, God rested from His work on the seventh day. In Exodus 31, we see God implement the Sabbath. Sabbath means intermission, to cease from labors, and, in at least one case, to celebrate. It was implemented specifically to model what He had done in Creation, “for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, but on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.” (Exodus 31:17b) The very idea that God was refreshed by rest from His work should shake us out of our self-reliance on our own ability to be like robots and just keep going. We are not created to be going non-stop. If we are created in the image of God, it would naturally follow that we need to rest as He did.

The argument is that we are no longer beholden to much of the old law, and that is why the speaker in Hebrews reminds us that a Sabbath rest remains for us. We need the Sabbath to simply focus on worship, family, fellowship, and to grow in our love and fervor for God. We need this time to take us away from the stresses and pressures of our work to revel in the presence of God. Cease from your work, take a break, and celebrate all of who God is and what He has done for us! Allow God to work in you and refresh you.

Read Also:

Psalm 95	[quoted in this passage]
Genesis 2:2	[quoted in this passage]
Joshua 22:4	[quoted in this passage]
Exodus 20:8-11	[God implements the Sabbath]
Exodus 31:12-17	[God explains the Sabbath]
Revelation 7:9-17	[the final Sabbath rest]
Romans 10:14-11:32	[Israel's rejection of the good news]

Group Discussion Questions - Theological Considerations

- What is the Sabbath?
- Does God need rest and refreshment? Does He tire and grow weary? If so, does this weaken Him in any way?
- How can one receive the good news but have it not benefit them?
- What is the law? How are we to view the law today?
- What is Creation? How long did Creation take?
- Does Scripture leave room for an interpretation of an old earth?

Group Discussion Questions - Digging Deeper

- How do you take a Sabbath rest? What does that look like for you?
- Is your Sabbath the same day every week?
- What things have you found to be most helpful to your refreshment during times of rest?
- Why do we so often feel like we don't have time to rest?
- Why is Genesis and the Creation account so critical to our view of the entirety of Scripture?
- What does the speaker mean in verse 3 when he says "even though his works have been finished since the foundation of the world" when speaking about those entering God's rest?
- When have you experienced a time where you felt burnt out because you did not rest?
- Why do you think the speaker in Hebrews references the Old Testament as often as he does?

Week of Monday, July 5, 2021

Hebrews 4:12-13

12 For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 No creature is hidden from him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account. -- Hebrews 4:12-13 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

O – Observe what it teaches

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Weekly Devotional

“An unarmed man can only flee from evil, and evil is not overcome by fleeing from it.”
– Jeff Cooper

In the United States every year, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), there are almost 15,000 homicides where a firearm was used. There is no doubt that some have found the power of a firearm to be deadly and destructive. However, also according to the CDC, somewhere between 500,000 and 3,000,000 people save their lives or the lives of others by brandishing a firearm for the purposes of self-defense. Looking at it that way, there are some who have found the power of a firearm to be lifesaving and protective. Firearms, by that measure can be both life-ending and lifesaving. They have the power to bring a man to destruction and the power to save them from the same.

That is the picture of what we see here in the passage in Hebrews. The Word of God is a double-edged sword. It has the power to penetrate deep into our innermost being. As the pastor points out in these verses, that there no one who can hide from its power, but instead that all will be laid out before it, fully exposed, as if naked to face its judgment. While you may be able to run and hide from this power for a while or, even, throughout this life on Earth, there is no possible way to escape it in the end. In the end, we will all be called to account before Jesus Christ and the Word of God will expose us and all that is in our hearts. That cutting power can bring one to destruction or it can bring one to salvation. The Holy Spirit employs the Word to convict of us our sin and to bring us to the Father through the Son.

When we are faced with the power of the Word of God, it cuts deep. This cut strikes us right in our heart and exposes what is there. When this happens, we can allow this cut to act as a tool in the hands of a surgeon and separate us from our sin as a surgeon separates muscle and tissue. The sword, the Word of God, is intended to heal, to make healthy, to bring new life. However, some will receive this cut as a post-mortem autopsy. Imagine telling your doctor that you do not want him to operate on you to remove the cancerous tumor. Having never allowed the Word of God to separate them from their sin, they end up being exposed before God after their death on this Earth as He opens their hearts and shows them the sin that led to their eternal deaths.

However, there is one more way this can go. Again, to the surgeon illustration. Imagine telling your doctor that he can operate on you to remove a cancerous tumor on your tongue, but that he is not to remove all of it, only the part that is impeding your ability to taste food. By not allowing the surgeon to remove the whole tumor, you end up with a tumor that spreads again and leads to a life unfulfilled. There are too many Christians that allow the Word of God to convict them and remove sin from their lives, as long as it doesn't go too far and remove those idols in our lives that we think bring us ultimate joy, like money, sex, careers, and so on. We must allow the Word of God to cut us deep and take from us all things that keep us from living holy lives wholly dedicated to finding joy and satisfaction in Him.

Read Also:

Jeremiah 23:29	[quoted in this passage]
1 Peter 1:23	[Word of God is living]
Isaiah 49:2	[God's Word is a sword]
Ephesians 6:17	[God's Word is a sword]
Revelation 1:16; 2:12; 19:15	[God's Word is a sword brandished by Christ]
Isaiah 55:11	[God's Word will accomplish His purposes]
Psalms 33:13-15	[God sees all and knows all]
Psalms 119:130	[God's Word is a light]
Jeremiah 17:9-10	[God sees the heart]
1 Samuel 16:7	[God sees the heart]
John 1:1-18	[Jesus is the Word of God]

Group Discussion Questions - Theological Considerations

- What does it mean that God's Word is a sword? What about adding in the adjective "double-edged?"
- What is the Bible?
- How did we get the Bible?
- What does the phrase "Word of God" mean?
- What is the authority of Scripture? Where does it come from?
- How is Jesus the Word of God? What does that mean?
- How does the Holy Spirit brandish the Word of God in salvation? In sanctification?

Group Discussion Questions - Digging Deeper

- What words would you use to describe the Word of God?
- How do you explain the Scriptures to an unbeliever?
- What does it mean in Isaiah when God says, "my words will not return to me empty?"
- Is the Bible a weapon? If so, against what or against who?
- We sometimes hear people describe the US Constitution as a "living and breathing document" meaning that it must be interpreted or applied based on the current political, social, and moral climate of the time. When we read that God's Word is called "living," what does that mean?
- How does the Word of God separate us from our sin?
- What are some idols you see that Christians hold on to that keep them from fully enjoying the blessings of God?
- How does the Word of God bring both life and death?

Week of Monday, July 12, 2021

Hebrews 4:14-5:10

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens — Jesus the Son of God — let us hold fast to our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.

1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed in matters pertaining to God for the people, to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he is also clothed with weakness. 3 Because of this, he must make an offering for his own sins as well as for the people. 4 No one takes this honor on himself; instead, a person is called by God, just as Aaron was. 5 In the same way, Christ did not exalt himself to become a high priest, but God who said to him, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father,” also says in another place, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” 7 During his earthly life, he offered prayers and appeals with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. 8 Although he was the Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. 9 After he was perfected, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, 10 and he was declared by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. -- Hebrews 4:14-5:10 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

O – Observe what it teaches

P – Practice this in your life

E – Express this in your prayers

Weekly Devotional

“Freedom lies in being bold.”
– Robert Frost

Abe Lincoln did not always have a beard. In 1860, 11-year old Grace Bedell wrote a letter to Abraham Lincoln, who at the time was US Representative from Illinois and candidate for President. Unsure of herself, saying “I hope you won’t think me very bold to write to such a great man as you are,” Grace spoke with boldness regardless. She stated that some of her brothers planned to vote for him in the upcoming election but thought she could use some help convincing the others. She thought that the key to gaining their support would be for Lincoln to grow a beard because “you would look a great deal better for your face is so thin. As a kicker, she added “All the ladies like whiskers and they would tease their husbands to vote for you and then you would be President.” As a gift for her bold letter, Lincoln responded to her with a letter of his own. As they say, the rest is history. Lincoln won the election and it’s hard to imagine him without that famous beard.

Perhaps a fear of being so bold before God is the reason so few Christians go to Him with such boldness. Rather than fear, however, we are invited to come before His throne with boldness! We are invited! We have an open invitation to boldly approach the throne of grace and bring before Him our needs. It is an open invitation to come drag ourselves before Him in our most broken state. It is an invitation to kneel before Him in our greatest moments. We are to come before God and the throne of grace with boldness, confidence, and humility.

What we receive back from God is not a letter. While a letter from a presidential candidate would be a pretty cool memento, it is such a pale response compared to what we get from God. When we come before Him, God looks upon us with understanding as One who has experienced what we experience. We receive love from One who can “sympathize with our weakness” because He suffered in weakness. More so, we can approach with boldness with the knowledge that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.”

Who knows what impact the beard had on Abe Lincoln’s election results, though, likely, it was negligible. However, what we do know is that the presidential term of Lincoln was one of greatness. He led the country through some of our darkest moments; slavery and the Civil War. By his presidency, all men were given freedom under the law. It is fun to think that, by the boldness of one little girl, freedom was granted to men.

While we do not know how her letter impacted the election, we do know one thing for certain. When we approach the throne of grace with boldness, we are made free. We are given grace that overcomes our sin. We are given mercy that overpowers our shame. We receive perfect love that drives out fear. We are invited to go to God boldly, not because of what you’ve done, but because of what Jesus, our high priest, has done for us.

Read Also:

Leviticus 8-9	[the first high priest, Aaron]
Leviticus 4	[the priest performed sacrifices]
Psalms 2	[quoted in part in this passage]
Psalms 110	[the priestly king; quoted in part in this passage]
Psalms 22:1	[indirectly referenced in this passage]
Philippians 2:7-8	[Jesus was obedient in his suffering]
Genesis 14:17-24	[Melchizedek in the Old Testament]
Hebrews 6:19-7:28	[Melchizedek in the New Testament]

Group Discussion Questions - Theological Considerations

- What is a high priest? What did they do?
- What does calling Jesus the Great High Priest tell us about Jesus? What does it tell us about Jesus in relation to the Trinity?
- What is the role of Jesus in salvation?
- Define temptation.
- Define calling as seen in verse 4. What does this mean for those called to ministry today?

Group Discussion Questions - Digging Deeper

- What does it mean to “approach the throne of grace with boldness?” What do we take with us to the throne of grace?
- Compare and contrast a priest in the context of the OT to an elder/pastor today.
- What does it mean “after he was perfected?” Was there ever a time when he was not perfect?
- Was Jesus high priest during his lifetime?
- What do 4:16 and 5:7 teach us about prayer and our communion with God?
- Is the throne on which Jesus is seated a literal and physical throne?
- Who are the people referred to in verse 2? How does imagery inform how we are to engage with them?
- How does God talk to His people today? How does this differ from or is similar to what we see in this passage?
- What does “in our time of need” mean in verse 16?

Week of Monday, July 19, 2021

Hebrews 5:11-6:3

11 We have a great deal to say about this, and it is difficult to explain, since you have become too lazy to understand. 12 Although by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the basic principles of God's revelation again. You need milk, not solid food. 13 Now everyone who lives on milk is inexperienced with the message about righteousness, because he is an infant. 14 But solid food is for the mature — for those whose senses have been trained to distinguish between good and evil.

1 Therefore, let us leave the elementary teaching about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works, faith in God, 2 teaching about ritual washings, laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And we will do this if God permits. -- Hebrews 5:11-6:3 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

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Weekly Devotional

“You’ll never have that kind of relationship in a world where you’re afraid to take the first step...”

– Robin Williams as Sean in “Good Will Hunting”

In the movie “Good Will Hunting,” Matt Damon plays a young man named Will. Will has an unworldly level of intelligence and ability to memorize information that he can recall at any given time. Will’s gifts lead him to have opportunities that most would only dream of; free education at MIT and top jobs at law firms and the NSA. His incredible potential is only matched by his self-destructive behavior and beliefs. He chooses to spend his life as a janitor, hanging out with his old friends, and never leaving the comfort of what he knows and finds safe. Will has the world at his fingertips, but has made decisions, even if unconsciously, to ruin his chances at changing his life.

Unfortunately, Christians do the same things to themselves on a regular basis. The pastor in Hebrews talks about it here in this passage. Chances are that you have seen it in those you know or even in yourself. Christians have available to them the entirety of the spiritual life at their fingertips. However, far too often, whether consciously or unconsciously, they are self-destructive to their growth as Christians and they turn away the opportunities to grab hold of those wondrous mysteries that are made available to those alive in Christ. We can recognize these things in people. We all know Christians who have been believers for a long time but are very immature in their faith.

Best I can tell, there are two reasons why this happens. The first is spiritual laziness. They simply do not put in the work of sanctification. To be clear, sanctification comes only as a work of the Holy Spirit in us. However, God has found fit to allow that growth nearly as a direct correlation of the work we put into it through the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, prayer, service, giving, solitude, fellowship, fasting/self-denial, and so on. When we do not engage the spiritual disciplines, we do not grow. Simple as that. Spiritual laziness is a lack of effort at growth.

The other reason for perpetual immaturity is treating spiritual growth as a posteriority. Posteriorities are the opposite of priorities. They are the things that you put at the bottom of the to-do list and anything that goes on the list goes above these things. Unlike spiritual laziness, they are at least on the to-do list, they just never get done. A posteriority can be a good thing, when we make the right things the last things. “I’ll do that after I get these other things done” is a recipe to ensure that it never gets done. Do not make spiritual disciplines posteriorities!

Let’s be careful in how we view this, however. It is not that we need to grow because God needs us to. Instead, we need to grow, because we need God. The best way to experience God happens in two ways: the moment of salvation when we are made alive again and when we are experiencing growth in our knowledge of God and His abundant graces poured out upon us. Grow in godliness by growing in the spiritual disciplines!

Read Also:

1 Corinthians 3:1-4	[the problem of immaturity]
Ephesians 4:9-16	[growing into the fullness of our maturity]
Colossians 1:9-14	[prayer for growth]
Colossians 1:28	[one of the goals of Christian ministry]
James 1	[trials bring growth and maturity]
1 Timothy 4:6-10	[train in godliness]
2 Timothy 3:16-17	[the role of Scripture in spiritual growth/maturity]

Group Discussion Questions – Theological Considerations

- What are spiritual disciplines?
- What is fasting?
- What is theology? Who should engage in theology?
- What is the aseity of God? Why does understanding this truth rightly guide our desire for spiritual growth?
- How are discipleship and discipline related?
- What does it mean that “all of Scripture is inspired by God?” Where does the authority of Scripture come from?

Group Discussion Questions – Digging Deeper

- When is the last time you fasted?
- Commit to fasting at least 24 hours over the next week. What will you do when the desire to break the fast becomes overwhelming?
- Why is it so hard to be consistent at the spiritual disciplines today? What can we do to overcome these obstacles?
- What spiritual discipline is your strongest? How can you help someone else grow in this area?
- Which spiritual discipline is your weakest? What are you going to do this week to improve in this area?
- What is the role of the church in feeding you as a Christian?
- How can you improve at “self-feeding” outside of the weekly worship gathering of the local church?
- In the context of this passage: What is milk? What is solid food?
- How is training in the spiritual disciplines similar to training in any other area? For example, training at your job or the way elite athletes train.

Week of Monday, July 26, 2021

Hebrews 6:4-8

4 For it is impossible to renew to repentance those who were once enlightened, who tasted the heavenly gift, who shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who tasted God's good word and the powers of the coming age, 6 and who have fallen away. This is because, to their own harm, they are recrucifying the Son of God and holding him up to contempt. 7 For the ground that drinks the rain that often falls on it and that produces vegetation useful to those for whom it is cultivated receives a blessing from God. 8 But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and about to be cursed, and at the end will be burned. -- Hebrews 6:4-8 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

O – Observe what it teaches

P – Practice this in your life

E – Express this in your prayers

Weekly Devotional

“The biggest threat to the church today is fans who call themselves Christians but aren’t actually interested in following Christ. They want to be close enough to Jesus to get all the benefits, but not so close that it requires anything from them.”
– Kyle Idleman, in “Not a Fan”

Imagine you and some friends are teens again. As a group, you go to King’s Island for a fun summer outing. All of you hop in the car, enjoy a great ride to the park together, and, laughing, excited about the things to come, walk up to the ticket counter and buy your tickets. As you walk through the gates, you experience the excitement and the thrill of the sounds and the sights of the park. Roller coasters flying across metal and wooden tracks. Cotton candy and Dippin’ Dots stands calling out, selling their goods. Kids and adults alike screaming with a mixture of joy and fear as they crest the top of the hill of the roller coaster and start the rapid downhill descent. What an exciting place to be! This place is full of people enjoying life and enjoying the experiences that come with it! Now imagine that having seen and heard all these things, you decide that you are not going to experience this park as fully as everyone else, but instead, you decide to buy a lemonade and sit on a bench until everyone around you is done.

That is what we see in this passage in Hebrews. The temptation is to read this passage and take it to mean that one can receive salvation and lose it again. However, that is not the case. This follows so closely with the previous passages that call for spiritual growth towards maturity. The seeking of continual spiritual growth is one of the markers of a true and pure faith and salvation.

Instead what we see here in Hebrews 6:4-8 is a person who has bought the ticket to the park, walked in, heard and seen all that is happening around them, having a temporary experience of joy and excitement, and then buying a lemonade and sitting on the bench the whole time. We all likely know men and women in churches that have never truly experienced salvation and the dying of the old self and the raising up into a new life. They go to church on a regular basis, perhaps serving and giving consistently. They have heard the gospel message and seen the thrills of those coming to faith and being given a new life. They have seen how God has worked in the midst of the people around them. They have seen how the Holy Spirit has moved to convict and to restore. They have seen God’s blessings poured on out people. They might have even had what they would call religious or spiritual experiences. But, having never placed their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, they never experience God’s saving grace in their own lives. They are never born again.

Instead they fall away and attempt to return again. What this leads to is a cycle where they attempt to re-crucify Jesus over and over again. However, we know that is impossible. Jesus’ single death and resurrection was sufficient to accomplish all it intended to accomplish and was more than enough to save all He intends to save. We blaspheme His name when we live this way, receive the good news, taste the gifts of grace, and, instead of producing good fruit, produce thorns and thistles. Make sure today that your faith and repentance are genuine and true!

Read Also:

Romans 5:8-6:14	[Christ died once for all]
1 Peter 3:18	[Christ died once for all]
Matthew 13:1-23	[parable of the sower; receiving the gospel]
2 Peter 2:20-22	[better to have never heard than to turn away]
Luke 11:24-26	[experiencing temporary purity; falling away]
Matthew 7:13-23	[good fruit; truly knowing Jesus]
Hebrews 10:26-39	[better to have never heard than to turn away]
Hosea 10:12	[sow righteousness]

Group Discussion Questions – Theological Considerations

- What is the difference between someone who is truly saved and one who has false security?
- How can one receive the gospel and not be saved?
- What are the similarities and differences in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament and the sacrifice of Christ?
- What does this passage tell us about our hearts?
- What does it mean when we say that “the death of Christ is sufficient?”
- Can a person be truly saved and never experience sanctification?
- What is the role of the local church when it comes to those who taste and see and hear, but do not experience salvation?
- What is eternal security or perseverance of the saints?

Group Discussion Questions – Digging Deeper

- How do we respond to someone who says, “follow your heart?”
- What is something that you enjoy doing that brings joy and excitement to your life? How would that activity or hobby be different if you were simply a sideline observer rather than a participant?
- What is the danger of false security of salvation?
- How do we know if we do not have true faith?
- How can we distinguish between vegetation that is useful and thorns and thistles? Can those exist together?
- Does God expect perfection from His followers?
- While the gift of grace and salvation are free, following Jesus will cost you something. What is the cost of following Jesus?
- How does the previous passage on maturity fit with this passage?
- How can someone taste or share in the Holy Spirit and never be saved?

Week of Monday, August 2, 2021

Hebrews 6:9-20

9 Even though we are speaking this way, dearly loved friends, in your case we are confident of things that are better and that pertain to salvation. 10 For God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you demonstrated for his name by serving the saints — and by continuing to serve them. 11 Now we desire each of you to demonstrate the same diligence for the full assurance of your hope until the end, 12 so that you won't become lazy but will be imitators of those who inherit the promises through faith and perseverance. 13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater to swear by, he swore by himself: 14 I will indeed bless you, and I will greatly multiply you. 15 And so, after waiting patiently, Abraham obtained the promise. 16 For people swear by something greater than themselves, and for them a confirming oath ends every dispute. 17 Because God wanted to show his unchangeable purpose even more clearly to the heirs of the promise, he guaranteed it with an oath, 18 so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us. 19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain. 20 Jesus has entered there on our behalf as a forerunner, because he has become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. -- Hebrews 6:9-20 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

O – Observe what it teaches

P – Practice this in your life

E – Express this in your prayers

Weekly Devotional

“It may be midnight or midday. He’s never early, never late. He will stand by what He claimed.”

– Toby Mac, in “Help is on the Way”

I enjoy a good love story. One with a well-crafted beginning, middle, and end. One that has excitement, conflict and a glorious resolution. God is creating the most epic love story of all time. In the beginning, he created all things and had a perfect design. In the process of man and woman choosing sin, we became broken. God created a relationship with Abraham and made a promise to him that he would provide a way for the brokenness to be healed.

Promises. We have all made promises. Some we follow through on, and some we might not. But God’s promise to Abraham, “I will surely bless you and your descendants” (v. 14) was more than a promise, it was a covenant made by God himself. God’s promises are founded in the truth that he is eternal and never changes. Because of who he is, this promise would most certainly be fulfilled. Sometimes we can be impatient when we are waiting on a promise. Remember, there is always an interval of time between the promise and the fulfillment. In this waiting time, how did Abraham respond? By “waiting patiently” (v. 15). Waiting patiently is not easy, but if we trust that God has an “unchangeable purpose” and that “it is impossible for God to lie”, we can trust that the waiting time is on purpose. During the time in between a promise and the fulfillment, our perspective is important. Instead of focusing on the fact that we are waiting, we should be encouraged by his past fulfilled promises and the “hope set before us” (v. 19). Do you need to change your perspective on something that you are currently waiting for?

Hope. Why is hope so important during the waiting game? Hope is an “anchor for the soul, firm and secure” (v. 19). Like an anchor holding a ship safely in position, our hope in Christ keeps us safe and focused on truth. Satan often uses a time of waiting as an opportunity to instill doubt. Fear and pride set in and we start to question God’s promises, His truths and His character. But, as a part of God’s perfect plan, he sent Jesus to earth “on our behalf as a forerunner” (v. 20). He goes before us and we can trust his plan. We have hope in Christ because *Christ is hope*.

As we patiently wait, we get to be a part of God’s love story that he is weaving through time. As active participants in his story, we are called to demonstrate “diligence” until the very end through “faith and perseverance” (v. 11). How can you demonstrate diligence in your relationships? In your job? In your walk with Christ? What is one way that you can practice faith and perseverance in those areas?

– Contributed by Kelly Hammersmith

Read Also:

Genesis 17:1-18:15	[the Abrahamic covenant]
Genesis 21:1-7	[God gives the promised child to Abraham]
Genesis 22	[Abraham's faith; v16-17 quoted in this passage]
Titus 1:2	[hope of eternal life; God cannot lie]
Leviticus 16	[entering the inner sanctum and making atonement]
Genesis 14:17-24	[Melchizedek in the Old Testament]
Romans 4	[Abraham's faith an example for us]

Group Discussion Questions – Theological Considerations

- What is a covenant? What are some of the covenants we find in Scripture?
- Define hope.
- When discussing the attributes of God, what are the “omnis?” Do the “omni-” attributes of God give Him the capability to do anything?
- How is patience an attribute of God?
- Who is Satan? When we view God and we consider Satan, how do they compare in their attributes? Why do you think Satan gets too much or too little credit for happenings in this world and our lives?

Group Discussion Questions – Digging Deeper

- What does the faithfulness of Abraham teach us about God's expectations for us?
- What is something that you would never sacrifice?
- What promise of God do you find gives you the most hope?
- Think about the greatest love story you know personally. How does that love story compare to the love of God for us?
- What can the patience of Abraham teach us about our need for patience?
- How do you find the patience of God to be encouraging or discouraging? What does His patience mean for those who are not yet saved?
- Kelly wrote in the devotional that “there is always an interval of time between the promise and the fulfillment.” We have received the promised salvation, rest, and new life. What else are we waiting on to be fulfilled?
- How can you best use the time we are living in now as we wait for the promised second coming of Jesus?
- What is a time that you've seen Satan use periods of waiting to separate someone from hope in God's promises?
- From the devotional: How can you demonstrate diligence in your relationships? In your job? In your walk with Christ? What is one way that you can practice faith and perseverance in those areas?

Week of Monday, August 9, 2021

Hebrews 7:1-10

1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High, met Abraham and blessed him as he returned from defeating the kings, 2 and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means king of righteousness, then also, king of Salem, meaning king of peace. 3 Without father, mother, or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever. 4 Now consider how great this man was: even Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the plunder to him. 5 The sons of Levi who receive the priestly office have a command according to the law to collect a tenth from the people — that is, from their brothers and sisters — though they have also descended from Abraham. 6 But one without this lineage collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. 7 Without a doubt, the inferior is blessed by the superior. 8 In the one case, men who will die receive a tenth, but in the other case, Scripture testifies that he lives. 9 And in a sense Levi himself, who receives a tenth, has paid a tenth through Abraham, 10 for he was still within his ancestor when Melchizedek met him. -- Hebrews 7:1-10 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

O – Observe what it teaches

P – Practice this in your life

E – Express this in your prayers

Weekly Devotional

“When eating fruit, remember the one who planted the tree.”

– Vietnamese Proverb

There is such a temptation to say that we give of our finances to God because He has given us grace that enables us to do so. In fact, I have been guilty of this line of thinking as well, that I can be generous only because God has given me the grace to be generous. However, if we look at charitable giving in America, we know that is not true. According to Giving USA, Americans gave nearly \$450 billion to charity in 2019 alone. You likely have heard a non-profit somewhere ask for your money while talking about how your gift is tax-deductible. There are many reasons why people give, and I'd argue that most of them do not have anything to do with an understanding of God's grace in their lives. Christians only give marginally more back to God (2.5% of disposable income) than the average American does to any other organization (2.1% of disposable income). If Christians have received grace in abundance unfathomable by the rest of the world, why is that they don't give abundantly more than those who do not know grace as we do? I believe the issue is a lack of gratitude.

However, Abraham (Abram at the time) sets a great example for us in this passage. He went into battle with 318 men and was handed victory over four of the world's greatest armies. When leaving the battlefield with the spoils of victory, he was greeted by Melchizedek. Melchizedek, the King of Salem and a high priest (both a priest and a king) long before the institution of high priest by God, greeted Abraham and served him communion, again, long before the implementation of the Passover. After serving Abraham, Melchizedek blessed Abraham. It was only then that Abraham gave a tenth of all he had received, the very first tithe seen in Scripture. This gift was given out of the overflow of gratitude that he had towards God. It followed the blessing given to him by God and by Melchizedek. Abraham was so thankful for the blessings he had received that he could do nothing other than to give abundantly back to God. His generosity was borne out of his gratitude.

In the story in Genesis where Abraham gives this tithe, we see the opposite picture as well. Whereas Melchizedek, King of Salem (literally King of Peace), served and blessed Abraham, the King of Sodom looks upon Abraham and declares “Give me what's mine.” What a stark contrast. However, it's one that we are probably familiar with and one that we have likely wrestled with in our own hearts. Why is that Christians give only marginally more than all other Americans? I believe that the reason is that Christians have the same sinful tendencies towards possession and greed as any other person. Too often, in the pursuit of good things like providing a good future for your family, leads to a mindset that your money is your money. This might explain why only 25% of all Americans who claim the name of Jesus give anything at all to the local church. There is a lack of gratitude of who God is and what He has done for us. He gave us His Only Son, Jesus Christ. It is out of the overflow of our gratitude and only after we have received this blessing that we can truly give with joyful hearts towards God.

Read Also:

Genesis 14:17-24	[Melchizedek in the Old Testament]
Numbers 18	[provision given to the priests]
2 Chronicles 31	[provision given to the priests]
Psalms 110	[Davidic psalm about the priestly King]
Malachi 3:7-12	[robbing God]
Numbers 18	[how God provides for the ministry of the church]

Group Discussion Questions – Theological Considerations

- Define Christophany. Define typology. Discuss Melchizedek as both a potential Christophany or as a type for Christ. Do you believe it is more likely that Melchizedek is a type for Christ or a Christophany?
- What is blessing?
- What is a tithe? Are we beholden to a tithe as New Testament Christians?
- Define worship. We call giving an extension of and an act of our worship. How is giving an act of worship?
- Why is the lineage of Abraham/Levi and Melchizedek contrasted?

Group Discussion Questions – Digging Deeper

- Commit to giving up one thing in the next month in order to give more to the local church. What is that thing? How can this practice shift your mindset from the King of Sodom to the King of Salem?
- Who is someone in your life that you are grateful towards? What is a way that you express that gratitude towards that person? How can this inform the way you show gratitude towards God?
- The pastor in Hebrews writes in this passage “without a doubt, the inferior is blessed by the superior.” What does this mean in this context? What does it mean for us? How does culture get this wrong when speaking of wealthy individuals, corporations, or the government?
- Adrian Rogers once said, “to give less under grace is a disgrace to grace.” Explain that.
- What is something that you are grateful for that God has given you?
- Many Christians split their giving or tithe between the church and other organizations. What are your thoughts on this? How do you believe Scripture directs this?
- How have you been personally blessed or grown in your faith through the act of giving and heart of generosity?
- What is a specific generous thing you would love to do? What can you start doing now to make that possible?

Week of Monday, August 16, 2021

Hebrews 7:11-28

11 Now if perfection came through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the law), what further need was there for another priest to appear, said to be according to the order of Melchizedek and not according to the order of Aaron? 12 For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must be a change of law as well. 13 For the one these things are spoken about belonged to a different tribe. No one from it has served at the altar. 14 Now it is evident that our Lord came from Judah, and Moses said nothing about that tribe concerning priests. 15 And this becomes clearer if another priest like Melchizedek appears, 16 who did not become a priest based on a legal regulation about physical descent but based on the power of an indestructible life. 17 For it has been testified: You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. 18 So the previous command is annulled because it was weak and unprofitable 19 (for the law perfected nothing), but a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. 20 None of this happened without an oath. For others became priests without an oath, 21 but he became a priest with an oath made by the one who said to him: The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever." 22 Because of this oath, Jesus has also become the guarantee of a better covenant. 23 Now many have become Levitical priests, since they are prevented by death from remaining in office. 24 But because he remains forever, he holds his priesthood permanently. 25 Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, since he always lives to intercede for them. 26 For this is the kind of high priest we need: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. 27 He doesn't need to offer sacrifices every day, as high priests do — first for their own sins, then for those of the people. He did this once for all time when he offered himself. 28 For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak, but the promise of the oath, which came after the law, appoints a Son, who has been perfected forever. -- Hebrews 7:11-28 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

O – Observe what it teaches

P – Practice this in your life

E – Express this in your prayers

Weekly Devotional

“To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible.”

– Thomas Aquinas

Have you ever put your faith in someone? Perhaps it's a close friend, or a financial advisor, possibly a politician? You name it, we've all likely put our faith in someone at some point in our lives to provide us with hope and security. Turns out this is a centuries old complex, which the Old Testament Jews struggled with as well. In this passage, we see the transition between the Old Testament law regarding high priests, legal regulation about physical descent (Aaron), to the new law which holds Christ as our one true high priest.

As we read through Leviticus, we see very specific requirements for Old Testament high priests (Leviticus 21), and their purpose to make atonement for sin before God (Leviticus 16: 32-34). While God's design is infallible, we are not. This legalistic approach to atonement was not intended to bring us salvation, but rather bring into focus our knowledge of sin and a need for total and permanent forgiveness (Romans 3:20). The Old Testament Jews are facing a radical and life altering decision, do I continue to place my faith in the high priest or do I trust in Jesus?

What's beautiful about this passage is God tells us what we need in a high priest (Jesus), he is holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. Okay, now think back to the person that came to mind at the beginning of this devotional. Given the recent election, let's take a look at Donald Trump. Alright, so let's go through this together. Holy?....innocent?.....undef.....well that was rough. Well wait what about that other guy Joe.....well, you probably guessed that as well. How did your person do? My guess is your check list looks a lot like mine and the tomb, empty. You see, no matter what, no one and I mean NO ONE, comes even relatively close to Jesus.

We sometimes put our faith in others, when it's Christ who is our cornerstone and our foundation. Christ remains forever, holds his priesthood permanently, is the only one able to save completely, and always lives to intercede for you and me. No one else comes close to providing us with everlasting hope, peace and faith. It's great to seek mentorship, friendship, and advice but may we always remain rooted in God's word

– Contributed by Adam Gray

Read Also:

Leviticus 21	[requirements of Levitical priests]
Leviticus 16: 32-34	[priests make atonement for sins of their people]
Romans 3	[justified by faith not by the law]
Isaiah 11:1	[the Savior will come from the line of David]
Micah 5:2	[the Savior will come from Bethlehem in Judah]
Romans 7:14-8:11	[the law points to our sin and our need for a Savior]
Psalms 110:4	[quoted in this passage]
Matthew 5:17-20	[Jesus did not come to abolish the law]

Group Discussion Questions - Theological Considerations

- What was a Levitical priest?
- What is the difference between exalt and exult? How does this passage prompt us towards both?
- What is works-salvation theology?
- Why did God implement the law if it could not save?
- What is original sin?
- What is sin nature?
- What are the five solas of the protestant reformation? How do these five truths help us keep our focus on and faith in Jesus?

Group Discussion Questions - Digging Deeper

- Why do you think that the author of Hebrews discusses that Jesus is our High Priest but that he did not come from Levitical lineage?
- How have you placed your hope in the works of the law rather in Christ? How do we see this in culture?
- How is the new covenant "better" than the old?
- What do we mean when we say that Christ is our cornerstone?
- Is the law now null and void? What does Jesus mean in his words from the passage in Matthew 5:17-20?
- How does Paul in the passage Romans 7:14-8:11 show us the difference in works-salvation and salvation by grace alone through faith alone?
- Who is someone other than God that you have placed your faith in? How did they fail you? Have you ever, even unconsciously, led others place their faith in you? How did you fail them?
- What is the difference between spiritual faith (or the faith of God) and worldly faith?

Week of Monday, October 11, 2021

Hebrews 8:1-13

1 Now the main point of what is being said is this: We have this kind of high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, 2 a minister of the sanctuary and the true tabernacle that was set up by the Lord and not man. 3 For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; therefore, it was necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. 4 Now if he were on earth, he wouldn't be a priest, since there are those offering the gifts prescribed by the law. 5 These serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was warned when he was about to complete the tabernacle. For God said, Be careful that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown to you on the mountain. 6 But Jesus has now obtained a superior ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been established on better promises. 7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion for a second one. 8 But finding fault with his people, he says: See, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah — 9 not like the covenant that I made with their ancestors on the day I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. I showed no concern for them, says the Lord, because they did not continue in my covenant. 10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 11 And each person will not teach his fellow citizen, and each his brother or sister, saying, "Know the Lord," because they will all know me, from the least to the greatest of them. 12 For I will forgive their wrongdoing, and I will never again remember their sins. 13 By saying a new covenant, he has declared that the first is obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old is about to pass away. -- Hebrews 8:1-13 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

O – Observe what it teaches

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Weekly Devotional

“Imitation is not just the sincerest form of flattery – it’s the sincerest form of learning.”
– George Bernard Shaw

I love seafood. The fresher the better. Back in 2012, Kate, Emma, and I joined my parents and both my brothers and their families for a vacation to Emerald Isle, NC. It was a great trip where we were able to spend quality time together and have a lot of fun. One of the things we did was my dad and brothers and I went deep-sea fishing. We hooked into a lot of fish, including a number of dolphinfish or mahi-mahi. We kept several and took them to shore where they were fileted. That night we cooked and ate some of the best food I have ever had. When I lived in Virginia, I used to visit a restaurant on the Potomac River called Tim’s II. They would pull crab right out of the river and serve it in their restaurants. Incredible. So imagine the disappointment I felt when I first tried imitation crab meat. While this stuff was a faint hint at the real thing, it stood as an especially poor reflection of the real thing. It is like the old Xerox machines where the quality of the copy got worse every time you copied a copy. Reminds me of the movie “Multiplicity” with Michael Keaton. The copy is never as good as the original.

The pastor here in Hebrews is saying the same thing. He is saying that the system of high priests and sacrifices is simply “a copy and a shadow of the heavenly things.” He is referring the original, eternally existent “thing,” being Jesus Christ. When man sinned, all of mankind earned their just wages which is death (Romans 6:23). To avoid the wrath of God, including eternal death and separation from Him, God showed remarkable grace. He offered us a chance to be redeemed. The earlier covenants pointed to how this redemption would come, but in the meantime, there had to be atonement for that sin lest man die apart from God. However, there was a fault in this system. The law could not be perfectly held and was designed to show our need for a greater redemption. The sacrifices had to be made repeatedly and were inherently offered by sinful men on behalf of sinful men. The system was a poor imitation of the real deal. The high priests and their sacrifices were a shadow of a greater High Priest and sacrifice yet to come. Like a building sitting in the shadow of a skyscraper under construction, these old systems sat in the shadow of the fulfillment of the plan that God had been building from eternity past.

I can imagine that from the point of view of those under the old sacrificial system, that we stand in an enviable position. We stand on this side of the cross and the resurrection. We can look back on the things that the Jewish people looked forward towards. We no longer live under the law, but under the grace freely given to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We no longer live under the sacrificial system of atonement, but under the blood of Jesus through His singular and perfect sacrifice on the cross. We no longer rely on sinful men to mediate with God on our behalf, but instead have King Jesus, sitting on at the right hand of the Father, mediating and intervening on our behalf. We no longer live under the curse of death, but under the promise of eternal life. Our Savior is the real thing!

Read Also:

Galatians 3:19-26	[purpose of the law]
Exodus 25:40	[quoted in this passage]
Exodus 33:7-11	[Israelites and the tent of meeting]
Galatians 2:20	[greater sacrifice and gift offered to God on our behalf]
Colossians 2:16-17	[shadow of what was to come]
Colossians 3:1-4	[focus on Jesus seated next to the Father]
2 Corinthians 3:6-11	[greater glory in the new covenant and ministry of life]
Jeremiah 31:31-34	[quoted in this passage]

Group Discussion Questions - Theological Considerations

- What are covenants? What is the better covenant?
- Why is the law referred to as a covenant of death? What is the new ministry of life?
- Why would God give His people a covenant of death for thousands of years rather than the ministry of life?
- What is the difference between the Old Testament temple and New Testament church?
- If they lived under the covenant of death, what hope for eternal life did those living pre-incarnation have?
- Define majesty. Who is the term Majesty referring to in this passage? How does the use of Majesty inform us of who He is?
- What is universal salvation? Is it biblical?

Group Discussion Questions - Digging Deeper

- What are some imitations that you have found in your life that just do not live up to the real deal? How can you also see this in Christianity today?
- What value does the law hold for us today?
- How are we to fulfill the ministry of life?
- This passage quotes from Jeremiah saying that God is making a new covenant with the houses of Israel and of Judah. How do we fit into that picture?
- This passage quotes from Jeremiah saying that "And each person will not teach his fellow citizen, and each his brother or sister, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least to the greatest of them. For I will forgive their wrongdoing, and I will never again remember their sins." Does this absolve us of our call to the Great Commission? Does this teach universal salvation?
- What does the pastor mean when he says that if Jesus were here on earth, he wouldn't be a priest?
- How can we see the glory of God and grace and heaven by looking at the shadows shown to us through the law and through the covenants? Why is the real thing even greater and more glorious?

Week of Monday, October 18, 2021

Hebrews 9:1-14

1 Now the first covenant also had regulations for ministry and an earthly sanctuary. 2 For a tabernacle was set up, and in the first room, which is called the holy place, were the lampstand, the table, and the presentation loaves. 3 Behind the second curtain was a tent called the most holy place. 4 It had the gold altar of incense and the ark of the covenant, covered with gold on all sides, in which was a gold jar containing the manna, Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. 5 The cherubim of glory were above the ark overshadowing the mercy seat. It is not possible to speak about these things in detail right now. 6 With these things prepared like this, the priests enter the first room repeatedly, performing their ministry. 7 But the high priest alone enters the second room, and he does that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. 8 The Holy Spirit was making it clear that the way into the most holy place had not yet been disclosed while the first tabernacle was still standing. 9 This is a symbol for the present time, during which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the worshiper's conscience. 10 They are physical regulations and only deal with food, drink, and various washings imposed until the time of the new order. 11 But Christ has appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come. In the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands (that is, not of this creation), 12 he entered the most holy place once for all time, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a young cow, sprinkling those who are defiled, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works so that we can serve the living God? -- Hebrews 9:1-14 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

O – Observe what it teaches

P – Practice this in your life

E – Express this in your prayers

Weekly Devotional

“Whatever you do, don’t do it halfway.”

– Bob Beamon

There are a lot of invaluable life skills that one learns in the service of this country. While serving in the military, you might learn how to dig a hole using a collapsible shovel that is too small. That hole could serve a lot of different purposes; hiding, protection, sleeping, or for use as a latrine. You might learn how to sew buttons on a shirt using far too little thread. You will also certainly learn how to sit patiently and wait for a long time after being told that you better not be late. This skill will become particularly handy in doctor’s offices one day in the civilian world. One of the many skills that you will likely learn is how to bathe in the field when shower facilities are unavailable but the stench of a week or more has become a bit more than you can bear. What this typically means is the strategic use of baby wipes. This is, at best, a marginally effective method of bathing. However, in the circumstances in which you find yourself in the moment, it is the best you have available. Plus, it is appreciated by everyone around you and makes for a more pleasant field environment when everyone showed the same courtesy. However, let’s be honest, since I served in the Air Force, it was a rare moment, that the command did not make sure that we would have access to a hot shower. A hot shower is incomparably better than any temporary fix that could be imitated in the field.

That’s the situation the Jewish people find themselves in that the pastor addresses here in this passage. He tells his hearers and readers that the old covenant was a temporary fix that, at best, was only marginally effective. It only reached halfway to the goal of holiness and redemption. There was only a certain place in which these sacrifices could be made. There was only a certain way in which they could be made. There were only sinful men that could make them. They required the continual spilling of the blood of animals. Rituals had to be followed to a very specific degree. The tabernacle had very specific requirements for the way it was to be constructed and set up and adorned. Yet, none of it allowed the people who approached it to receive perfection in total without returning again next year. It was, in a sense, a baby wipe bath in the field. It served its purpose for its time, but it wasn’t a hot shower in its effectiveness and ability to cleanse.

The pastor says “For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a young cow, sprinkling those who are defiled, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works so that we can serve the living God.” If all these things were able to accomplish the goal they were intended to accomplish for the time they were needed, how much more and how much better would the sacrifice of Christ accomplish that goal? The Christian Jews need not turn back to and continue the ways of their fathers, because the new covenant held something so much better for them. This new covenant was not a halfway fix. God leaves nothing halfway done. He did not leave His plan for redemption halfway done and He will not l

Read Also:

Exodus 25-30

[instructions for the tabernacle & sacrifices]

1 Peter 3:18

[one perfect eternal sacrifice]

1 John 1:7

[one sacrifice cleanses all sin]

Group Discussion Questions - Theological Considerations

- Why did blood have to be spilled to cleanse sin?
- What is penal substitutionary atonement?
- Why was the old covenant so ineffective?
- If the old covenant was ineffective, could it save? If so, how? Does this mean the Jews were saved by works? If not, what was its purpose? Were they saved by faith? In what? Or could they be saved at all?
- Compare the terms testament and covenant. When we talk about Old and New Testaments and old and new covenants, are we talking about the same things?
- Why does it seem as if God made the old covenant exclusive to the Israelites and yet open the new covenant to all peoples? Was there a way for gentiles to receive salvation under the old covenant? Were all Israelites under the old covenant guaranteed salvation?

Group Discussion Questions - Digging Deeper

- What do we say to those that say that penal substitutionary atonement makes God a monster?
- What is something you have done halfway? What was the effect? How does that mirror the old covenant sacrificial system?
- What is the impact of living your faith or holiness halfway? What is an area of your faith or holiness that you are not living fully?
- Why was God so specific in His instructions for the tabernacle and sacrifices and priests? Why is He not more specific in the practical things we face today? How do view the value of Scripture when the way we are to do things and the way we are to live our lives seems as if it is not as clearly spelled out as it was for the Old Testament Jews?
- What do you feel like God is still working on in your life or in your heart? What is something that feels still halfway done?
- What is God's plan for your life? Why are you here?

Week of Monday, October 25, 2021

Hebrews 9:15-28

15 Therefore, he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance, because a death has taken place for redemption from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. 16 Where a will exists, the death of the one who made it must be established. 17 For a will is valid only when people die, since it is never in effect while the one who made it is living. 18 That is why even the first covenant was inaugurated with blood. 19 For when every command had been proclaimed by Moses to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, along with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll itself and all the people, 20 saying, This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you. 21 In the same way, he sprinkled the tabernacle and all the articles of worship with blood. 22 According to the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. 23 Therefore, it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves to be purified with better sacrifices than these. 24 For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with hands (only a model of the true one) but into heaven itself, so that he might now appear in the presence of God for us. 25 He did not do this to offer himself many times, as the high priest enters the sanctuary yearly with the blood of another. 26 Otherwise, he would have had to suffer many times since the foundation of the world. But now he has appeared one time, at the end of the ages, for the removal of sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27 And just as it is appointed for people to die once — and after this, judgment — 28 so also Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. -- Hebrews 9:15-28 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

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Weekly Devotional

“He who wills the end, wills the means.”

– Proverb

There is a joke I read once that said “Dan was a single guy living at home with his father and working in the family business. When he found out he was going to inherit a fortune when his sickly father died, he decided he needed a wife with which to share his fortune. One evening at an investment club meeting, he spotted the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Her natural beauty took his breath away. ‘I may look like just an ordinary man,’ he said to her, ‘but in just a few years, my father will die, and I’ll inherit \$20 million.’ Impressed, the woman obtained his business card. Three days later, she became his stepmother.” The man was counting his inheritance before the will had been enacted and was enforceable. He was making plans and spending the money. It reminds me of a guy I played baseball with in high school who was drafted in the first round of the MLB draft by the Montreal Expos. He immediately went out and spent his signing bonus without having made it to his first farm team training camp. His career fizzled out within a year or two.

Sometimes when we talk about wealth, we talk about it in terms of ‘new money’ or ‘old money.’ New money means wealth that has been acquired within that generation. The wealthy person acquired it on their own; sometimes this is referred to being independently wealthy. Old money means that the money has been handed down from generation to generation. It is inherited. There is nothing that the wealthy person has done to acquire their wealth on their own. It was given to them simply as a matter of birthright.

The new covenant which God established with His people is old money. It is the oldest and greatest of inheritances. The will which laid out the inheritance to be received was established before the world was formed. This will laid out a wealth that could not be gained on one’s own. The gift of forgiveness of sin and of eternal life could never be gained by the volition and efforts of any one’s self. This could only be a gift given as a matter of inheritance. As with any will, the will could not be executed until the death of the one who established it.

When Jesus died on the cross, His blood spilled on our behalf, the will became executable and the inheritance payable. Christ, in a unique position, is not only the One who’s death validates the will, but He is also an heir of this gift. The Father in His vast mercy and grace determined that the will would also make the inheritance available to all who believe. When you believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, repenting of your sin and trusting in Him, you become a co-heir with Christ! And this is true of ALL who would believe. One of the amazing things about this inheritance is that the share of the inheritance that each receives is not diminished by adding more heirs receiving the gift. In fact, its opposite in many ways, as that means there are more who will be present in eternity to give glory to Christ before His throne!

Read Also:

1 Timothy 2:5	[there is one mediator]
Romans 8:15-17	[spirit of adoption & coheirs with Christ]
Galatians 3:15-18	[a will & inheritance]
Exodus 24:8	[quoted in this passage]
Matthew 26:26-30	[quotation also used at Last Supper]
Leviticus 17:11	[life is in the blood]
Romans 8:31-39	[Christ, our mediator and intercessor]
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18	[Christ is coming again]
Ephesians 1:3-14	[adoption & inheritance]

Group Discussion Questions – Theological Considerations

- What will it look like when Christ returns?
- What is the rapture? When will it occur?
- Where will the eternal kingdom be established?
- What does it mean that Christ is our mediator and intercessor?
- Who is in the will and is to receive the inheritance?
- When we think of blood, we think of it being something that stains. What does Scripture mean when it so consistently speaks of it as cleansing or making us white as snow?
- We are called “coheirs with Christ.” What does this mean? Is there a difference in the inheritance we receive from what He receives?

Group Discussion Questions – Digging Deeper

- This is a very broad question, but how do you view the crucifixion of Christ?
- Thinking in legal terms, how does Jesus act as our mediator? How does the legal illustration fall short of truly showing what Jesus is as our mediator?
- Why would God give an inheritance to any at all?
- Think of estate planning. What goes into the process? How does this compare and contrast to the illustration of wills and inheritance in this passage?
- In this world, sometimes inheritances come with debts that must be paid. Is there a debt that must be paid in the inheritance we receive from God?
- What is the greatest gift anyone has given you? What is the greatest inheritance you can leave behind for your kids, grandkids, nieces, nephews? How should this guide the way we live our lives and run our homes?
- Proverbs 13:22 says “A good man leaves an inheritance to his grandchildren, but the sinner’s wealth is stored up for the righteous.” What does this mean?

Week of Monday, November 1, 2021

Hebrews 10:1-18

1 Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come, and not the reality itself of those things, it can never perfect the worshipers by the same sacrifices they continually offer year after year. 2 Otherwise, wouldn't they have stopped being offered, since the worshipers, purified once and for all, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? 3 But in the sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year after year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. 5 Therefore, as he was coming into the world, he said: You did not desire sacrifice and offering, but you prepared a body for me. 6 You did not delight in whole burnt offerings and sin offerings. 7 Then I said, "See — it is written about me in the scroll — I have come to do your will, God." 8 After he says above, You did not desire or delight in sacrifices and offerings, whole burnt offerings and sin offerings (which are offered according to the law), 9 he then says, See, I have come to do your will. He takes away the first to establish the second. 10 By this will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all time. 11 Every priest stands day after day ministering and offering the same sacrifices time after time, which can never take away sins. 12 But this man, after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God. 13 He is now waiting until his enemies are made his footstool. 14 For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are sanctified. 15 The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. For after he says: 16 This is the covenant I will make with them after those days, the Lord says, I will put my laws on their hearts and write them on their minds, 17 and I will never again remember their sins and their lawless acts. 18 Now where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.
-- Hebrews 10:1-18 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

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Weekly Devotional

“Memorials become relics if they do not stir our modern consciences.”
– Henry Waxman

People love memorials. We build statues to war heroes and to our founding fathers. We build statues to fictional characters and make-believe scenes. We have memorials and monuments that don't make a lot of sense like the one in Norway where four evil creatures disguised as babies attack a naked man. We have grassy malls, reflecting pools, and horseshoe shaped football stadiums. We love to build memorials to the things we find both ordinary and extraordinary. Many of us will take time over the next year to visit the memorials of ones we loved or attend memorials for those who died to give us the freedoms we enjoy here in America. The point of these memorials is not simply remembrance, but to stir our hearts towards something better. They are to stir our individual and collective consciences towards a better life, innovation, greater humanity, morality, or some other noble end.

The author of Hebrews, continuing the discourse on the sacrifices and Jesus as the greater and perfect sacrifice, points to a similar idea. When speaking of the old covenant's sacrificial requirements, he says that the sacrifices would serve annually as a reminder of their sin. This continual reminder served several purposes: 1. Reminder that they are sinners and needed forgiveness; 2. That they were incapable of escaping their sin of their own accord; 3. Remembrance of the God who delivered them from slavery; and 4. To look forward to the coming Messiah that would take away the sins of the world and deliver them finally and completely. By obedience to the law and offering their sacrifices through their high priest, the Jewish people would have a continual reminder of their sin and need for God. It served as a macabre memorial to their own failings as the people of God.

However, ultimately, animal sacrifices and burnt offerings, were not what God truly desire. In the sacrifice of Jesus, we find one perfect, complete, and eternal sacrifice that can never be repeated. Through this sacrifice, God reveals His desires which is for His people to know Him, love Him, be holy as He is, and give Him glory. Rather than a continual reminder of our sin, we can look back and see the overwhelming grace of God on display in the tattered, torn, and bloodied body of our Savior Jesus. We see God's plans and new covenant permanently enacted in the empty tomb and folded burial clothes.

Looking back on all this, we have been given a new memorial. There is no longer a need to slaughter animals as a gruesome reminder of our sin. Instead, we have been given the command to celebrate through the corporate partaking of the Lord's Supper, or communion. Jesus was clear in its purpose “whenever you do this, do it in remembrance of me.” We have a new covenant in Christ and, along with it, we have a new memorial in which we find a reminder, not of our sins, but of the One who cleanses us permanently of them. We are given a new memorial in which we are stirred to holiness and mission.

Read Also:

Psalm 40	[quoted in this passage]
Jeremiah 36:2	[command to write in scroll referenced in passage]
Mark 12:28-33	[commands greater than the burnt offerings/sacrifices]
Psalm 110:1	[referenced in this passage]
Jeremiah 31:31-40	[new covenant; quoted in this passage]
James 5:19-20	[one sacrifice covers multitude of sins]
1 Corinthians 11:17-34	[remembrance in the Lord's Supper]
Luke 22:14-23	[remembrance in the Lord's Supper]
Psalm 51	[prayer for restoration; what God desires]

Group Discussion Questions – Theological Considerations

- What is transubstantiation? Is it biblical?
- When Jesus was hung on the cross, the Father also placed the sins of those who would be saved on the cross with Him. What about sins we have yet to commit? Or sins of which we do not repent?
- What is confession? How does confession in the Catholic church differ from biblical confession?
- If the law has been fulfilled in Christ, do we no longer heed the law? What are the different types of laws in Scripture? Which are we still beholden to?
- Is the work Jesus accomplished on the cross and in the grave finished? Or being finished?
- What are ordinances? What are the Christian ordinances? How do these differ from the sacraments found in Catholicism?

Group Discussion Questions – Digging Deeper

- How can guilt be both a good thing and a bad thing to our sanctification?
- When we believe, we are forgiven of our sins. How does this enable us to forgive?
- If works cannot save, why does God desire, even command, obedience?
- Animal sacrifices had to be bought and/or provided by the one seeking atonement. This meant it cost them something. How does this differ from the cost paid by Jesus? What does this foreshadow for us in what it costs us to follow Jesus?
- Verse 17 says that God will never again remember our sins. How do we square this with 2 Cor. 5:10 that says “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”?
- Can Christians take part in religious rituals? Or is this adding or taking something from salvation by grace alone through faith alone?

Week of Monday, November 8, 2021

Hebrews 10:19-25

19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have boldness to enter the sanctuary through the blood of Jesus — 20 he has inaugurated for us a new and living way through the curtain (that is, through his flesh) — 21 and since we have a great high 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 in pure water. 23 Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, since he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works, 25 not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching. -- Hebrews 10:19-25 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

O – Observe what it teaches

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Weekly Devotional

“Are the thing you are living for worth Christ dying for?”

– Leonard Ravenhill

In the past few years, I have often come to the place where I ask myself - is the effort I'm putting into the different aspects of my life worth the sacrifices I am making?

I enlisted into the military at 19, was aiming to becoming a police officer, and was eager and willing to go wherever I was sent - to fight, serve, and protect a nation which I had been blessed to live in. There were sacrifices made by countless men and women before I was even born - and growing up in the early 2000's, the stories of public servants in 9/11, ever present subject of the Global War on Terror, the war documentaries I watched with my dad, the police shows I watched with my mom, and my family's history of past service had me convinced of the nobility of becoming a soldier, and the underlying success of my country in the endeavors both stateside and overseas was all but a guaranteed.

That was in 2014.

And suffice it to say, 7 years later, I'm not sure I want to answer that question.

However - we as Christians should have no such question to begin with as to our sacrifices for the Kingdom of God. And the reason for that is that Christ our Lord, is both the priest and the sacrifice. And that is to what we must hold fast - that even in the midst of the insurmountable wickedness of the world, as the despair that slithers its way into our hearts and minds, and the ever present shadow of our own personal tribulations, our God sent Jesus, who has already paid the price for sin that contributes to the corruption of Creation. The crimson blood of Jesus has washed us clean and pure; we need only surrender to Him as our Lord and accept His grace.

That sacrifice is what has allowed us to come together and live in community with Him and one another. We may often wonder what the Kingdom of God will look like in eternity, or if we will live to see the Day where our Lord comes back - But I would argue, if you wish to see the Kingdom of God, you need only to show up on Sunday morning service, or a weeknight Life Group, or an outreach event, and look around you. For His Kingdom is made up of people, of individuals who encourage one another, bearing one another burdens and disciplining themselves for the advancement of the Gospel to the lost and maturity of the faith of those who have been found.

You have the choice and freedom to live for whatever you wish - be it your nation, your career, your family, your social status, your possessions, your community, your church, your pleasure, yourself, and even nothing. But whether those things are worth it is not up to you - as you were created for a purpose, and Christ died to redeem you that you might live for that purpose. And to those who question what purpose they have, maybe spend less time asking that of yourself and others and more time asking that of God.

- Contributed by Jon Drown, pastoral intern at Living Hope Church Columbus

Read Also:

Genesis 3:21	[origin of blood sacrifice]
Genesis 4:1-7	[importance of a proper sacrifice]
Hebrews 9	[understanding the holiest of holies]
Leviticus 16	[understanding the holiest of holies]
Exodus 26:33-34	[understanding the holiest of holies]
Exodus 30:10	[understanding the significance of blood sacrifices]
Matthew 27:51	[seeing the veil has been torn]
John 6, Luke 22:14-23	[symbolism of Jesus' flesh and blood]
*Additional verses related to Christian community - Acts 2; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Colossians 3:14; Galatians 6:1-12; Proverbs 17:17, 27:17; Romans 12; 1 Peter 2:9-10; 1 Peter 4	

Group Discussion Questions - Theological Considerations

- How does the blood of Jesus cleanse us?
- What is the Holy of Holies? How does this differ from what we have today?
- What is the symbolism of the veil being torn at the crucifixion of Jesus?

Group Discussion Questions - Digging Deeper

- When approaching God in prayer, worship, or generally being in His presence, how do you approach? Is it shameful, or insecure? With pride or arrogance? Why is it important that we approach God in a humble, yet confident, way, and how do you balance those two?
- Think of physical places you've been that require reverence, or a deal of preparation before entering, or may have some restricted form of access. How does this compare to the Holy of Holies? What is your mindset in entering those places? How does your disposition change when you know the process or are familiar with the people there?
- An old adage is that 'cleanliness is close to godliness.' In what ways might that reflect this passage?
- Think about a time when you had to count on somebody else and they actually came through. Consider the feeling you had in that moment and your attitude towards God and His promises. Is it the same? Better? Worse? What can you do to change it?
- How does teamwork influence you in your place of work and study? How can you take those lessons and apply it to the community you have at Living Hope? How can you apply it to ministry opportunities?
- How does isolation from other believers affect your walk with Christ? What is the purpose of gathering with other believers in the first place?
- Make a list of the things you are living for. Answer the question posed in Ravenhill's quote.

Week of Monday, November 15, 2021

Hebrews 10:26-39

26 For if we deliberately go on sinning after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire about to consume the adversaries. 28 Anyone who disregarded the law of Moses died without mercy, based on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much worse punishment do you think one will deserve who has trampled on the Son of God, who has regarded as profane the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know the one who has said, Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, and again, The Lord will judge his people. 31 It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. 32 Remember the earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings. 33 Sometimes you were publicly exposed to taunts and afflictions, and at other times you were companions of those who were treated that way. 34 For you sympathized with the prisoners and accepted with joy the confiscation of your possessions, because you know that you yourselves have a better and enduring possession. 35 So don't throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. 36 For you need endurance, so that after you have done God's will, you may receive what was promised. 37 For yet in a very little while, the Coming One will come and not delay. 38 But my righteous one will live by faith; and if he draws back, I have no pleasure in him. 39 But we are not those who draw back and are destroyed, but those who have faith and are saved. -- Hebrews 10:26-39 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

O – Observe what it teaches

P – Practice this in your life

E – Express this in your prayers

Weekly Devotional

“This hill, though high, I covet to ascend; The difficulty will not me offend. For I perceive the way to life lies here. Come, pluck up, heart; let's neither faint nor fear. Better, though difficult, the right way to go, Than wrong, though easy, where the end is woe.”
– John Bunyan in “The Pilgrim’s Progress”

According to a team of university researchers, the number of people attempting to climb Mt. Everest grows every year. Success rates have improved over the years with better technology and gear. However, still the success rate is roughly 60%. That means roughly 40% of climbers begin the climb but do not finish. As part of those that do not finish, somewhere between 1-2% of climbers die on the trip. So, just doing some basic math, 38-39%, or thereabouts, of people who set out with excitement and encouragement turn around and walk away from the peak of the mountain before reaching it. Their motivations for quitting and walking away from their goals vary; injury, weather or mountain conditions, fear, physical struggle, or mental struggles. Whatever the reason, they give up and walk away when things get difficult.

That is the warning given to the readers in this passage. The pastor readily acknowledges that the walk of being a Christian is far from easy and one that is often strife with struggles, suffering, persecution, and other difficulties. It will be a journey that is exhausting and will require a great deal of energy and focus. However, they can maintain their course and they can finish the journey if they do not “throw away [their] confidence, which has a great reward.” The end result of this sort of endurance and perseverance is a great reward. One that ensures eternal salvation. Quoting from Habakkuk, the pastor reminds them that the key to this endurance is that “the righteous will live by faith.” Press forward to the end by reliance on the Holy Spirit and the joy found even in suffering. In some cases, that means that some may perish on this journey. Some will pay with their lives for the cost of following Christ.

However, there will others who will receive this truth, and may even know it to be true. They might even believe that it is true. However, because they have not placed their faith fully in Jesus Christ, their knowledge is not enough to sustain them. So when life becomes difficult, they will turn back from reaching the goal of eternity. They will shun the faithless knowledge of Jesus and turn back to their old ways. As we’ve seen throughout the book of Hebrews, this meant that many would turn back to the old faith of Judaism, a faith that was made null and void with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In the illustration of mountain climbing, they would deliberately turn away from the peak and head back to the base camp. They are turning their back on the Jesus that they looked towards and head back for the relative safety of the old covenant.

For a wonderful picture of this journey and how some persevere while others turn back when things get hard, I highly recommend John Bunyan’s book “The Pilgrim’s Progress.” It is a beautiful allegorical story of a man’s journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. He encounters struggles, hardships, doubts, fears, and those trying to pull him away. Along the way, he meets fellow travelers who turn back. Press forward to the end! The reward is truly greater than we can imagine!

Read Also:

Deuteronomy 32:34-42	[quoted in part in this passage]
Habakkuk 2:2-4	[quoted in part in this passage]
Psalms 135:14	[quoted in this passage]
Numbers 15:30-31	[deliberately sinning against God]
Deuteronomy 17:12	[deliberately rejecting truth]
2 Thessalonians 1	[perseverance vs judgment]
Matthew 12:31-32	[the unforgiveable sin]
Romans 12:19	[vengeance belongs to God]
Philippians 3:12-21	[pressing towards the goal]

Group Discussion Questions – Theological Considerations

- What is the perseverance of the saints? What is a saint?
- What is the unforgiveable sin?
- Does this passage point to people losing their salvation? What does it mean?
- How can someone believe something to be true and still not be saved?
- How does “backsliding” play into this conversation about deliberate sin and judgment vs faith and endurance?

Group Discussion Questions – Digging Deeper

- One common argument is that suicide is an unforgiveable sin. Why do people believe this? What would you say to someone who claimed this?
- What is something you believe is true but have not placed your total faith in?
- How can you find joy in accepting suffering and struggles inflicted upon you by others because of your faith?
- What is the end goal of our journey as believers?
- How do we engage people who think they are saved by live lives that stand in contrast to the faith they claim?
- Does “vengeance belongs to God” mean that we are forbidden from seeking retribution for wrongs done to us? Where do we draw the line on accepting our persecution vs self-preservation? Where do we draw the line on pacifism vs security or duty in times of war?
- What is a time in your life that you found yourself headed in the wrong direction in your faith journey? How did you correct the course and get headed back towards the goal?

Week of Monday, December 27, 2021

Hebrews 11:1-7

1 Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen. 2 For by this our ancestors were approved. 3 By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. 4 By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was approved as a righteous man, because God approved his gifts, and even though he is dead, he still speaks through his faith. 5 By faith Enoch was taken away, and so he did not experience death. He was not to be found because God took him away. For before he was taken away, he was approved as one who pleased God. 6 Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. 7 By faith Noah, after he was warned about what was not yet seen and motivated by godly fear, built an ark to deliver his family. By faith he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. -- Hebrews 11:1-7 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

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Weekly Devotional

“True faith on the promise works obedience to the command.”

– William Gurnell

Think about the time you got your first paycheck. Remember what it felt like to hold that paper showing the fruits of your labor. Remember the pride you felt when you realized that your hard work paid off. Remember the shock and anger you felt when you saw how much the government took from you in the form of taxes. I mean, what the heck is FICA anyways? And why I am paying it? I remember the first thing I ever bought with my first paycheck was a pair of Justin cowboy boots. I was so proud of those boots. I wore them for years. But I have no idea where they are now, or even when I got rid of them. However, if I had saved that paycheck and a portion of every future one in a Roth IRA, I would know exactly where that money went. But it is hard to save for the future and not live in the now. It is hard to envision much larger payoff of the works we do now. However, if, starting at 16 you took \$200 (roughly what those boots cost me) out of your paycheck monthly and invested it into a Roth IRA and stopped investing at age 25, you would have roughly \$1,310,000 at an average market return of 8%. \$1.31 million with only \$24,000 total investment. But if you waited until age 25 to do the same thing, you would've invested \$96,000 and end up with about \$704,000. You would invest 400% more but end up with only 54% of the total end amount. But admit it, it's hard to see that far into the future, let alone invest into the hope and security it brings. That is why the average American in their 60's has less than \$175,000 in total retirement savings.

Our faith is the same way. It is hard to invest into a future we cannot see, regardless of the hope and security it brings. And we have the advantage of living on this side of the cross and seeing how God fulfilled His promise of a Savior and eternal security through His Son Jesus Christ. Imagine how much harder that must've been for those that lived in the Old Testament times. Those men and women lived by faith in a promise that was yet unfulfilled. They lived by faith in a hope that was unseen, but, still, demanded a response. This was not easy by any means.

Think of the mocking that Noah would've received from those around him as he built a massive ark in the middle of the barren desert. Yet, his works were evidence of his obedience to the true faith in the promises given by God. Abel offered the best of his harvest to God as an act of faith. His reward on earth was death at the hands of his brother Cain. However, his eternal reward was secured by God. The reward was not a result of the works, but as a result of his faith that led him to the works. As the pastor writes here, without faith it is impossible to please God. Our works are simply an outward expression of the faith within us; faith in an unseen God and an unseen future.

Faith is essential to salvation and then faith leads us to invest in that salvation, not only for our own sanctification, but for the future salvation of others. And at the end of our lives, even though we are dead and gone, God still speaks through our faith as a sign of the hope of the yet unfulfilled promise that Christ will return. Live out your faith in works, not as a means of salvation, but as a means of obedience to the One who was obedient to the point of death.

Read Also:

Hebrews 11	[the Hall of Faith]
Genesis 4:1-16	[Cain and Abel's offerings to God]
Genesis 5:21-24	[Enoch's walk with God]
Genesis 6:9-9:17	[Noah, the ark, and the Noahic Covenant]
James 1:19-27	[faith is hearing and doing]
James 2:14-26	[faith and works]
James 5:7-11	[patiently working towards the return of Christ]

Group Discussion Questions - Theological Considerations

- What is works-based salvation? What are examples of this? How would you dispute this from a biblical stance?
- What is the Hall of Faith? How can we learn from these men and women who, in many cases, had major and glaring failures of faith but are held up as examples to be imitated?
- Define false dichotomy. How is faith and works a false dichotomy? What are other examples of false dichotomies in Scripture?
- Define works. What are examples?

Group Discussion Questions - Digging Deeper

- Who would you add to the Hall of Faith? From the Bible? From your own life?
- How is faith enhanced by works?
- What is the danger of focusing on works rather than on faith?
- What about people who live really good lives and do a lot of really good things, but do not know Christ? Doesn't it seem that those who do good things to seek justice and serve the oppressed and poor would be pleasing to God? How do we answer those who say they are likely to go to heaven because they are good people who have lived good lives? Practice sharing the gospel using the scenario where someone has just told you this.
- What about those whose faith ebbs and flows? Or whose faith wains in later years or times of trials?
- Is it possible for a person with true faith to perform good works that are not pleasing to God?
- How do you balance humility and works?

Week of Monday, January 3, 2022

Hebrews 11:8-22

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and set out for a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance. He went out, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he stayed as a foreigner in the land of promise, living in tents as did Isaac and Jacob, coheirs of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11 By faith even Sarah herself, when she was unable to have children, received power to conceive offspring, even though she was past the age, since she considered that the one who had promised was faithful. 12 Therefore, from one man — in fact, from one as good as dead — came offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and as innumerable as the grains of sand along the seashore. 13 These all died in faith, although they had not received the things that were promised. But they saw them from a distance, greeted them, and confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth. 14 Now those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 If they were thinking about where they came from, they would have had an opportunity to return. 16 But they now desire a better place — a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. 17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. He received the promises and yet he was offering his one and only son, 18 the one to whom it had been said, Your offspring will be traced through Isaac. 19 He considered God to be able even to raise someone from the dead; therefore, he received him back, figuratively speaking. 20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. 21 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and he worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. 22 By faith Joseph, as he was nearing the end of his life, mentioned the exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions concerning his bones. -- Hebrews 11:8-22 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

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Weekly Devotional

“Abraham was justified by works before men, but before God it was the righteousness of Christ wherein, by faith, he shrouded himself. Faith justifies the person, and works justify his faith, both to himself and other men.”
– Elisha Coles

In game 6 of the 1997 NBA Finals, Steve Kerr hit the game-winning shot to give the Chicago Bulls their 5th championship title in 7 years and the 2nd of their two 3-peats. This is what Kerr said about it at the championship parade, "A lot of people have been asking me about the shot the other night, and there have been some misconceptions about what actually happened. I wanted to clear it up. We called timeout with 25 seconds to go, we went into the huddle and Phil told Michael, 'I want you to take the last shot.' And Michael said, 'You know what Phil -- I don't feel real comfortable in these situations. So maybe we ought to go in another direction -- why don't we go to Steve?' So I thought to myself, 'Well, I guess I gotta bail Michael out again ... anyway, the shot went in and that's my story. And I'm sticking to it.'" In any other situation, it would have been Michael Jordan taking that shot. However, Jordan passed the ball to Kerr who hit the shot. Kerr became an instant hero. His shot placed him as the lead on headlines and new stories around the world. However, it was only possible because Jordan had given him the opportunity.

Much in the same way, the works that we do in this world as Christians can put a spotlight on us. Think about some of the most famous “heroes of the faith.” From the Bible, we see Abraham, Paul, Peter, Noah, Ruth, John the Baptist, Stephen, and more. From more recent history, we might think of Charles Spurgeon, Jonathan Edwards, Martin Luther, John Calvin, CS Lewis, Billy Graham, Lottie Moon, and so on. Think about current Christians that you can name that are doing amazing things for the Kingdom of God; maybe they are missionaries in Asia, faithful witnesses in their workplace, or Kingdom builders in their homes. These men and women are people we look to because of the work that they do. They are justified before us.

However, they are not justified before God by their works. We can likely name several people who have done amazing things for humanity that were not men and women of faith. Those wonderful things did not save them from their sins, and, like any other unrepentant sinner, their earthly lives ended, and they entered into the wrath of God. It is not our works that justify us before God. It is only the righteousness of Christ imputed on us at salvation that justifies us before God. It is only Christ in us that justifies us and saves us. We are only able to accomplish the work we do on behalf of the Kingdom because Christ has given us the ability to do so through His righteousness, not our own.

Read Also:

Genesis 12:1-9	[story referenced in passage]
Genesis 22:1-19	[story referenced in passage]
Revelation 21	[the city we look forward to]
Genesis 17:15-22; 18:9-15; 21:1-7	[story referenced in passage]
Genesis 27	[story referenced in passage]
Genesis 50:24-25	[Joseph's prophecy mentioned in passage]

Group Discussion Questions – Theological Considerations

- Define imputation. Define impartation. What's the difference?
- What things are imparted on us?
- What is imputed righteousness?
- Define sanctification. When and how does sanctification occur?
- Define calling. What does it mean that God calls us? How does calling happen? What does He call us to?
- How is the story of Abraham and Isaac a typology of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son? Why is it important to look for these types in Scripture?

Group Discussion Questions – Digging Deeper

- What is something that you've been able to accomplish only because someone else made it possible for you to do so? Don't only think big picture things like "I can worship freely in public because Americans before me were willing to fight for independence." Think about your life personally.
- Pastor Jason McDonald encouraged us to write out our "By faith,..." statements. Do that now or discuss them with your group. "By faith, I..."
- What is something that you'd never be able to do if not for the grace or righteousness of Christ in you?
- How do we live at peace with the frustration of balancing the knowledge that God's promises for our lives are good and true with knowing that we may not see or realize them until after this life is done?
- What would you do if God clearly called you to quit your job, sell your home, and take your family to live as missionaries in a foreign land? How would your response differ if He called you to do so within the states?
- What do the stories of the individuals in this passage teach us about how to approach the end of our lives? Knowing that you could die at any moment, or Jesus could return suddenly, what does that mean for the way you approach life currently?

Week of Monday, January 10, 2022

Hebrews 11:23-31

23 By faith Moses, after he was born, was hidden by his parents for three months, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they didn't fear the king's edict. 24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter 25 and chose to suffer with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasure of sin. 26 For he considered reproach for the sake of Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, since he was looking ahead to the reward. 27 By faith he left Egypt behind, not being afraid of the king's anger, for Moses persevered as one who sees him who is invisible. 28 By faith he instituted the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn might not touch the Israelites. 29 By faith they crossed the Red Sea as though they were on dry land. When the Egyptians attempted to do this, they were drowned. 30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after being marched around by the Israelites for seven days. 31 By faith Rahab the prostitute welcomed the spies in peace and didn't perish with those who disobeyed. -- Hebrews 11:23-31 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

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Weekly Devotional

“Since it is so likely that children will meet cruel enemies, let them at least have heard of brave knights and heroic courage.”

– C.S. Lewis

Laurie Ann Eldridge remembers looking up from her garden one evening at her Cameron, N.Y., home to see a confused 81-year-old driver stuck at a railroad crossing nearby, oblivious to the train speeding toward her car. Ms. Eldridge raced barefoot to the car, wrestled out the disoriented woman, rolled with her down the railway embankment and covered her with her body, just seconds before the train demolished the automobile. Ms. Eldridge's feet were bloody and riddled with splinters. The elderly woman was unhurt. Ms. Eldridge was an unlikely hero. She had no rescue training. At 5-foot-8 and 115 pounds, she was outweighed by the woman she saved. The biggest surprise to Ms. Eldridge, a single mother of two teenage boys, was that she was able to run at all. Until the day of the rescue, she hadn't run for 10 years because of a disabling back injury. "All I could think about was the lady's face. She looked lost. She needed help, and she needed help right then."

Imagine you are in some perilous situation that involves life or death or a situation where your action or inaction will lead to victory or defeat. How would you respond? Most of us would like to believe that, given the opportunity, we would rise to the occasion and emerge as a victorious hero. I know that most boys dream about this whether it be imaginary battles against a dragon or army or Game 7 of the World Series with the score tied in the bottom of the 9th inning. Often times, we are the underdog in those situations, but we become unlikely heroes. Unlikely heroes are everywhere. We all possess within us some ability to step up when we are needed most.

That is what we see in this passage as well. We see two men and a woman who become unlikely heroes of ancient Israel. Moses had a speech impediment, possibly a stutter. He lived in luxurious comfort as the adopted child of the Egyptian princess. Joshua led the broken and deflated Israelites in a 7-day march around the walls of Jericho in order to defeat the much larger and stronger Canaanite people. Rahab was a lowly prostitute. However, what each of these individuals did when God called upon them was to respond “by faith” rather than cowering under their own shortcomings. They trusted that God would deliver them as He had promised and that His plans were greater. They trusted, not in their own abilities, but in God’s ability to work through them to achieve what He had decided was His own good ends.

So the question becomes “How would you respond if God called you to a task that you were utterly incapable of successfully completing?” Would you respond “by faith” or by fear? Would you rise to the occasion or hide behind your own insecurities?

Read Also:

Exodus 1:15-2:25	[story referenced in passage]
Exodus 12	[story referenced in passage]
Exodus 14	[story referenced in passage]
Joshua 2	[story referenced in passage]
Joshua 6	[story referenced in passage]
Romans 1:20	[God's invisible attributes]
Colossians 1:15-16	[God's invisible attributes]
1 Timothy 1:17	[God's invisible attributes]

Group Discussion Questions - Theological Considerations

- What are the attributes of God? What does the pastor mean by “invisible attributes”?
- How does a Christian balance submission to government and civil disobedience?
- What is the Passover? What does the Passover prefigure? What does it mean for us today?

Group Discussion Questions - Digging Deeper

- God is calling you to a lot of things that you cannot do on your own. What are they?
- Why does God seem to use so many men and women that have so many shortcomings? How do you privately view those around you when they are stepping into something they are unequipped for? How do you verbally encourage or dissuade those individuals?
- How do we help those who are called by God become equipped? What are you doing now to help those who have not yet been called to a task?
- How do the attributes of God direct us in who we are to be as image-bearers of God? How are we to take on or clothe ourselves with these attributes?
- What is the craziest thing that God has called you to?
- When is a time you have chosen suffering over comfort? How did this help you grow? What did you learn from this?
- Per the brief research I have done, there seems to be no archaeological evidence of the parting of the Red Sea nor of the collapse of the walls of Jericho. How should we view these events in light of Scripture?
- God sometimes uses those on the edges of society to accomplish His will or to redeem His people, as we see with Rahab. How do we sometimes misjudge those individuals in the church?

Week of Monday, January 17, 2022

Hebrews 11:32-40

32 And what more can I say? Time is too short for me to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets, 33 who by faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the raging of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, gained strength in weakness, became mighty in battle, and put foreign armies to flight. 35 Women received their dead, raised to life again. Other people were tortured, not accepting release, so that they might gain a better resurrection. 36 Others experienced mockings and scourgings, as well as bonds and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawed in two, they died by the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated. 38 The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and on mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground. 39 All these were approved through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised, 40 since God had provided something better for us, so that they would not be made perfect without us. -- Hebrews 11:32-40 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

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Weekly Devotional

“You should never settle for who you are.”

– Michael Scott

Zaha Hadid was an Iraqi British architect known worldwide for her innovative and bold designs. She passed away in 2016. However, some of her projects are still being built to this day. She will never see the completion of some of her works. She left the works she started in the hands of the engineers and builders, trusting that they would bring to completion what she had started. Even without death that is true of architecture design work and construction in general. The architect starts the process but needs the engineers and contractors to finish it; to see the vision realized and brought to completion.

The men and women whose faith we have studied the last few weeks left this world not seeing the completion of the works they had started. By faith, they lived according to the will and plans of God, entrusting their unfinished works to the hands of those who would come later. “39 All these were approved through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised, 40 since God had provided something better for us, so that they would not be made perfect without us.” Their faith in the coming and promised Messiah justified them before God. However, their works were incomplete and imperfect when they died. They needed the Savior to come and finish that work. They needed what we have so that their works would be perfected.

New Testament Scholar Gareth Lee Cockerill put it this way: “Thus, the pastor forges the strongest bond between God’s people before and after Christ: in order to attain the promised eternal city, ‘we’ need their persevering faith; ‘they’ need the benefits that are ‘ours’ through Christ.” What the pastor in Hebrews is saying, according to Cockerill, is that the Old Testament faithful did not have what they needed in order for their works and faith to be perfected and we, as the New Testament faithful, need what they exhibited in order for our works and faith to be perfected. They had perseverance but needed Christ. We have Christ but need perseverance.

Perseverance is necessary for the Christian life. We must be a people that excels at longsuffering. Furthermore, it is a necessary part of sanctification, which, unlike the act of justification, is a work of the Holy Spirit, which will not be completed till the soul is perfected in glory. It is the gradual transformation of the renovated but imperfect heart continued until this corruptible shall put on incorruption. When that day arrives when we pass into eternity through death or the return of Christ, we will see the faith of all believers from Creation to the end perfected and we will see the end result of our works that were started without the promise that we will see them completed. We should not settle for who we are in the meantime, however. We must continually strive for holiness and Christlikeness until we are called home. We must allow the Holy Spirit, through our practicing of the spiritual disciplines, to bring growth and to continually change our hearts to be like that of God.

Read Also:

Judges 4:6; 11:1; 13:24; 14:5-6; 15:8	[stories referenced in this passage]
1 Samuel 1:20; 16:1-13; 17:34-37	[stories referenced in this passage]
2 Samuel 7:11; 8:1-3	[stories referenced in this passage]
Daniel 3:25; 6:22	[stories referenced in this passage]
2 Kings 1:8; 20:7	[stories referenced in this passage]
Genesis 39:20	[stories referenced in this passage]
Jeremiah 20:2	[stories referenced in this passage]
1 Kings 19:10; 21:13	[stories referenced in this passage]
2 Chronicles 24:20-21	[stories referenced in this passage]
Revelation 6:9-11	[martyred saints waiting]
Romans 6	[sanctification & our new life in Christ]

Group Discussion Questions - Theological Considerations

- Define justification, sanctification, and glorification.
- Define perfection. Is it possible, theoretically or practically, to attain perfection in this life?
- Define progressive, positional, and entire sanctification. Are these all biblical concepts? Why or why not?
- What is sanctifying grace?
- Define perseverance. Why is it necessary to have perseverance or to be longsuffering? What does it mean that God is longsuffering? How does this characteristic of God inform our lives and what we are to be?
- Why do Christians struggle or suffer? Why would a good and loving God allow His children to suffer?
- Where are the Old Testament faithful now?

Group Discussion Questions - Digging Deeper

- What is something you have started that you will not see finished in this lifetime? What is the legacy you are leaving for those who come later?
- Does the pastor literally mean that “without us” that “they would not be made perfect”? What does he mean?
- How is our faith perfected?
- What is something that you have had to persevere through?
- What is a painful thing you have experienced that helped you grow personally or spiritually?
- After looking back at the entirety of Hebrews 11 and the Hall of Faith, what is one major takeaway for you in how to live by faith? What is something that will change the way you approach your Christian life?
- Does anything in this week’s passage discourage or dissuade you from a life lived fully abandoned by faith to Christ?

Week of Monday, January 14, 2022

Hebrews 12:1-13

1 Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, 2 keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, so that you won't grow weary and give up. 4 In struggling against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons: My son, do not take the Lord's discipline lightly or lose heart when you are reproved by him, 6 for the Lord disciplines the one he loves and punishes every son he receives. 7 Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline — which all receive — then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had human fathers discipline us, and we respected them. Shouldn't we submit even more to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time based on what seemed good to them, but he does it for our benefit, so that we can share his holiness. 11 No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. 12 Therefore, strengthen your tired hands and weakened knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated but healed instead. -- Hebrews 12:1-13

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

O – Observe what it teaches

P – Practice this in your life

E – Express this in your prayers

“The man who can drive himself further once the effort gets painful is the man who will win.”

- Sir Roger Bannister

On May 6th, 1954, what many thought impossible, became a reality. Roger Bannister, a 25-year-old medical student, took a break from his studies, went to the track at the University of Oxford, and clocked a mile time of 3:59.4. Many doctors and scientists at the time believed the 4-minute mile was a human barrier that could not be broken. Some even cautioned that those who tried might die. However, Bannister was convinced it was just a psychological hurdle and pressed on in his attempt. When he finished his recorded breaking run, he even joked, saying, "I figured I was dead."

In Hebrews chapter 12, the author of this letter uses the imagery of an endurance race. He writes, "*Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith*" (Heb 12:1-2). We are given two instructions for going about the race of faith that we are running. First, we are to get rid of everything that hinders us. This hindrance includes sin, which will trip us up at every turn and preclude us from running well. Suppose you look back at pictures and videos of Bannister's historic race. In that case, he wasn't wearing anything but a tank top, running shorts, and track spikes. He hand-removed every hindrance. To illustrate the importance of this truth, you can look at a new race called the "blue jean mile." That's where you try to run a mile as fast as you can in a pair of blue jeans. Sorry, no stretchy jeans. The record for this denim hindered race is only 4:06.25.

The second instruction in these verses is to run the race with our eyes fixed on Jesus. Now we may imagine this as focusing our eyes on Jesus standing at the finish line. Right now, He's just a distant dot, but he gets closer and more in focus the longer we run. I don't believe this is the author's intention. I believe the illustration is more like a pacesetter in a race. In many races today, runners employ pacesetters to run out in front and set a correct and steady pace for them. Bannister had two pacesetters in his race. This is extremely helpful for racers because it saves mental and physical energy. Some studies have shown that running behind a pacesetter saves 7.5% energy. We are to fix our eyes on Jesus. He is not a distant dot; He is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. He has set the pace, and we need to focus on Him latching our lives to Him as we follow His lead.

Today over 1,400 men have run under 4 minutes in the mile. So much for impossible. Each of these athletes adds to the cloud of witnesses who say the 4-minute barrier can be broken. And with each generation, this number grows at a higher rate. But why? Is the 4-minute barrier easy today? Granted, we have better tracks and shoes, but running under 4 minutes in the mile is still as hard as it was back in 1954. The difference is the cloud of witnesses who say the barrier can be broken. For you and me, the cloud of witnesses we have is so much greater than 1,400, and the race we run is so much more critical than the 4-minute mile. So let's run the race of faith, lay aside every hindrance, and focus our eyes on Jesus. And remember that those who have gone before us. It doesn't make it easier, but it does show us that it is possible.

- Contributed by Pastor Jason McDonald

Read Also:

Romans 5:1-5	[faith and endurance]
2 Corinthians 4:16-18	[endurance in light of eternity]
James 1:2-18	[enduring with joy]
Romans 15:4-6	[hope in endurance]
1 Corinthians 9:24-27	[why we run the race]
Proverbs 3:11-12	[quoted in this passage]
Psalms 94:12-13	[discipline from God]
1 Peter 1:3-9	[purpose of enduring in discipline]
Philippians 2:14-18	[run the race until the end]

Group Discussion Questions – Theological Considerations

- What is joy? How is this similar to and/or different from happiness?
- What was “the joy that lay before” Jesus?
- What is biblical discipline? What is the difference between discipline and punishment? Are Christians punished by God?
- Define endurance. What does biblical endurance look like?
- What is the “great cloud of witnesses?”
- Define authorial intent. Proverbs 3 was written originally by Solomon to his son, but here it is applied to us from God the Father. Is this inconsistent application of the original authorial intent based on differing contexts?

Group Discussion Questions – Digging Deeper

- What is something you are enduring now or have endured recently? What is the joy that lies beyond that struggle?
- What is something you have learned by enduring struggles?
- What does it practically look like to “fix your eyes on Jesus?”
- Does “great cloud of witnesses” mean that those men and women are watching us? Do you believe that those in heaven can observe us and what is happening on earth? Why or why not?
- What is the witness that you are leaving behind as an example for those that follow?
- How does looking at eternity help us endure our struggles?
- What is the race that is spoken of so often in Scripture? Why is the imagery of a race used?
- This passage tells us that fixing our eyes on Jesus helps us endure. How does relationship with other believers help us as well? What is something that other believers have done for you in the past to help you endure?
- How does sin slow down our race? What is a sin that you need to cast off or lay aside? How can you practically do that?
- How does the imagery of a father disciplining a son resonate with you?

Week of Monday, January 31, 2022

Hebrews 12:14-29

14 Pursue peace with everyone, and holiness — without it no one will see the Lord. 15 Make sure that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no root of bitterness springs up, causing trouble and defiling many. 16 And make sure that there isn't any immoral or irreverent person like Esau, who sold his birthright in exchange for a single meal. 17 For you know that later, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, even though he sought it with tears, because he didn't find any opportunity for repentance. 18 For you have not come to what could be touched, to a blazing fire, to darkness, gloom, and storm, 19 to the blast of a trumpet, and the sound of words. Those who heard it begged that not another word be spoken to them, 20 for they could not bear what was commanded: If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned. 21 The appearance was so terrifying that Moses said, I am trembling with fear. 22 Instead, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God (the heavenly Jerusalem), to myriads of angels, a festive gathering, 23 to the assembly of the firstborn whose names have been written in heaven, to a Judge, who is God of all, to the spirits of righteous people made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which says better things than the blood of Abel. 25 See to it that you do not reject the one who speaks. For if they did not escape when they rejected him who warned them on earth, even less will we if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven. 26 His voice shook the earth at that time, but now he has promised, Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens. 27 This expression, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of what can be shaken — that is, created things — so that what is not shaken might remain. 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful. By it, we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and awe, 29 for our God is a consuming fire. -- Hebrews 12:14-29 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

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Weekly Devotional

“Self-discipline is often disguised as short-term pain, which often leads to long-term gains. The mistake many of us make is the need and want for short-term gains (immediate gratification), which often leads to long-term pain.”

– Dr. Charles F. Glassman

In the 1960s and 1970s, a psychologist ran an experiment that pitted children against their greatest temptation, marshmallows. The study consisted of putting a child in a room alone with a single marshmallow on a plate in front of them. Before leaving the room, the psychologist told the child, that if they would like, they could eat the marshmallow while they waited for him to return. However, if they waited until he got back, then they would receive two marshmallows. He would then leave the room for roughly 15 minutes and observe the child's behavior from another room. Several children made the decision, consciously or not, that having the single marshmallow now was reward enough rather than waiting for a potentially greater reward at a future unknown time. The study found that those who were satisfied to delay their gratification for later went on to lead significantly more successful lives as measured by income, educational attainment, marital happiness, BMI, and other life measures. It also found that giving the child something to do while waiting, such as a toy, puzzle, or book, increased the number of children who delayed their gratification.

Why is immediate gratification so appealing? Why is it that delaying gratification for a greater reward later is often inventive enough? Why is it that the discipline of patience and endurance in the face of temptation such a marker for future growth and success? We see from our passage this week, a specific warning against giving in to immediate gratification. We see that Esau did not. He traded his entire inheritance, his birthright as the oldest son, to his twin brother Jacob for a single meal of stew that Jacob had prepared. The two brothers are contrasted starkly as Esau was a man who pursued the things of the world while Jacob was a plain or quiet man.

While both men would grow to be leaders of nations, their spiritual lives took very different paths. The passage tells us that later, when Esau desired his father's blessing, it was denied him. This warning comes on the heels of the pastor's words in the last passage telling us to be patient, have endurance, and to run the race that God has given us so that our faith would be perfected by the discipline we suffer. The warning to us is clear: do not give in to the temptations of this world for a short-term immediate satisfaction, but instead cling to the promise of a greater, future reward. The gratification we receive now is far less than the blessing we will not receive later. Be disciplined.

As we saw in the marshmallow test example above, engaging our minds with other things when faced with temptations helps us overcome those temptations and grows us in greater ways. We talk a lot about spiritual disciplines. Things such as Bible study, prayer, giving, Scripture memory, and so on. Engaging in these things when faced with temptation allows us to overcome those temptations as we run our race, seeking a greater reward, namely salvation and eternity in heaven with Jesus. Look forward to the greater reward. Follow the example of Jesus who resisted temptation so that His faith would be perfect and complete. And when temptation becomes overwhelming, do not trust in yourself to overcome it, but instead trust in God and turn towards Him.

Read Also:

1 Corinthians 10:13	[temptations are experienced by all]
Genesis 25:19-34	[story of Jacob and Esau]
Genesis 27	[Esau seeks his father's blessing]
1 Peter 5:6-11	[resist temptation]
Philippians 4:10-20	[satisfaction in God's provision]
Romans 7-8	[our battle; life in Christ vs life in the flesh]
Galatians 5:16-26	[the flesh is opposed to the Spirit]

Group Discussion Questions – Theological Considerations

- What does the name Satan mean?
- Can believers be deceived?
- What is temptation? Is temptation sinful?
- What is apostasy? What is the eternal security of salvation? If our salvation is eternally secure, why does the Bible warn so strongly against apostasy?
- What is idolatry? What are things that are idolized today? How does this relate to immediate gratification?

Group Discussion Questions – Digging Deeper

- Why is it that sin is enjoyable? Why would God allow the things that separate us from Him to bring us pleasure?
- What are practical ways you can overcome temptation?
- 1 Corinthians 10:13 tells us that we do not face any temptation that we cannot handle. Why is it, then, that we give in so easily?
- What are some examples you've seen or personally experienced where someone gave into their desires and sought immediate gratification? What was the result?
- Is it good enough to practice some of the spiritual disciplines but not all of them? Why or why not?
- Which spiritual discipline do you find easiest? Which one is most difficult for you? How can you use your strength to bolster your weakness? Why is it important to grow in that area? How will it change the way you face temptation?
- Where does temptation come from? Why is it that some are better at overcoming temptation than others?

Week of Monday, February 7, 2022

Hebrews 13:1-6

1 Let brotherly love continue. 2 Don't neglect to show hospitality, for by doing this some have welcomed angels as guests without knowing it. 3 Remember those in prison, as though you were in prison with them, and the mistreated, as though you yourselves were suffering bodily. 4 Marriage is to be honored by all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers. 5 Keep your life free from the love of money. Be satisfied with what you have, for he himself has said, I will never leave you or abandon you. 6 Therefore, we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? -- Hebrews 13:1-6 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

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Weekly Devotional

“Knowledge is useless without consistent application.”
– Julian Hall

On the social media and news site Reddit, there is a subreddit called ATBGE. It stands for Awful Taste But Great Execution. When scrolling through this ATBGE, you see example after example of things that make you think “Why in the world would anyone make that? But, wow, amazing craftsmanship!” It is full of strange things from the minds of apparently creative, yet weird people, but done in such a way that you cannot help but be impressed by their talent. It is hard to explain in words the sorts of things found on the subreddit, but I will try with a couple. One is a double toaster wrapped in the fur of a rabbit with the antlers from a 12-point whitetail deer on the rabbit’s head. Strangely beautiful but nothing I would put on my kitchen counter. Another is a pizza which has, instead of stuffed crust, a sushi roll acts as the outside rim/crust of the pizza. This is a terrific example of two things that are good on their own, but do not belong together in any circumstance.

We can have an abundance of knowledge and ability, but if we do not execute or apply that knowledge in the right way, it leaves us wondering what the point of all that knowledge was. As redeemed, born-again Christians, it is not enough to simply know God and know truths about Him. It is not simply enough to know what God expects or how to be holy. Instead we are called to *live* by faith. The truths we know should change our hearts to be more like Christ’s. They should drive live as if the knowledge and truths are enough to change the hearts of the world around us as well. Truth should drive knowledge and knowledge should drive application. We must inwardly and outwardly apply the truths of Scripture. There are too many biblical scholars who are avowed atheists. The knowledge they have has not changed their hearts, so their knowledge is useless.

That is what the pastor is doing in this passage. He spent the entirety of this book reminding his audience that Jesus is greater. He is greater than all the prophets, the angels, the sacrificial system, Moses, and the priests. He spent this entire message showing how Jesus is greater than all things and using theology and the Old Testament to make his point. Now in these last couple chapters, he is telling his audience what to do with it. He is saying, “go live out these truths you now know.” And in this passage this week, it is almost like he is running out of time and giving them some final instructions as reminders of the new lives they have in Christ and how they are to live them out. He is giving them specific application points of how to engage with one another, with the world around them, in their homes, and in their own hearts. Truth should first change our hearts and then change our relationships. Here’s the basis of what he says:

Application for our hearts: be satisfied in Christ and do not fear the world

Application for our relationships: love all people the way Christ loves them and be holy

Read Also:

Genesis 18:1-8	[Abraham shows hospitality to angels]
1 Corinthians 2:6-16	[necessity of Holy Spirit to understand Scripture]
Matthew 25:31-46	[caring for those most in need]
Deuteronomy 31:6-8	[God's promise to never leave us; quoted in passage]
Joshua 1:5	[God's promise to never leave us; quoted in passage]
Philippians 4:11	[contentment in Christ]
Psalms 27:1; 56:4, 11; 118:6	[quoted in this passage]
Matthew 28:20	[Jesus' promise to be with us always]

Group Discussion Questions - Theological Considerations

- What are angels? What does the pastor mean in verse 2? If we remembered this how would it change the way we view those in need?
- Define theology. Why is theology important?
- What is the difference in hospitality and fellowship?
- How does God fulfill the promise that He will never leave us or abandon us? How has this looked different pre-cross and post-cross? Does the intertestamental period negate this promise?

Group Discussion Questions - Digging Deeper

- How can you be more hospitable? What are specific things you will commit to doing this calendar year? Who is going to hold you accountable?
- Why is brotherly love so difficult sometimes? How can we get better at it?
- Why is the first application of truth that is must change our hearts?
- Why is the love of money so dangerous? How have you seen this play out in your life, in the Church, and in others? Why does God warn against the dangers of wealth?
- What does it mean to honor the marriage bed and keep it undefiled? How does sexual immorality of any sort defile the marriage bed? How has the Church gotten this wrong so often throughout history? I'd argue that cohabitation is a great a danger to the Christian church as homosexuality. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- Is it ok to find satisfaction or joy in things other than Jesus?
- What does verse 6 mean? Does it mean that man cannot harm us? Or that there is no rational fear towards man?
- When is a time that you were acutely aware of God's presence in your life?
- What is something you regret having taken on with your time and energy or purchased with money that you regret and wish you had given to God instead?

Week of Monday, February 14, 2022

Hebrews 13:7-19

7 Remember your leaders who have spoken God's word to you. As you carefully observe the outcome of their lives, imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. 9 Don't be led astray by various kinds of strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be established by grace and not by food regulations, since those who observe them have not benefited. 10 We have an altar from which those who worship at the tabernacle do not have a right to eat. 11 For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the most holy place by the high priest as a sin offering are burned outside the camp. 12 Therefore, Jesus also suffered outside the gate, so that he might sanctify the people by his own blood. 13 Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing his disgrace. 14 For we do not have an enduring city here; instead, we seek the one to come. 15 Therefore, through him let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. 16 Don't neglect to do what is good and to share, for God is pleased with such sacrifices. 17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, since they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account, so that they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. 18 Pray for us, for we are convinced that we have a clear conscience, wanting to conduct ourselves honorably in everything. 19 And I urge you all the more to pray that I may be restored to you very soon. -- Hebrews 13:7-19 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

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Weekly Devotional

“The seen is the changing, the unseen in the unchanging.”

– Plato

We live in a world where the certainty of change is the only thing that never changes. We see it in the beauty of nature with how metamorphosis takes a chunky and sluggish caterpillar and turns it into a graceful butterfly. We see it in the way the leaves on trees change colors and drop every fall. We also see great change in other ways in our world. Since the 2000s, we have seen huge technological changes. You can now talk on the phone and browse the internet without having to worry about losing your connection to either. We went from teachers telling kids they have to learn math because they won't have a calculator with them everywhere they go. Guess what? Even a lot of elementary students have pocket-sized gadgets that are not only calculators, but also communication devices, research tools, and shopping assistants. The way we travel has drastically changed as well. Cars are more fuel efficient. Electric cars are becoming more and more viable everyday vehicles. Flying has become a mess of security checkpoints and has seen a ban on bringing your own water on the plane.

Change is inevitable and pervasive. The old saying is that the only thing certain in life is death and taxes, everything else will change. However, as the pastor in the passage reminds us, there is something, or Someone, that never changes. God and His Word are unchanging. Despite calls from culture that say the Word of God is outdated, written thousands of years ago by men separated from us by time, distance, and culture, and, therefore, must change with the winds of time and ever-evolving morals. The good news is that we know better. The Word is as relevant, practically and theoretically, as it has ever been. That is the crux of this passage; that God's Word is trustworthy and true and should be followed above all other teachings.

He tells us to follow the lead of those placed in spiritual authority over us, to imitate their faith as they live out the precepts of Scripture. That our spiritual leaders' lives of faith, lived out biblically, act as a truer compass for our lives than the ever-changing, “various kinds of strange teachings” of culture. “Jesus is the same yesterday (in Creation and salvation), today (in salvation and on His throne), and forever (as King in the future new heaven and earth).” Thank God for that! That means we can find a solid rock of comfort, peace, and truth in a sea of struggle, turmoil, and deception. We can run to Jesus in all things, leaving the enclosed gates of culture and following Him to His death on the cross, outside the bounds of cultural expectations and shirking societal demands that we conform. That means that we sacrifice the things of this world at the foot of the cross, dying to ourselves. We give up pursuits of wealth and comfort in order to take the unchanging hope of the gospel to a dead, hopeless world. We follow the immutable truths of the Word of God and the spiritual leaders who live those truths by faith as an example for us. Don't submit to the culture. Be in the world, but not of the world.

Read Also:

2 Timothy 3:10-17	[inerrancy of Scripture]
1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1	[imitate spiritual leaders]
John 8:54-58	[Jesus is eternal]
Ephesians 4:11-15	[foundation of truth]
Acts 10:9-16	[God makes foods clean]
Acts 7:54-60	[Stephen martyred outside the city gates]
1 Peter 4:12-19	[suffering as Christ did]
2 Timothy 4:1-8	[teachers who say what they want to hear]
Ecclesiastes 1:1-11	[nothing new under the sun]

Group Discussion Questions – Theological Considerations

- Define immutability. How does this bring comfort? Does it unsettle you in any way?
- Define heresy. How do we determine what is heretical?
- Why did God allow all peoples to eat all foods?
- In the future new heaven and new earth, will there be any change?
- What does it mean to be crucified with Christ and to die to ourselves?
- What does inerrancy of Scripture mean? How do we get it wrong?
- Define proof-texting. What is the danger in this practice?

Group Discussion Questions – Digging Deeper

- What is a major change that you have seen in your own life? What about in culture? Has this been positive or negative?
- Why is it important to remember that there is “nothing new under the sun” when we look at the evil around us?
- How can we practically confront or address heresies we see in culture? What about from those we are close to?
- How do we practically live lives in which we are dead to ourselves?
- How do we handle situations where our spiritual leaders are not living biblical lives worthy of imitation?
- Where do you see people seeking teachers who say what they want to hear? What are “various kinds of strange teachings” that we see today? How has this differed from previous generations?
- Verse 16, among other passages in Scripture, has been used to say there is a biblical case for socialism. Is this a valid argument? Why or why not?
- I hold to the view that Hebrews is a sermon that was transcribed so that it could be shared more broadly. Is this a valid view in light of verse 19? Why or why not?

Week of Monday, February 21, 2022

Hebrews 13:20-25

20 Now may the God of peace, who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus — the great Shepherd of the sheep — through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 equip you with everything good to do his will, working in us what is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. 22 Brothers and sisters, I urge you to receive this message of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. 23 Be aware that our brother Timothy has been released. If he comes soon enough, he will be with me when I see you. 24 Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who are from Italy send you greetings. 25 Grace be with you all. -- Hebrews 13:20-25 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

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Weekly Devotional

“Confidence is the result of remembering you are already equipped with everything you need to get the job done.”

– Lisa Prosen

In the summers after my junior and senior years of high school and on and off during my senior year, I worked as a framing apprentice for a custom home builder building million-dollar homes in a high-end neighborhood in Northern Virginia. I have seen and participated in my fair share of having the right tool, but using it the wrong way, or using the right tool improperly. Occasionally, these practices resulted in injuries. One such example was using a pneumatic nail gun as a hammer to square up a stud on a wall. The framer had his finger on the trigger and while pounding the stud into place, he bumped the safety contact on the top plate and drove a nail into the palm of his hand. Another time was significantly more serious when a man was cutting roof sheathing while standing on the trusses. He made two mistakes as it comes to equipment. The first is that he was using no safety harness, which is surprisingly common in that field of work. Second is that he pegged the blade guard back on his circular saw so that he could work the saw one-handed more easily. He was making a cut and fell from the trusses. While falling, he failed to release the trigger of the saw. Upon contact with the floor below, he planted the blade, still spinning at full speed, into his thigh. Tool safety rules exist for a reason, kids. These men, and I, had all the right tools. We used them improperly or failed to use them at all.

The old saying goes that “God does not call the equipped, He equips the called.” It is far too tempting to say that we don’t evangelize because that is not our gifting. Or we don’t practice generosity in our giving because we do not have the means to do so. However, what the pastor tells us in this passage is that we could not be more wrong. God has given us all the right tools for the job He has given us. He has given us these tools to “equip [us] with everything good to do his will, working in us what is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ.” I heard a pastor once say that the spiritual gifts are things we are all commanded to do, but that some are especially endowed with.

We have all that we need to do the work laid out for us. However, if we do not use the tools He has given us, or if we use them improperly, then we are setting ourselves up for a life of frustration or pain. The job He has called us to is primarily two-fold: 1. To live in such a way that we fully experience His glory and joy, and 2. To take the message of the gospel to the whole world and make disciples of all nations. We can fail to experience His glory and joy when we do not lean into the gift of the Holy Spirit within us, when we do not indulge the gift of Scriptures or prayer, or when we do not find the joy in giving and serving. This can lead to us not trusting God’s goodness and lead to spiritual pain or backsliding. 2 Timothy 1:7 reminds us of some of what God has given us, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and sound judgment.” He has given us good gifts. You have all you need to live the life to which He has called you! Do not forsake those tools, use them!

Read Also:

2 Timothy 1:7	[tools we have been given]
2 Timothy 3:15-17	[the tool of Scripture and how it works in our lives]
2 Peter 1:3-4	[we have everything we need]
1 Corinthians 2	[gift of the Holy Spirit for understanding Scripture]
John 14:15-31	[gift of the Holy Spirit]
John 16:12-15	[gift of the Holy Spirit]
Zechariah 9:9-17	[the coming of Jesus and the blood covenant]

Group Discussion Questions - Theological Considerations

- What are the spiritual gifts?
- What is cessationism? What is continuationism? Which do you believe is biblically accurate?
- What are the biblical giftings of tongues and prophecy? Do they continue today? How does the modern church get this right or wrong?
- What is the blood of the covenant?
- Define exhortation. How do you practice it?

Group Discussion Questions – Digging Deeper

- What do you think is your spiritual gift? How do you know?
- When is a time you have practiced your spiritual gifts?
- When have you done something that would've been impossible apart from the Holy Spirit?
- Why is the Holy Spirit necessary for right understanding of Scripture? How does this explain the vast number of interpretations of Scripture?
- When have you seen someone use the right tool the wrong way? Or use the wrong tool for the job? What was the result? How does this help you understand the gifts and tools we have been given as Christians?
- Looking back over all of Hebrews, what is your greatest takeaway? What is something that you know now that you did not before? What is something that will change the way you live your life as a Christian?
- What do you think about the saying “that the spiritual gifts are things we are all commanded to do, but that some are especially endowed with?”