

05.04.2025

Hebrews Introduction

******This is a general script, not exact*** to ***This is a working manuscript and is not an exact transcription of the sermon. Actual audio content may differ slightly from these notes.******

- Good morning!
- I just recently returned from a camping trip in Big Bend National Park out in W. Texas which is one of my favorite vacation locales.
- I've been going to Big Bend for 4 decades as my dad used to take me just about every year. Since his passing last year, I've wanted to make it back out and spend a little time reminiscing and processing my dad's death.
- Now, I'm an introvert, but even I don't love the idea of a whole week of solitude so I invited Mark Blake to accompany me.
- If I couldn't have my dad, at least I could have a ton of dad jokes and puns courtesy of Mark.
- He had never been before so as we pulled into the park I was trying to show him all of the various points of interest.
- I pointed to the west and told him about Boquillas and Ernst Tinaja which we would visit on Wednesday and pointed to the east and told him about Terlingua and Santa Elena Canyon.
- And as we drove into the basin campground, I called his attention to various sites you could see from our vantage point.
- Over there is the Lost Mine trail, we'll hike that tomorrow. Down there is the Window which we'll hike on Thursday.
- I wanted him to orient himself to the general topography and geography of the park so that he would understand where we were in regards to each hike or drive. I wanted to kind of give him a big picture perspective before we got onto the actual trails.
- And that's a bit like what we are going to do in our sermon this week. This is about our 150th sermon since we planted the church and it will be the first one that we've ever done that really doesn't have a controlling passage.
- In fact, this isn't really going to be an expository sermon in the technical meaning of that term because we aren't just expositing one particular text. We'll spend about 2 years expositing the book of Hebrews in detail, but I thought it might be helpful to spend one week looking at the forest before we start looking at the trees.
- Like me showing Mark around the park, I'm going to be pointing out the mountains and valleys that we'll be exploring over the coming months.
- We'll see the deity of Christ in the next couple of weeks and look at what the author says about Moses next month and we'll meet Melchizedek in October and we'll get to the hall of faith in chapter 11 next year and so forth.
- But this morning we want to just summarize and overview the book so that you'll have a better idea of the overall flow and themes of Hebrews before we get into the weeds. Hopefully, this will help us keep the bigger picture in view as we work through some of the precise details later.
- This isn't a pattern of us moving away from exegetical and expository sermons. In fact, today will be pretty theologically dense. Its just an introductory sermon to get a sense of the big picture and flow so that you'll have some idea of the vistas that we'll soon explore.

- In light of that, today of all weeks I would recommend you have your own Bible open and not just rely on the slides as I want you to actually see for yourself how this flows. To be fair, I think that should always be the case, but today more than ever its more important.
- Is that fair?
- Alright, well then, let's pray.
- Self, others, me.

how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard... (Hebrews 2:3)

- I wanted to start with this passage to address the question of authorship.
- Who wrote Hebrews?
- This is a bit challenging because the letter is anonymous. Unlike many of the other letters of the NT, the author of Hebrews doesn't come out and say, hey Hebrews, its your boy Paul.
- That said, most of the early church considered it to be a 14th letter of Paul, especially after Jerome and Augustine's influence in the 4th century.
- From then until the Reformation, the church mostly assumed Pauline authorship, but that all began to change with the reformers.
- Calvin thought it likely to have been written by Luke or the church father Clement of Rome.
- Luther thought it was written by the eloquent Apollos that we meet in the book of Acts.
- And that set the wheels in motion to question Pauline authorship such that today, hardly any scholars think that Paul wrote it. Why not?
- Well, first, as mentioned before, the author doesn't identify himself which doesn't fit Paul's normal style.
- Second, as we see in Hebrews 2:3, there seems to be an implication that the author was writing on the basis of secondhand testimony. Look at the phrase "it was attested to us by those who heard." This contrasts with how Paul took pains in the book of Galatians to say that his gospel wasn't based on a middleman. He had received direct revelation.
- Third, the language and rhetoric of the book is pretty different from Paul's typical literary style.
- Finally, the author will emphasize a number of themes that are different, complementary, not contradictory, but different from what Paul generally emphasizes.
- So, for all of these reasons, most scholars today doubt that Paul wrote it.
- That said, there does seem to be at least some Pauline influence in it. After all, the author mentions Timothy toward the end of the book so even if it wasn't Paul, it was most likely someone associated with the apostle.
- Given that the author doesn't identify himself, we can only try to surmise based on clues in the text itself. So here's what we do know:
 - First, it was a male. Not only would we naturally infer that from the way that the Bible treats gender roles throughout, but even those places where the author uses first person pronouns, they're all masculine.
 - Second, we know that he had direct access to eyewitness testimony on the basis of what we read in chapter 2 about hearing it from those who had firsthand experience.
 - Third, he probably had some relationship to the Pauline circle as noted before.
 - Fourth, he was well educated based on the literary style of the book. Moving from the simple style of something like John's gospel to the intricacies of the Greek of Hebrews is a bit like moving from Dr. Seuss to Shakespeare.

- Fifth, he was acquainted with both Hellenistic or Greek conventions and Jewish customs and traditions. So he was most likely a Hellenized Jew, that is a Jew who grew up in the Roman empire and spoke Greek and was familiar with Greek culture.
- That's about all we can reasonably conclude and any sort of actual guess is more or less speculative at best.
- In the end, perhaps the opinion of Origen in the 3rd century is the best answer as he wrote:
 - "But who wrote the epistle, in truth, only God knows." (Origen)
- BTW, this shouldn't concern us or make us question the canonicity of the book. When we talk about criteria of books to be included in the canon, we do talk about apostolicity, but we need to remember that doesn't mean that all of the books were written directly by an apostle. For instance, Mark and Luke weren't apostles. We mean that the writings align with the apostolic deposit and that there is some sort of apostolic connection. So the fact that Hebrews was probably written by someone who wasn't himself an apostle isn't a challenge to its authority.
- So let's move on to the date. Unfortunately, again, we don't know enough to nail this down with any degree of certitude. As commentator Doug Moo writes:
 - "We do not know who the author is, we can't be certain where it was written from, we don't know who the readers were or where they were located, and we can't determine the date of the letter." (Doug Moo)
 - That's a real Dougie Downer. Most of Paul's epistles we can nail down to a general 1 or 2 year period, but with Hebrews, that's a challenge. That said, we can narrow it down a bit.
- For instance, given the fact that the book of 1 Clement references Hebrews a number of times, we can be confident that it was written before then, which was about 96AD.
- And I think it most likely that it was written even earlier than that, sometime before the destruction of the temple. Considering how central the sacrificial system and the priesthood are to the book, I would think that its destruction would have been mentioned if it had already taken place.
- For those & a few other reasons, I think it was probably written sometime in the 60s. But, at the end of the day, if this was written in the 80s or 90s that wouldn't be a big problem! There is nothing about our uncertainty about the date, author, provenance, or audience that should call into question the canonicity, authority or inerrancy of the text. If you are hung up on that, feel free to reach out to me or Ed and we'd be happy to chat over lunch.
- Now, let's talk about the context because this is where things get quite a bit clearer.
- Look at the following passages:
 - *For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.* (Hebrews 10:34)
 - *In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.* (Hebrews 12:4)
 - *Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.* (Hebrews 13:3)
- What do those seemingly random passages have in common? Well, based on these & a few other verses, we can infer that the intended recipients were facing a degree of opposition, adversity, in particular, persecution. At least some have been imprisoned and mistreated and had their possessions plundered although it doesn't appear like they have yet been martyred as

the reference to not yet shedding blood implies. This is another reason for an early dating of the book since Nero's persecution of the church began around 64AD.

- But that persecution seems to be the context.
- And in light of that environment, there is a temptation. That temptation is described in various ways in the book:
 - *Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.* (Hebrews 2:1)
 - *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.* (Hebrews 3:12)
 - *Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.* (Hebrews 4:1)
 - *Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.* (Hebrews 4:11)
 - Notice the language of drifting away or falling away. This will become even more pronounced in chapter 6 which warns of the danger of falling away. These are the so-called problem passages of Hebrews that have long discomforted & confused Christians. What do we do with these warning passages? Why would the Bible warn us against the danger of falling away if Christians can't lose their salvation? Why warn against apostasy if apostasy is impossible for genuine believers? We'll get to that in the common months.
 - For now, let's just note the common refrain.
- In light of the mounting persecution, the cost of discipleship, there is a temptation to drift, to fall away.
- Why? What are they falling away to? I think the answer is that they are tempted to return to their old lifestyle.
- The book of Hebrews seems to be written to mainly Jewish Christians (thus why its called Hebrews) who might be tempted to renounce Christ and once again yoke themselves to their Jewish roots. This would have been an appealing option when you consider that Judaism was a tolerated religion in the Roman Empire.
- As Christianity and Judaism became more obviously distinct in the first century and as Christians faced increased imperial pressure, there would have been at least some enticement to go back to where it was seemingly safe.
- As a "tolerated religion" in the Roman Empire, Judaism would seem to shield its adherents from the persecution that Jesus followers would have been experiencing.
- And I think that explains the entire apologetic of the book which is written as an encouragement, an exhortation, basically a sermon.
- Look at Hebrews 13:22
 - *I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.* (Hebrews 13:22)
- A couple of things to note there:
 - First, he says that has written briefly. 13 chapters. Almost 5000 words. Takes about 45 minutes to read through it. And that's considered brief. As someone who preaches relatively long sermons, I find that comforting.
 - But more importantly, notice the word exhortation. You could also translate that as encouragement or appeal.

- The book is full of rich descriptive material. There is a lot in here about sacrifices and priests and angels and Christology and anthropology and so forth, but notice that there is a prescriptive element to it.
- It is intended as an exhortation, an encouragement, an appeal.
- To do what?
- To hold fast. To not fall away. To endure, to persevere.
- Look at how that plays out throughout the book:
 - *but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.* (Hebrews 3:6)
 - *For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.* (Hebrews 3:14)
 - *Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.* (Hebrews 4:14)
 - *And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.* (Hebrews 6:11–12)
 - *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.* (Hebrews 10:23)
- Think about that imagery of holding fast and holding firm. And bear in mind the danger. That of drifting or falling away. How do you keep from drifting?
- Imagine you're in a boat. How do you keep from drifting? You tether yourself or "hold fast" to something. You anchor yourself & sure enough we even see that image of an anchor in chapter 6:
 - *So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain...* (Hebrews 6:17–19)
- Notice what anchors us? A hope in the promises of God rooted in His nature. We'll walk through this passage soon enough, but for now, just think about the imagery. Like an anchor clinging to some rock on the bottom of the lake, so our hope is anchored in the inner place behind the curtain, that is the very presence of God. Christ has taken our hope and tethered it to something immovable, immutable, invincible, sure and steadfast.
- Now, again, remember the flow:
 - First, the context of persecution.
 - Second, the temptation of apostasy, giving up, giving in, letting go of Christ and drifting back to what is familiar...in this context what is familiar is Old Covenant Judaism.
 - 3rd the encouragement: hold fast, hold firm to Christ, to God's promises, to gospel hope.
- Let me give an illustration that might help.
- The other day I changed my internet provider at home. We got a better deal from a competitor so after 8 years, we made the switch. And when I called my previous provider to tell them that we were cancelling their service, how do you think they responded?
- The lady cursed me out! No, that didn't happen, but she did spend the next 10 minutes stalling so she could tell me what a fool I was to switch. Her service was so much better than the competitors. The competitors price would go up and their connection speed would slow down

and their security measures weren't up to industry standards and so forth. By the end, she kinda made it sound like my new company was run by a bunch of cannibalistic Nazis or something.

- I remember thinking, if any of this is true, I AM a moron. How could I switch services! And since I'm a moron in most areas except theology and Office trivia, I texted a couple of guys who know about this kinda thing and they all said she was bluffing so I felt better about my decision.
- I tell you that because that's what the author of Hebrews does & that's the key to understanding the book. The lady was trying to convince me that what she offers is better so I would be a fool to switch. Well that's what the author of Hebrews is doing...except he's actually correct.
- So as you read the book and as we exposit it over the next couple of years, I want you to think of one phrase in particular: Christ is better.
- I first heard that particular phrase after a pastor buddy of mine confessed to some serious potentially disqualifying sexual sin almost 20 years ago. The idea was that Christ is better than his sin and better than the consequences of coming clean about the sin and better than his job and everything else.
- The author of Hebrews says something similar in Hebrews 11:24-26 where he writes:
 - *By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.* (Hebrews 11:24-26)
- But this idea of the supremacy of Christ, the idea that Christ is better, permeates the book in a different way as well. For instance, chap 1 says that Christ is superior to the angels. In chap 6, we read about better things, and chap 7 speaks of a better hope & a better covenant, & chap 8 talks of better promises & chapter 9 of better sacrifices & chapter 10 of a better possession and chapter 11 of a better country and chapter 12 of a better word and chapter 9 speaks of a greater and more perfect tabernacle and the book talks about how Christ is more excellent and has more glory and more honor and offers a sacrifice that is more sufficient and more sanctifying.
- Words like better and more and greater and superior saturate the book.
- Again, Christ is better. Than what? Well, everything, but in context, He is better than the old covenant, better than the Mosaic Law, better than the shadows of ancient Judaism.
- See how the author makes this crystal clear in chapter 7 and 8:
 - *This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.* (Hebrews 7:22)
 - *But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.* (Hebrews 8:6-7)
- And now you can see the point. What was that internet provider trying to tell me? Our service is better, don't leave us.
- That's what the author of Hebrews is doing. The New Covenant is better than the Old Covenant so why go back? Why go back to shadows when you can have the substance itself?
- Notice that language in Hebrews 10:1
 - *For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.* (Hebrews 10:1)
- And speaking of the priests under the Mosaic law, he writes in chapter 8

- *They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain."* (Hebrews 8:5)
- This mirrors what Paul writes in Colossians when he says:
 - *Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.* (Colossians 2:16–17)
- The Mosaic Law and all of its cultic regulations about food & festivals & other ceremonial aspects are shadows. Shadows tell us something about the substance, but a shadow isn't the thing itself.
- You can't hug or kiss your spouse's shadow. A picture of your child is great, but no one would say, now that I have this picture, I'm okay with not having my kid...a picture is good enough.
- This speaks to what theologians call typology. We've talked about typology before and its essential to grasp if you want to understand Scripture. So if you've been drifting off, wake up.
- You will not and indeed cannot understand Hebrews without at least a rudimentary understanding of typology. So what is it?
- Well, typology is the idea that God has embedded a certain correspondence between events, institutions, and persons of the old and new testaments. In other words, there are divinely designed similarities between things that we find in the two testaments. For instance, there is an intentional parallel between the temple and Christ's body, or between the Passover lamb and Christ's sacrifice, or between Israel's temptation in the desert and Christ's wilderness temptation. Typology is the study of those parallels. Not every similarity is a typological parallel, just because two things happen to be similar, that doesn't mean that it is a true type, but when the parallel is intended by God, that's what matters.
- And 1 of the features we always see in typology is that the fulfillment is always greater than the original picture. Or, to use the language of Hebrews, the substance is greater than the shadow.
- As Tom Schreiner says:
 - *Biblical typology is characterized by escalation. This means the fulfillment is always greater than the type.* (Tom Schreiner)
- So, for example, speaking of Himself, Jesus says in Matthew 12:
 - *I tell you, something greater than the temple is here.* (Matthew 12:6)
- The temple is a type, a picture, but Jesus is the antitype, the true and better temple, the ultimate fulfillment of what the temple was just a shadow of. The temple tells us something about what God desires and requires, but it doesn't tell us everything. The seed is there, but not fully blossomed. For that we need Jesus.
- Or later in Matthew 12 He says:
 - *The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.* (Matthew 12:41–42)
- Notice the parallel. Jesus is both like Jonah & Solomon, but also unlike them in that He is greater.
- That's escalation. That's typology.
- And that's what we see throughout Hebrews.

- So now, think about how the author advances his argument. The idea is that if the old covenant and its system and institutions and regulations were just types or shadows or pictures, then why would you ever choose that over the real thing? Why would you drift away from Jesus and go back to what is lesser?
- Why would you willingly choose to eat Taco Bell, when you can have Mi Cocina? Why would you choose some vegan soy tofu pseudo-burger when you can have a Ron Swanson special? Why trade your gold for iron pyrite?
- Why would you take the shadow of a temple, when you can have the real thing? An imperfect sacrifice rather than the sufficient sacrifice? Why accept an insufficient and lesser substitute? A lesser and weaker priest?
- And that's how the bulk of the book is structured. The book is structured as an apologetic for the supremacy of Christ over the old covenant. For example,
 - By whom did God speak to the prophets in the Old Testament? By angels. Chapter 1 shows us that Christ is greater than the angels.
 - And to whom did God speak thru the angels? The prophets.
 - And who was the greatest prophet of the Old Testament? Moses. Well, chapter 3 is about how Christ is greater than Moses.
 - And Moses promised rest in the promised land. Well, Jesus provides a better rest in a better land. That's chapter 4.
 - And what did Moses receive from God? The law. And what did the law establish? The Mosaic covenant. Well, chapter 7 is about a better law and chapter 8 is about how Christ is the mediator of a better covenant.
 - And the law instituted the priesthood and chapter 7 is about how Christ is a better priest.
 - And the priests minister in the temple and chapter 9 is about how Christ is a greater and more perfect tabernacle.
 - And what do the priests do in the temple? Offer sacrifices. Well, chapter 10 is about how Christ's sacrifice is superior to the blood of bulls and goats.
 - The whole book is an apologetic for the supremacy of Christ. Christ is better!
- So, if Christ is better, why would you ever go back? That's what we'll spend the better part of the next two years unraveling.
- As we'll read in chapter 3, the entire book is a call to consider Jesus. Consider Christ. Observe, notice, think about, ponder, contemplate. Think about His supremacy. Think about how He is superior to the angels and Moses and temple and Levitical priests. Think about how He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature. Consider how He is like us in all ways except sin. Contemplate how He was tempted and suffered. Consider Christ.
- You and I may not be tempted to drift back to old testament Judaism, but we are constantly bombarded by temptations to embrace sin, to choose the lesser over the greater, to compromise and capitulate.
- So, as we prepare for embark on this expositional journey, I just want to give a couple of opening exhortations to encourage you to be thinking and praying and talking about.
- First, we'll see a communal thread throughout the book. We are to encourage one another, see to it that others don't fall short, not give up meeting together, and so forth. In other words, we can't just read this and think "how does this apply to my individual life" but also must think about how this applies in our families and in the church. When the book says not to drift, that means that we are to not only tether ourselves to Christ, but also check out your neighbor's knot to make sure it is secure.

- To put it bluntly, Cain asked, am I my brother's keeper and the rest of the Bible says, yes you are. So bear in mind the corporate nature of the book. As we spent the better part of a year seeing in Philippians, godliness entails a pursuit of humility which is manifest in seeking the good of others. There is no way to do Christianity apart from community.
- Second, if you're in a season of suffering, this book is for you. Remember that the church is being persecuted and in chapter 12 we'll get to the idea of God's loving discipline for our good. This book is an exhortation to not give in and not give up in the midst of hardship and adversity. It is a reminder that Christ is better. He's better than comfort and health and convenience and financial security and anything else we might be tempted to elevate above Him.
- Third, this book should provide a strong incentive to repent of any aspect of drift or apathy in our lives. If you are playing around with sin, if you're growing calloused to the things of God, this book provides a strong warning to repent and come back to what is greater.
- Lastly, for each of these things, bear in mind that one of the themes we see in the Bible is not only the sufficiency of Scripture, but also the efficacy of Scripture. As Hebrews will say, it is sharper than any two-edged sword, it will pierce you and lay you bare, or as Isaiah says, it doesn't return void, but accomplishes that which God has commanded.
- So ask the Lord to use this book over the next year to encourage you and us to persevere, to exhort you and us to consider Christ, to convict you and us of sin, to warn you and us of danger, to stir you and us up to love and good works.
- Hebrews is ultimately a book about both the transcendence and immanence of Christ. Christ is transcendent as the sovereign son of God, equal in glory and essence to the Father, but He is also immanent as the suffering son of Adam, like us in all ways except sin. And because He is like us and like the Father, because He shares in deity and humanity, He has thus brought us near to God. He has done what the blood of bulls and goats and the Aaronic priesthood and Solomon's temple and the Mosaic Law could not.
- As we considered a few weeks ago, Hebrews is about the fact that Jesus has declared, tetelestai, it is finished. The altar is closed. God is satisfied. And all we have to do is rest and receive what He has already done.
- We'll see that over and over and over again over the next two years. Christ is better. Christ is better. Christ is better.
- Let's pray.

Communion

- Fence table
- As we are embarking on a book about the supremacy of Christ and the sufficiency of His sacrifice, I thought it helpful to take a minute to consider how He responded when asked why He ate with sinners and tax collectors.
- Remember His response, it isn't the well who need a doctor. I've not come to call those who think they are righteous, but those who know that they aren't.
- That's good news for us as we approach the table. We can draw near not because we are worthy or good, but because He is.
- Despite how you struggled and failed. In spite of all of your shortcomings. You come to the table with confidence because Christ is better.
- So take a second to confess your sin and to believe the promise of your forgiveness on the basis of Christ's person and work and we'll partake together.
- On the night