

Why We Would Carefully Consider Hebrews

- 2 Tim 3:16-17
- My conviction: Paying careful attention to what the Bible says about Jesus with the goal of knowing Him as He is... is the best use of our time and that which becomes the highest priority for all Christians.
- Fits well with the goal I asked us all to adopt for 2021 -- If you don't know what that was, I forgive you, but let me give it to you one more time and call you to resolve.
 - **To know Jesus as He is;** and that ...
 - **By developing the regular devotional discipline of listening to God's revelation of Him;** and that by **regularly, prayerfully, and with the Spirit's help:**
 - **Reading** God's Word;
 - **Journaling** what we discover about Jesus; and
 - **Sharing** what we have discovered and journaled concerning Jesus.
- Fits well with our goal for 2021 especially because, as Pastor Kit says, "**It presents a singularly high and thorough vision of Jesus, the Messiah...**" (Culver: Notes, p.1).
 - **If we want to know Jesus as He is, read Hebrews with focused attention**
- Kit gives us some other good reasons to consider this book
 - **Understanding the book of Hebrews will help us understand every book of the Bible, and the Bible as a whole, for Hebrews discloses Jesus as the fulfillment** ("...the goal, climax and fulfillment **of Israel and its history**" (ibid.) **of all the Scriptures**. God said what He said, and did what He did, as those things were recorded in what we call our Old Testaments, fully intending that those things would find their fulfillment and highest expression in Jesus. If we are to know Jesus as God intends us to know Him, we must know Him as God revealed Him -- the fulfillment of "Israel and its history"
 - **All that God did, as recorded in the OT, "...anticipated, prepared for, and together portrayed the coming Messiah and the work He'd accomplish**" (ibid.). **The writer to the Hebrews speaks of Jesus as that Messiah** and thus presents Jesus as He is the fulfillment of all God has said and done especially to and through the nation of Israel as we find God's dealings with Israel recorded in our Old Testaments.
 - **The writer to the Hebrews "wrote to Jewish Christians to encourage and strengthen them in their faith in Jesus" (ibid.) and we sorely need some of that encouragement today** as our stressors may be different but we too find our faith challenged. If we will receive the ministry of the Spirit though our time in the book of Hebrews, **our faith in Jesus as He is will be encouraged!**

JP -- A Reason Why Study Hebrews... Arising Out of the Angst of Today

Our country is stressed and our people are polarized in such a way that pushes us apart from each other as fellow citizens. That can have a stressing and polarizing impact on us as members of Christ's Church as well, if we let it. And **we must not let it!** For what God has joined together, no man should separate; and it is God who has joined each of us to His Son, and therefore each of us to each other who are in His Son.

It could be said that as a nation we have allowed the current polarizing forces to push us apart such that our common identity has been diminished in our national psyche. But I do not come to you today to talk about politics. **I say to you that as a church we are susceptible to the same polarizing forces and we must not allow those forces to oppose the common union, the family, God has made of us, each and every one of whom He looks upon as His adopted child, all of whom He has joined together by our common share in Christ Jesus.**

What do we do when forces pull apart those God has joined together? We RESIST such forces, recognizing that any of us who opposes what God has done at the very least have allowed ourselves to be influenced by something or someone fundamentally opposed to God. There are forces that still oppose God -- they are defeated and will not prevail, but the Bible still portrays them as having a bite:

See 1 Peter 5:8-9¹; and [Ephesians 6:10-20](#): **Be sober, alert, resist... stand firm against the schemes of the devil... and yes, I see that which seeks to divide what God has joined as containing evil.**

The best way that I know to resist forces seeking to undo or render meaningless what God has done is to pay careful attention to **what it is that God has done** (we call this the Gospel), especially as that has found its highest expression and fulfillment **in Christ Jesus**. To resist forces that pull apart what God has joined together we pay careful attention to what God has done in Christ and then we **seek to orient our thinking and lives such that they are consistent with that Gospel and that reality**. It is not as God's opponents say it is, it is as God says it is.

Jesus warned His disciples in their day that, "...false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect." Mark 13:22

¹ 1 Peter 5: 8-9 -- **8** Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. **9** But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

Paul similarly warned the Christians in Corinth about dangers that faced them from those who oppose God in the name of God, “**13** For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. **14** No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. **15** Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.”

It seems that Christians (then and now) are at risk of being influenced to choose paths effectively opposing God. What do we do?

No Christian, no kind-hearted non-Christian for that matter, would want to be influenced to oppose the God who is love and who seeks their best and the best for humanity and for all creation.

Paul exhorts us, “**...walk in a manner worthy of the calling** with which you have been called, **2** with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, **3** being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Eph 4:1-3).

How do we do that?

We “set our eyes on Jesus...”²

And how do we do that?

We read and give careful attention, with the Spirits help, to what the Scriptures reveal about Him.

Every part of the Scripture has something to say about Jesus. But as we come to the book of the Bible titled, "**Hebrews**" we come to **a feast of truth concerning Jesus** -- it is a feast set to feed those suffering under forces seeking to drive them apart from Jesus. It is a feast that, if feasted upon, will encourage and strengthen us to persevere in faith holding fast to all God has given us (including our unity in Him) against the forces that would separate us from the same.

² Hebrews 12:1-2

1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

As we give our attention to the Scripture and particularly to this letter written to the Hebrews in the first century, we will encounter time and time again the Truth concerning Jesus and hence, the truth that He has joined us to Him and to each other in Him. Knowing and being reminded of this truth of Jesus and the truth of us in Him will enable us (with the Spirit's help) to resist the forces who oppose Him and seek to separate those He has joined together.

This series, in which we will **carefully consider Jesus** as the letter to the Hebrews discloses Him, can't help but help us to know Him and ourselves and encourage and equip us to better meet the challenges in our day, including the challenges we all sense in our polarized country with their bleed-over influence into our churches.

ILLUS. -- Bend in the south, Terrebonne in the north, Sisters towards the west. If those in Bend set their eyes on Sisters (ala Heb 12:2), and those in Terrebonne do the same, they will overcome their separation and become increasingly close to each other as they travel to their common destination. I believe what is true in the physical world in this case is true in the spiritual realm as well -- as we travel from where we are in our "knowing" of Jesus, the distance between us will be closed, for we do share a common humanity, a common nationality, and for the Christian, a common union in Christ.

Let me give you just a little background to the Book of Hebrews this morning and then we will take on chapter 1 verse 1 next Sunday. It is actually a letter written to real people to encourage them as they faced significant hardship in their lives.

And let me say at this time how we are going to structure our considerations of this book. I will be allowing **Pastor Kit Culver's dependably excellent notes and messages to set the pace** for us and be a resource for me. The passage from Hebrews he covers in each of his messages, I will take as the verses for each of my corresponding messages. Many of us have received tremendous benefit from his scholarship and pastoral exhortations in the past and we will find in his resources relating to Hebrews cut out of the same cloth.

But that being said, **I am not going to reiterate all that Pastor Kit says.** Rather I am going to refer you who are interested to his audio recordings and notes (providing you with links to those resources). As for what I am going to share on Sunday mornings, I will seek to bring forward two things for each passage: 1) The main point of the passage; and 2) What that passage says about Jesus. Additionally, I will labor to bring forward the significance of what the passage says about Jesus for us, seeking to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He forms Christ in us.

What I bring is insufficient to accomplish the purposes of God in your life.

Those purposes of God have already been significantly accomplished in Christ Jesus by His faith/faithfulness which He has already exercised in His life, death, resurrection and which He still exercises as our heavenly king and high priest.

But what God has done in Christ must still be received and acted upon in the faith He has granted us. We must believe! We must believe not as a fleeting ascent to something we have read in our Bibles or heard in our churches, we must believe with a tenacious reaching for the truth to apprehend its meaning and its implications concerning how we are then to live so that we actually do live in the truth/the reality God has brought about in Christ.

What I bring is insufficient to accomplish the purposes of God in your life. It is but a start. For you to appropriate (come to possess and enjoy) the purposes of God in your life **you will need to believe God for yourself**, and not with a casual thought but with a concerted thoughtfulness. Have you had to think hard about important things before in your life, I'm sure you have. Think even harder about

- the truth of Jesus, and
- what God has done in Him, and
- what that means about how you are to live if you are to live in the light of what He has done, instead of in the practical darkness, as if He had never done it.

The Creator has created us anew in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:10); He has caused us to be born again (1 Peter 1:3); ... nevertheless **for all that He has done**, and recognizing that we can do nothing of value apart from Him (John 15:5 & ctx.), to live in the reality of the new creation He has inaugurated (in light of what He has done) **we must actively believe and live accordingly, making decisions about our life and how we are to think and act as if what God has done is true**. The faith God grants to us and then requires of us sits still at the feet of Jesus, yet it is not entirely passive; rather it gets up acts accordingly, as if it is true indeed.

What I bring to you on Sunday morning in the sermons that lie ahead as we consider the letter to the Hebrews will be insufficient to affect God's purposes in your life. You will need to believe the truth of Jesus yourself as it is revealed in the Scriptures with the help of the Holy Spirit as He ministers to and through those He fills.

ILLUS. -- I will push you off on a wave, I will ride with you to the top of the lift, I will drive you to the trail head; but you must walk the trail, ski the slope, ride the wave. Christianity is not a spectator sport.

So please **regard what I bring to you on Sunday morning as a point of departure** from which you will journey with each other and with Christ Jesus into the fullness of Truth apprehended and applied such that you are not only those who have heard but those who have understood and embraced and are now walking with Jesus in a manner worthy of the calling by which you have been called.

Ladies, you are invited to join the ladies on Tuesday at noons.

Men and ladies you are invited to join the saints on Tuesdays at 6:30

Do what is necessary so that the important valuable truths we speak of together on Sunday mornings do not just cross our minds in a fleeting moment and then flit away as

soon as the next less important, less valuable so called truth sweeps in cawing for our attention.

- The person who penned Psalm 1 likened the blessed [of God] to trees planted by streams of water whose roots reached into the water that gave it life and fruit... He was speaking of the person who draws to himself the water of God's instruction. Let's plant ourselves by the water and send out roots!
- Jeremiah said, "Your **words** were found and I ate them, And Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart" (15:16). Let's eat!
- We sing (inspired by Ps 46:10), "Be still and know that I am God...", but ironically we must do so actively -- the one who believes God will do what He says
- What will our actions be
 - Read the passage again, and again
 - Listen this message again
 - Read my notes
 - Listen to Kit's message
 - Listen to Kit's notes
 - Engage with the community to give and receive the ministry of the Spirit through them
 - Talk about the truth of Christ revealed in each passage with those you know and trust: family, friends, other members of the body of church...
- Exercise faith
- Do what you should do with the truths so important that God inspired and preserved them for us to know in this Bible of ours.

What We Need To Know About the Book Overall to Approach it Rightly

Authorship -- See Kit pp.2-3

Several possibilities have been suggested because the author is not explicitly mentioned in the text: Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, Luke, Silas

"In the end, it appears that the best conclusion regarding the authorship of this great epistle is that God was pleased to give it to the Church in anonymity, and therefore all attempts to determine its authorship can only distract from what really matters, which is the letter's content and magnificent contribution to the New Testament witness to Jesus the Messiah" (Culver: Notes, p.3).

"Therefore, it is probably best to claim ignorance and agree with Origen when he states, "Who wrote the epistle, in truth, God knows" (Hist. eccl. 6:25:14). [Beale and Gladd, p. 364]

Date -- See Kit p 3

Because this book discloses Jesus as the fulfillment of all that God said and did in the OT, i.e., it discloses Jesus in the context of God's dealings with Israel, coupled with the fact that there is no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, which were at the very heart of Israel's national and religious life, we can reasonably conclude that **it was written before 70 AD.**

Recipients & Occasion

Recipients

Some say Gentiles, some say Jews. For a variety of reasons **primarily: Jewish Christians**.

[Hebrews] “was specifically directed to Jewish disciples of Jesus and the particular challenges and obstacles they faced. These “Hebrews” were suffering at the hands of the Roman power just as Gentile Christians were, but they were also experiencing a second, especially fierce, element of persecution: They were enduring the wrath of their Jewish countrymen as apostates from Yahweh and His Torah – apostates who, in the eyes of committed Israelites, needed to be destroyed” (Culver p. 6).

“In light of Hebrews 13:24, the author appears to be writing **primarily to Jewish Christians and secondarily to converted Gentiles who live in or near Rome**” [Beale and Gladd, p. 364]

Occasion

“**Jewish opposition** drove the first Christians from Jerusalem, and it continued to dog them as they spread their gospel and influence across the empire (cf. Acts 8:1-2, 9:1-2, 10-29, 13:14-50, 14:1-19, 17:1-13, 18:1-17, 20:1-3, 21:17-23:22; etc.). “Faithful” Jews vehemently opposed the Christian faith and its false Messiah, but especially other Jews who’d been led astray. It was bad enough that such persons were abandoning their heritage and ancestral traditions; far worse was that they were forsaking Israel’s God” (Culver, p. 6).

Jewish Christians “weren’t seen as fellow Hebrews who’d embraced Israel’s Messiah (at least by the Jewish power structure), but as enemies of God and His truth who needed to be silenced or even destroyed” (Ibid., p. 7).

This was the stress to which the writer to the Hebrews spoke. He did not tell those suffering from their stress to make sure they took time for themselves... He disclosed the truth concerning Jesus and called them to live in light of that.

Tone and Goal/Intent of Letter

“The Hebrews epistle is eminently pastoral in both its heart and its intent: The writer’s goal wasn’t to supply his readers with a systematic Christology, but to rehearse with them what Jesus the Messiah had accomplished and enacted, in order to encourage and comfort them in their very real struggles of faith and spur them on them to persevere in Him, whatever may come (10:19-12:13)” (Ibid., p.7).

“The author of Hebrews exhorts Jewish Christians and perhaps some Gentiles through a homily to resist the temptation to[:]

- revert to the old covenant with its emphasis on the sacrificial system[,] and
- abandon faith in Jesus.

The congregation must press on in their faith so that they may continue to enjoy access to God’s throne room” (Beale and Gladd, p. 365).

Let's Get a Taste of the Hebrews

The letter begins:

1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. 3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had

made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, **4** having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

The letter ends:

13:20 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, **21** equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

And the middle is just as good!

A Couple of My Favorite Passages

Hebrews 8 -- A New Covenant

7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. **8** For finding fault with them, He says,

"Behold, days are coming, says the Lord,
When I will effect a new covenant
With the house of Israel and with the house of Judah;

9

Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers
On the day when I took them by the hand
To lead them out of the land of Egypt;
For they did not continue in My covenant,
And I did not care for them, says the Lord.

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 I will write them on their hearts.
And I will be their God,
And they shall be My people.

11

"And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen,
And everyone his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,'
For all will know Me,
From the least to the greatest of them.

12

"For I will be merciful to their iniquities,
And I will remember their sins no more."

13 When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

Hebrews 10 A New and Living Way

19 Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,
20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21
and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a sincere
heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and
our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without
wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another
to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some,
but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Biblical-Theological Themes

1. "Jesus: A better sacrifice." (Beale and Gladd, pp. 366-367)

- a. Although the OT describes and prescribes sacrifice to facilitate people's approach to God... "...two problems quickly surface as the OT unfolds:
 - i. sacrifices are unable to atone fully for sin (e.g., Hos 6:6), and
 - ii. Israel and her priests are incapable of faithfully offering up sacrifices (e.g., 1 Sam 15:21-22).

The book of Isaiah understands these deficiencies and predicts that a future servant figure will become "an offering for sin": and will "justify many" within Israel (53:10,11). For complete atonement to be made, a faithful and righteous individual, not an animal, will offer himself up as the ultimate sacrifice in the latter days."

Hebrews will present Jesus as both that better sacrifice (above) and as the better priest (below).

2. "Jesus: A better priest." (Beale and Gladd, pp. 367-368)

The OT (even in Gen 1-2) portrays mankind (especially in Adam) as a priest and king, but the narrative makes clear that mankind can not faithfully serve as such. God establishes the nation of Israel as a kingdom of priests ([Ex 19:5-6](#)), but Israel fails as well. Something or someone better is needed. The Gospels portray Jesus as that One who capably and faithfully serves as ultimate priest, saving, protecting, and establishing what God had intended from the start -- [JP]: that His people would live in intimate communion with Him and represent Him to the rest of the world that they too be welcomed into right relationship with God as members of His kingdom.

Conclusion and Final Exhortation

We have great stuff ahead of us. If we will lean in to what the book of Hebrews has to say, we will come to know Jesus more fully as He is. As we know Him in this more complete way, we will be more aware of the goodness of the life He has secured for us, a life like He Himself, one that is better than the life we lived apart from Him, or even the one we Christians live not knowing Him as well as He has revealed Himself to us in books like this.

Jesus adds the ultimate value to our lives not because He makes us rich or healthy or keeps us from having to suffer hardship, but because His life which He has shared with us is life at its best, life according to God, even a sharing in the very life **of** God. If we

will give ear to what Hebrews has to say, we will be significantly helped on our way to knowing Jesus as He is and life as He intends.

Prayer in Light of the Message

Communion

We celebrate Communion = The Lord's Supper because Jesus has so instructed us. But He has so instructed us at least so that we would remember Him. It is fitting this morning as we remember Jesus, that we remember Him as He is the fulfillment of all God promised as we find those promises recorded in our Old Testaments. This past week we read in the second book of the Bible, Exodus, the account of God delivering His people out of their bondage in Egypt and into the land that He had promised them, importantly the land in which He would dwell with them as their God and them with Him as His people.

Psalm 114 from our readings this past week praises God for His deliverance of His people out of their bondage in Egypt. It is a poem so allow its words their poetic freedom as they look back on God's deliverance of His people. Be reminded of that great event of the Exodus, and take even greater joy in God's greater deliverance which He has brought to us in Jesus.

This is how I would ask you to remember Jesus this morning: He is the highest expression of God delivering His people out of their ultimate bondage to sin and death into the freedom of life in its highest form -- life restored to God as His adopted sons and daughters, life under a new and better covenant this one ratified by the blood of Jesus, Himself "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Thank God for the Bread and then Receive it Together

Thank God for the Cup and then Receive it Together

Final Blessing from Ephesians 3

to know
the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge,
that
you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

- 20 Now to Him
 who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think,
 according to the power that works within us,
- 21 to Him
 be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus
 to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Announcements

- **Keep after those devotions**
- **Next week we'll look at Hebrews 1:1-3**
 - **Read it in advance**
 - **Journal on what it reveals about Jesus and come prepared to share on that**