



NOV-DEC 2019

THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

SERMON AND STUDY BOOKLET (CHAPTERS 1-4)

St Matthews Anglican Church, Wanniasa

Introducing the Letter to the Hebrews

Author: unknown, yet clearly a close associate with Paul's ministry team (serves with Timothy – 13:23). Some common suggestions include the Apostle Paul, Barnabas, Priscilla or Aquila (Acts 18:2). But ultimately we don't know.

Date: sometime before 70AD (before Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, which we spoken of as present day realities in the Letter to the Hebrews))

Purpose:

The Letter to the Hebrews was written to Christians under pressure (10:32-35). The author is delivering a written sermon (13:22) to his Christian family - throughout the Letter the author avoids any reference to reading or writing. Instead all the verbs refer to speaking and hearing. Thus, according to this Letter, the most important thing that we can do it to hear what God is saying to us.

The main concern in the Letter is the cost of Christian discipleship. It is written to Christians whose lives are falling apart and their faith seems to bring them no advantage, but only suffering. The cost of following Christ led to the loss of their property or even their lives (not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood - 10:32-35).

But they had become weary, showing signs of indifference and apathy, some even had stopped meeting together. They most likely lived in Rome or near Rome. In 49AD Claudius expelled Jews (including Jewish Christians). In 64 AD Nero the Emperor's hostility was clear for all to see. Christians were called to say that the emperor is the Son of God and refusing to say this could cost their lives. Some began to withdraw from contact with outsiders, even fellowship with the church. They would have been thinking 'not again. We suffered 15 years ago - we should be done with this'.

The language is that of "we" and "us". This is no ivory tower letter written from a place of safety. The author is in the midst of the same struggle, and is writing to people he knows and wishes to visit (13:23-25).

The Letter is a call to remember the character of Jesus, the pioneer of their faith, who identified with them and released them from the fear of death. They were to see the supremacy of Jesus in and over all things. Jesus, the final revelation from God, God the Son, the fulfilment of all God's promises. Jesus, the true King of Kings.

NOTE: The following studies are an edited version of the Study & Discussion Questions in Nancy Guthrie, Hoping for Something Better (Tyndale Momentum)

Sermon One: What is God saying to you? Hebrews 1:1-4

Study One: What is God saying to you? Hebrews 1:1-4

Big idea: Jesus is everything God wants to say to us.

Intro: In what areas of your life have you felt a nagging sense of disappointment? At this point, what are your thoughts about the suggestion that upping your amazement and affection for Jesus could make any difference?

Read Hebrews 1:1-4

List at least six things we are told about Jesus in verses 1-4.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

Which one of these aspects of who Jesus is do you find especially meaningful, and why?

What do you think it means that God “has in these last days spoken to us by His Son” (1:2)?

Some say that Hebrews 1:1-4 expresses the most important idea of history. How would you express this idea in your own words?

Looking back, what are the primary influences that have shaped your understanding and expectations of Jesus?

How satisfied are you now in terms of closeness to and intimacy with God? In what ways would you like that relationship to change?

Sermon Two: Who do you rely upon? Hebrews 1:5-14

Study Two: Who do you rely upon? Hebrews 1:5-14

Big idea: There is no person, office, authority, law or teaching (on earth or under earth or in heaven) that even begins to rival the supremacy of Jesus.

Intro: What is the common concept of angels today?

Read Hebrews 1:5-14.

Compare your answer above with what the writer says about the duties and position of angels in 1:4-7, 14.

What does each of the following passages add to your understanding of the role of angels?

1 Kings 19:5-7

Psalms 34:7

Luke 1:13, 30

Acts 12:23

Revelation 5:11-12

As you follow the line of argument in 1:5-14, what does the writer intend to prove about Jesus Christ's position in relation to angels?

What responsibilities and authority does the Son have according to 1:8-9?

The writer has shown Jesus as superior in rank and in power to the prophets and to angels. What is Jesus shown to be superior to in 1:10-12?

According to 1:13-14, where is the Son? Where are the angels? How might the knowledge of this make a difference in your day to day life?

Sermon Three: Are you drifting? Hebrews 2:1-4

Study Three: Are you drifting? Hebrews 2:1-4

Big idea: Hold onto Jesus and His saving grace or face the consequences.

Intro: Have you ever lost control of where your body was going? Slipping on ice? Falling off something? A car accident? How did it happen? What did it feel like?

Read Hebrews 10:32-35.

What was life like for the people this letter was originally written for? What was the message for them?

Read Hebrews 2:1-4

Put into your own words the warning in Hebrews 2:1-4.

How do these words connect with what's been written in
Hebrews 10:32-35

Hebrews 1:1-14

How does the culture we live in entice us to drift away from what God has said? What difference does an understanding of who Jesus is make in our tendency to drift?

Do you see yourself as paying careful attention to Jesus or drifting away? What changes can you make in your life and what divine promises can you cling to in fuelling these changes to guard against drifting away?

What was the reason for signs, wonders, and miracles of Jesus according to verses 2:3-4? (See also John 10:38 and Acts 2:22).

Do you see yourself as drifting in regard to your connection to Jesus, or would you say that you have tethered yourself firmly to him? Prove it!

Sermon Four: What are you afraid of? Hebrews 2:5-18

Study Four: What are you afraid of? Hebrews 2:5-18

Big idea: Jesus frees us from the slavery of being scared to death of death

Intro: When you think about death, does it inspire fear or hope or some other emotion? What belief about death shapes your emotional response?

Read Hebrews 2:5-18

What point do you think the writer was trying to make to his readers by quoting Psalm 8 in 2:6-8?

Hebrews 2:8 says that “we do not see everything subject to him” (referring to both humanity and the ultimate man, Jesus)? What are evidences of this you observe in the world and in your own life?

According to 2:11-18, in what ways does Jesus identify with human beings? How does this help you appreciate Jesus more?

In what way was the devil destroyed by Christ’s death (2:14)?

According to 2:18, what are two specific experiences that Jesus has shared with us? What difference does it make in your life that he has shared these things with you?

Thinking back to our intro question, reflect on the words "but we do see Jesus" (v.9). What difference does it make to see who Jesus is and what he has done as we face the reality of death?

What truth in this chapter has the power to free you from the fear of death?

Sermon Five: What are you thinking? Hebrews 3:1-6

Study Five: What are you thinking? Hebrews 3:1-6

Big idea: When we fix our thoughts on Jesus we hold firm to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.

Intro: What takes up most of your thoughts? Daydreams? Nightmares?

Read Hebrews 3:1-6

How would you summarize what the transition (“therefore” or “and so”) in verse 3:1 refers back to?

Based on the instruction in 3:1, in what practical ways can you “fix your thoughts on,” “consider,” or “think carefully about” Jesus?

In what ways is Jesus similar to and superior to Moses according to 3:1-6?

Similar	Superior

Why was Moses so esteemed by the Hebrew people? Why was it important for the Hebrews to see that Jesus is greater than Moses? (see John 1:17 for insight)

Who or what do you tend to esteem too highly—someone or something that threatens to take priority over the authority and influence of Jesus in your life?

What do you think it means to “hold fast our confidence” or “hold on to our courage and the hope in which we boast” (3:6)?

Describe what a person is like who fails to hold on to the courage and hope provided for us in Christ. How can you hold on to the courage and hope provided for you in Christ?

Sermon Six: Have you heard? Hebrews 3:7-19

Study Six: Have you heard? Hebrews 3:7-19

Big idea: We must take upon ourselves the responsibility to persevere by listening to God and encouraging one another.

Intro: When was the last time you were warned about something? What was it? Why the warning? How did you respond?

Hebrews 3:7-19

Read Hebrews 3:7-14, along with Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:1-13, which describe the two events referred to in Psalm 95 quoted in Hebrews 3.

What did the people in the wilderness do wrong?

What was the result for them?

What is the warning in this passage? Who is it for? What are the results of not heeding this warning?

In the series of questions found in 3:16-18, we discover that the people rebelled, sinned, and disobeyed. How are these attitudes and actions related to unbelief (3:19)?

While we don't like to label ourselves as "rebellious" against God, are there areas in which you would have to admit you have rebelled against God?

What do you need according to Hebrews 3:7-19?

Sermon Seven: Where are you going? Hebrews 4:1-13

Study Seven: Where are you going? Hebrews 4:1-13

Big idea: Jesus leads us away from meaningless ritual toward meaningful rest.

Intro: If someone were to ask you what it takes to have real rest in this life, how would you answer?

Read Hebrews 4:1-13

From reading through Hebrews 3 and 4, what was the “rest” God offered to the Israelites?

What rest is offered to us as believers to experience here and now?

What rest is still ahead for believers?

What is the implied warning of 4:2?

According to 4:2-3, how does a person enter God's rest?

How do you reconcile the offer of rest with the command in 4:11 to "make every effort" to enter that rest? How are both true in the life of a Christian?

Read 4:12 in two or three different translations (if you have them). What are at least four things you learn about God's Word from this verse?

When you think about the promise of rest that God offers, what appeals to you about it?

In what way have you experienced personally that the Bible is living and active? What can you do to put your life under the authority of God's Word?