

BETTER SERMON SERIES ON THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

INTRODUCTION

We live in a world that is so pluralistic in religious beliefs. As a Christian, you probably come into contact with people from various different religious beliefs and ideas on a daily basis. Some may be involved in other world religions such as Judaism, Hinduism or Islam, while others might be involved in cults such as Mormonism or Jehovah's Witness. And others you know may claim to be atheist.

All of these groups will come to you as a Christian with one question, "Why is Jesus better than my religious beliefs?" They may not come out and say it, but if you get into a discussion with other people, you may find that they are uncomfortable with claims about Jesus exclusivity. People don't mind if we will say that our belief in Jesus is no better than their belief in Allah, or Jehovah or some other form of God. But to claim that Jesus is the only answer and the only way will create trouble. Often, for those who are believers, the question of the superiority of Jesus may even raise questions for you.

But the issue goes further than this. The world is full of so many things that can drag us away from authentic faith in Jesus. The opportunity for riches, fame, power, and position beckon. So many people are leaving the faith for all sorts of reasons. Yet, no matter the reason, at the heart, when a person leaves the faith it is because something else in life became more important, more valuable, more beautiful to them. The truth is, that it is often easy to lose our awe and wonder at the God revealed in Scriptures and the glory of Jesus.

The book of Hebrews in the Bible was written to help with this issue. The writer is challenging you to realize that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to God and heaven, and that Jesus is superior to all others. Other religions create rules and regulations that seek to provide a way for man to build a bridge to God. But Jesus is God who became a man. He built the bridge, and because of His death and resurrection, Christianity is superior because Christ is the only way. The book of Hebrews was primarily written to Jewish people who had a professed faith in Jesus, but were being persecuted and tempted to go back to their old religion. The author is warning them not to return to Judaism, because the Jewish religion cannot save a person, apart from Jesus Christ.

Reading Hebrews after completing Exodus is appropriate, because this book is the New Testament answer to the Old Testament sacrificial law. In Exodus and Leviticus, God gave His people the law about the Tabernacle, and priests, and the sacrifices that would need to be made for the sins of the people. Often during the quiet times in Exodus, I reminded you that everything about these laws was a picture of Jesus Christ, and his mission on earth. The sacrifices pointed to the ultimate perfect sacrifice that would forgive our sin forever. Hebrews will connect the dots from the Old Testament law to their fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ.

AUTHOR

The authorship of Hebrews is actually one of the great mysteries of the Bible. There are many possibilities that have been presented as the possible author, including

people such as Paul, Luke, Barnabas, and Phillip. While it is possible that one of these people wrote this book, we do not know for sure. No where in the book does the author state his name, although there is evidence that the readers knew him (ch. 13:18-24). He also references Paul's disciple and traveling companion Timothy. What we do know that the person was probably of Jewish descent, but had been trained in Roman and Greek literature and culture. The truth is that Third Century church father Origen was right when he said, "But who wrote this epistle, truly only God knows." Only God knows for sure who wrote this wonderful book of the Bible, but we can be assured that the Holy Spirit inspired Hebrews and that every word can be trusted.

GENRE AND STYLE

At first glance, it is easy to see that Hebrews is an epistle (Latin word for letter). Much of the New Testament is composed of letters from people such as Paul, John, and Peter. While this work does not begin with the normal salutation that generally accompanies ancient letters (see the beginning of Romans, Ephesians, or 1 John to see examples), the work does conclude with the sort of greetings and personal comments normal for letters in the ancient world. Furthermore, the author speaks of having "written to you" (13:22). Yet, as a letter there is also another element that we should consider as we read and interpret. The author also speaks of Hebrews as "a word of exhortation", and this letter actually contains all of the elements of a sermon. In fact, this letter was probably designed to be ready in a corporate gathering of local churches as a sermon. As a sermon it is filled with Christ-centered expositions of multiple passages of Scripture, and a series of rhetorical exhortations. The argument continues to lean in to the Old Testament Scriptures for its authority. Hebrews contains multiple exhortations and application points. Yet, those points are centered on a common theme, that of the exclusivity of Jesus. So maybe the best way to see the letter as a sermonic epistle.

RECIPIENTS AND COMPOSITION DATE

The book of Hebrews was written to first century Jewish people who had been confronted with the claims of Christ. These are people who had grown up learning and keeping the laws of the Old Testament. They knew the Old Testament Scriptures. They had participated in Jewish festivals such as the Passover (remember Exodus), and were sure to honor all ceremonial laws. They had also been looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. Their families had been doing these things for centuries, but in their lifetime a major event took place. Jesus Christ came and lived among them. Claiming to be the Messiah, He taught, performed miracles, and ultimately died on a Roman cross. And, as we know, three days later Jesus rose from that tomb. Now, for about 30 years the Gospel of Jesus has been proclaimed, starting among Jewish people in Jerusalem. Some Jews received Jesus while others rejected Him. Was this man truly the Messiah the Old Testament had promised?

From the first days of Christianity two things took place in Jerusalem (you can read about this in Acts). First, the church exploded in Jerusalem and among Jewish people. Second, many outright rejected Jesus and the persecution of Jewish believers starts almost right away in church history. Many who embraced Jesus were arrested, scourged, and even murdered. Others were ostracized from families, thrown out of communities, lost their jobs. For these people the question is simple, is Jesus worth it?

Or can I return to my heritage with kind of an at arms length trust in Jesus, and keep my life and place in the community?

The writer of Hebrews is addressing three groups of Jews with this book:

- Jewish believers - These are people who have truly trusted Christ by repenting of their sin and trusting Christ alone for salvation. To these people, Hebrews is a book of encouragement and hope in the midst of persecution. For some, accepting Christ meant being thrown out of families, or losing a job and position in society. Hebrews shows them that they made the right choice, because Jesus is the answer.
- Professed believers - These are people who acknowledge Jesus with their lips but have never really come to a place where they truly turned their lives over to Him. Hebrews is a book of warning. Mental belief is not enough to save a person. To experience Christ's salvation one must come to the point where professed faith leads to a transformed life, while leaving the old life behind.
- Jewish Seekers - The third group are people who are still wondering if Jesus was really the Messiah that God had promised. They are not sure that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament requirements, and are struggling with what to do with Christ. Hebrews is a book of answers for these people. Hebrews will show them how Jesus Christ was God's plan for their sin, and will even show that the Old Testament heroes of the faith were looking forward to His coming.

As for dating the book of Hebrews, we actually have a bit more confidence on this than we do the identity of the author. The book of Hebrews was quoted by a man named Clement of Rome in 95 AD (about 60 years after the death of Christ), which shows it was being used as Scripture by the church at the end of the First Century. Other evidence points to a writing date that is before AD 70. Specifically, the book deals with the Jewish sacrificial system performed in the Jerusalem Temple. These sacrifices involved the killing of the bulls, sheep, and rams for the sins of the people on the Temple altar as prescribed in the Torah. The author of Hebrews references this practice and a few other Temple activities in Hebrews as if they were still happening in his present time. In AD 70, the Roman armies destroyed the Temple, ending these sacrifices and rituals. Furthermore, there is no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem in Hebrews, an event on par with Pearl Harbor or September 11 for the Jews. If this event had taken place the author would have surely mentioned it and referenced these sacrifices in past tense. These facts surely indicate that the book was written before this horrible event took place. Most likely, Hebrews was written somewhere between AD 64-68. In other words, this book was written within 30-35 years after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

THEMES

Hebrews has a couple of key themes, but they all point to the superiority of Christ. First, Jesus Christ is the only true hope for humanity's problem. The author point out that Jesus is better than angels, Moses, the Law. He is the better High Priest, sacrifice, King, and Sabbath. These are the rituals and people central to the religious Jewish system. At the time of Jesus, most religious Jewish people relied on their being

God's chosen people and their faithfulness to the system as the source of their redemption. As a very Jewish book, Hebrews is a reminder that their redemption is not based on their performance, their ability to keep the laws and follow their leaders. Rather, the author reminds us, these things were given to show their inability to fulfill these laws and therefore their need for a redeeming Messiah who had come. Judaism is not alone, all other religions depend on men and women to live up to certain religious and lifestyle expectations to get to God. Or in other words, all religion is about what you or I do. But in Christ, God came to man, and became everything we need. Because of Jesus' life and death, He has provided a better covenant, future, hope, and power. Hebrews reminds us that Jesus is superior because He accomplished everything we can't, and His perfect life, death, resurrection and ascension, He stands as our true representative. So while religion points to "you do", Hebrews reminds us that the central message of the Gospel is "He did".

Not only is Christ superior because He is the answer to our greatest need, but Hebrews shows us that Christ is the whole point of the Old Testament. He is the lens by which the Old Testament should be read. More specifically, everything in the Old Testament is fulfilled in Jesus. The sacrifices, festivals, Sabbath, and even the heroes of the Old Testament were but types, shadows, pointers to a better and truer reality. All of the sacrifice and religious festivals pointed to Christ, who is the True and Better Passover. The High Priests served a huge role in the Jewish religious activities, but they were sinful and often morally corrupt men. But Jesus is the true and better High Priest. The book of Hebrews is a great gift for us because it teaches us how to read and interpret everything in the Old Testament, always seeking to understand how the Law, event, person, or activity point us to something greater in Jesus.

Because of the superiority of Jesus, faith is the key. Hebrews is a book about faith. Our access to God is by faith. We do not have access to God by our works or efforts to follow a religion. But by faith, we can have a relationship with God. Hebrews 11 is considered the Faith Hall of Fame. In this chapter, Hebrews shows us that even the Old Testament saints of old were saved and lived by faith. This is key for the First Century Jewish believers, to see that the Old Testament heroes were actually saved by faith in Jesus, a faith that was looking forward, but still by faith. Their faith looked forward to the coming of Christ, while ours looks back to Him. Hebrews reminds us that salvation has always been by faith in Christ alone.

Finally, Hebrews is also a book of challenge and warning. The first readers were being persecuted for their faith in Jesus. For some, this came with the temptation to walk away. Hebrews speaks clearly and sternly about the outcome of apostasy. Those who left the faith were not in Christ, and therefore separated from Jehovah. Others wanted to find a middle ground, a way to kind of believe in Jesus, but in a way that would be acceptable for their family, neighbors, and employers. The danger that the readers faced was to leave their faith, or to fail to embrace Christ wholeheartedly. The easiest choice was to drift back to Judaism, or to have a partial commitment to Christianity. Hebrews is a challenge to leave old belief systems and religious efforts to get to God behind, and to press on to maturity in Christ. While the struggle for most of us does not involve a return to Jewish festivals and laws, there are pressures that dim the glory of Jesus and make us wonder if Christ is worth it. The challenge is to hang in there, to keep believing, to see that Jesus is better. And the warning is clear as well. "It

is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God (Hebrews 10:31, ESV).
“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:28-29, ESV).”

Hebrews Outline - ESV Study Bible

- I. Jesus Is Superior to Angelic Beings (1:1–2:18)
 - A. The supremacy of God’s Son (1:1–14)
 - 1. Introduction: summary of the Son’s person and work (1:1–4)
 - 2. Evidence of his status as Son (1:5–14)
 - B. Warning against neglecting salvation (2:1–4)
 - C. The founder of salvation (2:5–18)

- II. Jesus Is Superior to the Mosaic Law (3:1–10:18)
 - A. Jesus is greater than Moses (3:1–6)
 - B. Warning: a rest for the people of God (3:7–4:13)
 - 1. The failure of the exodus generation (3:7–19)
 - 2. Entering God’s rest (4:1–13)
 - C. The high priesthood of Jesus (4:14–10:18)
 - 1. Jesus the great high priest (4:14–5:10)
 - 2. Pause in the argument: warning against apostasy (5:11–6:12)
 - 3. The certainty of God’s promise (6:13–20)
 - 4. Return to main argument: the priestly order of Melchizedek (7:1–10)
 - 5. Jesus compared to Melchizedek (7:11–28)
 - 6. Jesus, high priest of a better covenant (8:1–13)
 - 7. The earthly holy place (9:1–10)
 - 8. Redemption through the blood of Christ (9:11–28)
 - 9. Christ’s sacrifice once for all (10:1–18)

- III. Call to Faith and Endurance (10:19–12:29)
 - A. The full assurance of faith (10:19–39)
 - 1. Exhortation to draw near (10:19–25)
 - 2. Warnings against shrinking back (10:26–39)
 - B. By faith (11:1–40)
 - C. Endurance until the kingdom fully comes (12:1–29)
 - 1. Jesus, founder and perfecter of faith (12:1–2)
 - 2. Do not grow weary (12:3–17)
 - 3. A kingdom that cannot be shaken (12:18–29)

- IV. Concluding Exhortations and Remarks (13:1–25)
 - A. Sacrifices pleasing to God (13:1–19)
 - B. Benediction (13:20–21)
 - C. Final greetings (13:22–25)

Preaching Plan - Sermon list for this series

*Note - dates outlined through November.

Sermon 1, September 15 - *Jesus is Better* (Hebrews 1:1-4, 12:25-29)

We open our series on the New Testament book of Hebrews with an overview of this great book by looking at the interpretive keys to understanding any piece of literature, including issues of authorship, recipients, occasion, and purpose. We will find that even though the genre is a letter, it actually is a sermon intended to be read out loud to the gathered church as a continuous appeal with two key messages. The first is the superiority of Jesus in all things. Specifically, Jesus is superior to anything in the Old Testament because He is both the purpose and fulfillment of everything there. The second message is a warning not to fall away from Christ, even if the result is earthly prosperity for leaving or persecution for staying faithful.

Sermon 2, September 22 - *Jesus is the Better Revelation* (1:1-4)

Hebrews opens with an incredible declaration, the God who exists has chosen to make Himself known, He is a God who speaks and reveals Himself. We are not left alone to guess and figure out our own spirituality, we have a God who has spoken, we can know Him. And God speaks in many different ways, to and through many different people. Yet, the clearest forms of revelation are through the prophets who wrote the Scriptures and the sending of Jesus, the Son of God into the world. Jesus is full revelation of the God who created the universe, yet He is also the point of all revelation. This sermon will point to a Jesus-centered hermeneutic as the goal for the study of all Scripture.

Sermon 3, September 29 - *Jesus is Better than Angels* (1:5-14)

In the movie, *Angels in the Outfield*, the climactic scene shows us an aging pitcher who is convinced by a kid to believe that he can rise to the occasion in a ball game because he has an angel with him. Truth is that the Bible does teach us that there are real spiritual beings with incredible power, unseen by our eyes yet present in the world. And one of their roles is to serve those who know Jesus. But we should not seek angels, rather, we should seek the One whom angels worship. Hebrews tells us of the superiority of Jesus over angels as they are nothing more than servants of God who fulfill His purpose, but Jesus is the Divine Son whom the angels worship and over whom Jesus rules.

Sermon 4, October 6 - *Jesus is a Better Savior* (2:1-4)

Chapter 2 begins with the first warning passage in Hebrews, warning these people to hold fast to the gospel, lest they drift from it. This Gospel has been proven true by Angels and confirmed in its witness by signs and wonders. Yet, there are so many other “saviors”, and it is so easy for our eyes to turn and seek salvation in safety, comfort, prosperity, or acceptance. So be warned, those who reject this great salvation have no escape from God’s justice.

Sermon 5, October 13 - *Jesus is a Better Humanity* (2:5-18)

This one who is the ruler of all, for a little while was made lower than the angels, put on flesh, suffered and tasted death. The One whom and by all things exist lived the perfect

life then died our death and through His suffering brought many sons to glory. The glorious miracle of the incarnation is in view in this text, and for these people, the man Jesus was someone they had seen, heard, known. Yet this individual in human history destroyed the power of death and the devil on our behalf, standing as every human being's representative and High Priest.

Sermon 6, October 20 - *Jesus is Better than Moses (3:1-6)*

For the First Century Jew, Moses was the foundation for their faith and the greatest hero of their story. He was a prophet and spokesman for God who gave Israel the Torah. The Jews who were following Jesus were accused of leaving Moses to embrace a different religion and therefore were being persecuted. So the author of Hebrews shows us that Moses was just a brick in the wall, a servant in the house. But Jesus is actually the builder of the whole house that is Israel, and is the ultimate apostle and high priest. More important, to rightly understand Moses is to realize that his life, ministry, and writings were pointing forward to Jesus who is worthy of more glory than Moses.

Sermon 7, October 27 - *Jesus is the Better Exodus (3:7-19)*

Under Moses, the Hebrews were rescued by God from slavery in Egypt and brought to Yahweh and into a covenant. Yet, they quickly abandoned the Lord, falling into sin and failing to believe His promises. This section recalls the horrible story of God's people found in Numbers and the reality that a whole generation of Hebrews died in the wilderness, missing out on the promises. While God was still faithful, keeping the promises to their children, the first generation who crossed the Red Sea missed it. This is a warning for everyone who looks to Jesus and yet turns away in with a hardened heart, because His redemption is even better than the rescue from Pharaoh.

Sermon 8, November 3 - *Jesus is the Better Sabbath (4:1-11)*

The problem with life is that it is so difficult to ever really rest. We believe the world depends on us, and if we stop for a minute it will all fall in. Religion is the spiritualization of this, picking up the weight of salvation and trying to carry our load. But the call of the Gospel is to enter rest, to cease from works, and to enter the land of promise. The Sabbath was a day set aside to cease from the busyness of work, to rest, gather at a table, and worship with God's people. These rhythms are important, yet the author of Hebrews also shows us that the Sabbath rest was a pointer looking to Jesus, who is our true Sabbath, the place where we can rest, stop working, and enjoy the land of promise.

Sermon 9, November 10 - *Jesus has a Better Word (4:12-13)*

Those who grew up doing Bible drill will remember the command, "Draw swords!" As a pre-adolescent boy it felt kind of cool to hear the call to arms, but also a bit bizarre that our response was to raise a book in readiness to find a verse. At first look, the Bible appears to be just like every other book, with words filled with information and stories on pages. Yet, any long time reader knows that the Bible is something different, it is alive, active, cutting. The reason is that this book is inspired, it is the Word of God. To be honest, we don't read it, it reads us, exposes our need, and points us the Jesus, who is the true author behind every word.

Sermon 10, November 17 - *Jesus is the Better Priest (4:14-5:10)*

The Priest's job in the Old Testament was to be the go-between, the mediator between God and people. They offered sacrifices for the people and served as interpreters of the Torah for the people. Yet, their ministry was imperfect because they were flawed and broken people who also needed the forgiveness of the sacrifices. Often, rather than serving the Lord and His people, they misused their position for personal benefit and honor. Hebrews shows us that Jesus is our true and better High Priest, who sympathizes with our weaknesses, yet he was sinless. He did not need a sacrifice, this priest was the sacrifice that allows us to draw to the throne of grace with confidence.

Sermon 11, November 24 - *Jesus is the Better Hope (5:11-6:12)*

Following Jesus is so worth it. But there are always challenges that can quickly cause us to become dull, complacent, stagnant, or worse, cause us to fall away completely. This is the second warning passage in Hebrews, giving a clear warning to those who once seemed to have a vibrant faith and are now falling away. This passage does not speak of people who lost their salvation, yet they appeared to know Jesus and gave Him up to protect themselves. For these people, their seeking a better hope actually means the loss of all hope. But for those who endure, there is no better place to be than the road that leads to Jesus.

Sermon 12 - *Jesus is the Better Anchor (6:13-20)*

The in between is hard. God is a God of promises, and He is faithful. Yet, we have not seen all of them fulfilled. Abraham was given a direct promise of an heir, and then Abraham waited 25 years into very old age before God kept the promise. Yet, the Lord had sworn, so Abraham knew the promise would come true. So to, in Jesus we have a better promise, and while we do experience many of the blessings of grace, we still long for the day when all the promises are true. Yet, we can go on because we have a sure and steady anchor for our souls in the faithfulness of God and the promises made true in Jesus.

Sermon 13 - *Jesus is the Better Substance (7:1-10)*

The author of Hebrews has already alluded to Melchizedek twice, now he gives us a whole chapter connecting this figure to the mission and ministry of Jesus. He is only mentioned twice in the Old Testament, once in Genesis and the story of Abraham, and then again by David in Psalm 110. But the author shows us something amazing about how we are to understand the Old Testament, that we are to see every single story pointing to Jesus. Melchizedek was the King of Salem, but also a priest of God, he received offerings from Abraham. And he is a type of Jesus, a small picture of Jesus pointing forward to the true King/Priest. In this sermon we will look at typology and other ways the Old Testament points us to Jesus as the full substance of the small tastes given in the text of the Old Testament.

Sermon 14 - *Jesus is the Better Forgiveness (7:11-28)*

The author uses the comparison between Melchizedek and Aaron to make a clear point. Jesus is our Great High Priest, but not in the order of Aaron. God separated the line of the kings and the line of the priests in Israel as a way of protecting the people

from the failures and flaws, and therefore, unlike all the other nations, no one could be a King/Priest. The priests were flawed, their lives were short, and their sacrifices insufficient to truly cover sin. Yet, Jesus is a better king/priest, in the order of Melchizedek. As King, He is our King of Peace. As High Priest he offered himself once for all. We do not have to come back again and again, the cross of Jesus makes us perfect and righteous, so that we like the Son are considered perfect forever.

Sermon 15 - *Jesus Brought a Better Covenant (8:1-13)*

The love language for God is the language of covenant. Covenants are divinely imposed legal agreements between God and people that stipulate the conditions of their relationship which is a love relationship initiated by God and given to people. And the language of covenant is beautiful, "I will be your God, and you will be My people," God declares, and these covenants are filled with promises to be kept by God and conditions to be met by people. Yet, the problem for every covenant is that the people never keep their end of the bargain. God is continually faithful, the people are not. Yet, there are echoes of a New Covenant, promises that one day God will go from writing His Law on stone tablets and to writing His Law on the hearts of those who know them. But for the New Covenant to be true, we first needed a covenant keeper, a person who actually keeps our side of the relationship on our behalf.

Sermon 16 - *Jesus is the Better Tabernacle (9:1-14)*

The author takes us on a tour of the Tabernacle, a tent built by Israel following the specific instructions given by God in Exodus. This tent was a holy place, a window of sorts where heaven invaded earth, and God came near to His people. For generations, the Hebrews would set this tent up in the middle of their dwellings so that the priests could offer sacrifices and the nation could live in the presence of God. Eventually the tent was replaced by Solomon with the Temple, a permanent structure. By taking us on the tour the book of Hebrews is helping us see that the tent always pictured something greater. First, every single object in the Tabernacle points to Jesus, including the candlesticks, table, show bread, and Ark of the Covenant. Furthermore, we are told that the Tabernacle is a human built replica of a greater dwelling, and in this Holy Place Jesus entered with His own blood without blemish to purify our conscience before God.

Sermon 17 - *Jesus is the Better Sacrifice (9:15-28)*

Hopefully we are getting the picture, every aspect in the worship and sacrifices commanded by God pointed forward to Jesus. From the first stories in the Bible, including the story of Abraham, the offering of sacrificers is a significant theme. And in Leviticus, God gives His people clear commands about a litany of sacrifices. Yet, the death of bulls and goats were never a sufficient sacrifice, that should have been obvious. And the sacrifices were bloody, with blood everywhere. Seems extreme, yet God was showing the people the depth of their sin, the seriousness of His wrath, and the need for redemption. But they never fully covered the sin and depravity of the people. To leave Jesus and return to these religious rituals represented a return to a system that was never really able to save. On the other hand, the death of Jesus is a once for all sacrifice, and since Jesus is the Divine Son, His death is sufficient to cover all sin. Death is an appointment for each of us, but we can go to death knowing that the

justice of God has been satisfied by the once for all sacrifice of Jesus.

Sermon 18 - *Jesus Brings a Better Change* (10:1-18)

The author of Hebrews has been making a long and building argument comparing the Old Covenant and its priests, sacrifices, and Tabernacle to the New Covenant in which all of the longings and purposes have fully come true in Jesus. But the question arises, “so what?” What does this mean for you and me? The beautiful answer is that the life and death of Jesus has secured our forgiveness for all time, our perfection in the age to come, and our transformation in this life. We are people who have been made holy, are being made holy, and one day will be fully made holy and perfect.

Sermon 19 - *Jesus is the Better Way* (10:19-31)

As a sermon, Hebrews has made a long and detailed argument for the superiority of Jesus to all things, and specifically, to all of the practices and images found in the Old Testament Jewish faith. Hebrews 10:19 begins the shift from explanation to application. Addressed to Jewish people who are suffering persecution and maybe even expulsion from their communities, families, and religious spaces, these people are wondering if Jesus is worth it, and some have probably rejected the Gospel and turned back to Judaism for their path. So the author shows these people two clear paths. One path is to draw near and hold fast, to trust and endure, and to stay connected to the Christian community. The other path is to push away, to fall into sin, reject the church, and give up on Jesus. The first find an open door into the very presence of God. The second will find that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Sermon 20 - *Jesus is our Better Reward* (10:32-39)

The call to endurance is based on the reality that there is a prize at the end, and this prize is secure and real. So the writer of Hebrews tells his readers to keep believing. He calls them to remember that they came to faith in the midst of persecution and suffering. Those who lived in Jerusalem during Saul’s rampage knew the cost of following Jesus. They accepted the plundering of their goods and were willing to visit those who were in prison for their faith, even if it meant losing their own freedom. Hebrews reminds us to never give up, keep believing in Jesus, to hold on to our confession with confidence. Because faith in Jesus comes with a promise that in a little while the Coming One will come, and will not delay.

Sermon 21 - *Jesus is our Better Assurance* (Hebrews 11:1-6)

Chapter 11 has often been referred to as the Hall of Fame of faith. But the chapter begins with a definition and explanation of faith, coupled with a reminder that without faith it is impossible to please God. Or put positively, we are made right with God and stay right with God by faith alone. This is not blind faith in some mysterious deity, rather it is a faith that knows the truth of God and believes the promises of God. The faith that keeps us firm is assurance, conviction of the things not yet seen, yet promised. And we will see that every “hero” from the Old Testament story is justified and blessed solely based on their faith in Jesus.

Sermon 22 - *Jesus tells a Better Story, Part 1 (Hebrews 11:1-7)*

We may call this the Hall of Fame of Faith, but the truth and point of this story is that there is only one True Hero. The Bible is a grand story about this great Hero, yet, in His grace He has included people in the story. Every person listed in this chapter has unbelievable flaws and failures, yet, they trusted the character of God and held on to the promises He made, and by their faith experienced the grace, presence, and blessings of God. They are included in the grand story by faith, and as a result God tells a better story through their lives than the one they would have told on their own. During this series within the series we will take a journey through the lives of those who are listed in this chapter, telling their stories as reminders of God's story and the work He does in and through the lives of those who believe. We retell their stories for those who have never heard them and as reminders for those who have. The first three characters we will examine are Abel, Enoch, and Noah.

Sermon 23 - *Jesus Tells a Better Story, Part 2 (Hebrews 11:8-22)*

The lives of the Patriarchs, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph are in view. This section also comes with a reminder that even though they experienced the blessings of knowing God, they did not receive all the things promised.

Sermon 24 - *Jesus Tells a Better Story, Part 3 (11:23-31)*

The stories of faith jump forward 400 years and to the parents of Moses and the story of God's rescue from slavery. By faith, Moses was the leader and the people went through the Red Sea by faith. By faith the walls of Jericho fell, and by faith a non-Hebrew prostitute named Rahab was rescued.

Sermon 25 - *Jesus Tells a Better Story, Part 4 (11:32-40)*

The author drops the names of several other important Old Testament people, and gives allusions to others. Left to themselves, each of these people would have shipwrecked their lives, yet out of brokenness, failure, and pain they believe, and God tells a better story through their lives. Some experienced great blessings and victories. But we can't miss this, others were sawed in two, flogged, mocked, and persecuted brutally. Yet, they lived as strangers and exiles in this land, looking forward to the promised Messiah and the hope for a better world. And they all looked forward to the day we live in, the time after the coming of Jesus, cross, and resurrection longing to live in our day.

Sermon 26 - *Jesus and the Better Race (12:1-4)*

The author has built a long and beautiful argument that the entire Old Testament story was pointing to Jesus, preparing God's people for their True King and High Priest. He even showed us that the Old Testament heroes were saved and lived by faith in the hope of this coming One. Now they stand as witnesses and it is our turn to grab the baton and run the race set before us. So we are to lay aside the sin, shed excess weight, and run with endurance. And even when the struggle is hard we keep running, because we cannot lose if we keep running. The reason we win is because Jesus runs both the first and anchor leg of this great race.

Sermon 27 - *Jesus and our Better Father (12:5-11)*

I saw a video recently with a father disciplining his son for the disrespectful way the boy spoke to his mother. But the caption chastised the father for being harsh with his son, although the dad never struck the boy and his tone was completely appropriate for the moment. We live in a culture that is rejecting parental discipline on any level, which coincides with the complete loss of trust in authorities. People like the idea of God being a loving Father as long as that love does not involve discipline. Any loving dad disciplines his children, without that discipline they would shipwreck their lives. Same is true for children of God. He as loving Father disciplines His children, out of love, and for their good. We need to learn how to recognize God's discipline and rather than despising it, lean in to it to build endurance for life.

Sermon 28 - *Jesus and the Better Path (12:12-17)*

The Gospel sets on a journey of progressive sanctification. Because Jesus endured the cross, because we have a loving Father who disciplines and leads us, because we have the fruit or righteousness imputed to our lives, we need to keep walking. The path is incredibly difficult at time, yet, we need to lift weary hands and get our knees loose and keep walking. This is the path to wholeness, to healing. Yet, the journey has a lot of side paths we can take, each of which ends in brokenness, hardened hearts, and dead ends.

Sermon 29 - *Jesus and a Better Kingdom (12:18-29)*

Hebrews is an invitation and a warning. The invitation is a call to endure, no matter what the cost, knowing that the end is a Kingdom which cannot be shaken, to the Holy City, and into the presence of Jesus, the mediator of the better covenant. The warning is serious, a command to not refuse Him who is speaking, because this God is a consuming fire, and it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of an Angry God. The invitation and the warning come with a promise, there will be a last moment of shaking of this earth, and all that can be shaken and burned will go, so that the things which cannot be shaken remain.

Sermon 30 - *Jesus gives a Better Life (13:1-6)*

We long for a happy life, one which fills and satisfies. Yet, a fulfilling life is actually difficult to find. The author of Hebrews shares some simple yet profound pathways toward contentment and joy. All of these will run counter the culture around, yet they are the way to experiencing the joy of knowing and experiencing Jesus. So we are to love one another, care for strangers and those in prison, build strong marriages and protect our sexuality, and keep our lives free from the love of money. When we do this we will find the promises of Psalm 118:6-7 to be true, that the Lord is on our side and He is our helper.

Sermon 31 - *Jesus Gives us Better Leaders (13:7-19)*

This section shows us that the author sees himself as a pastoral leader of the people he is writing this letter which is a sermon. As he nears the end of the book he reminds them of the wonderful pastoral leaders God gave His church, and calls them to watch their way of life, follow their lead, and submit to their authority in the church. But he also

warns them about other leaders who call them to embrace false teaching, move away from Jesus and grace, and to give themselves to false worship. The goal is to find godly leaders who will serve as a plurality of Elders who will point people to Jesus and keep watch over the souls of God's people. When men don't do that, don't follow them and show them out. When they do, go all in to follow their lives and make their ministry a joy. And most important, pray for your leaders continually.

Sermon 32 - *Jesus is our Better Shepherd* (13:20-25)

Hebrews ends with a beautiful benediction, a prayer that the God of peace would work through the Gospel of Jesus to equip the church for every good work. Jesus is our good Shepherd, the one who leads, feeds, guides, and protects His sheep. He is also the one who laid down His life for the sheep. The book of Hebrews has been a reminder about the supremacy of Jesus in all things, and a call to love Him deeply and glorify Him above all things. His glory is on display in the church around the world through a people doing His will and with His power working in and through us.