

An Introduction to the Book of Hebrews

Hebrews

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, February 6, 2022

Well, if you're joining us for the first time this morning, I just want to say, you have come at a good time, because we're on the front end of a brand-new series in the life of our church on the book of Hebrews. I actually counted it up the other day. And this is the seventh book we've looked at in our time together, which is quite a lot, because it's more than one each year since the church first started, or since I first came. But the reason we're doing it this way is because it's good to move quickly, when you're planting a church, it's good to not stay in one place too long, because you don't have a lot of material yet. But the fact is, as you get going as a church, you also need to slow down or else you'll wear everybody out, it'd be kind of like drinking out of a fire hydrant, if you don't slow down some. And so that's what we're going to do this morning. And to get us started, if you would please open your Bibles with me to the book of Hebrews.

And as you're turning there, if you were to go on our church website, you would find that one of our distinctives is expository preaching, or the act of explaining the Bible to you. You can see the word expose in the word exposit. We want to expose the Word of God to your hearts and minds, and show you what it says. There are several ways you can do that. One way to explain the Bible to people is to do it in a survey fashion, kind of like we did with the book of Ecclesiastes, because we went through that book in a hurry, we finish it in a couple of months. Or you can do it thematically, where you take a theme and you see what the Bible says about that. We did that in the Sermon on Bill C4 a few weeks ago. Or you can also go through the Bible slowly, you can take your time and go through it verse by verse, one little piece at a time where one week you look at one passage the next week, you look at the consecutive passage, and the next one you do right afterwards. And that's what we're going to start doing in this series. And in fact, today, I just want to introduce the book of Hebrews to you to get to whet your appetite for it.

So if you would look in Hebrews chapter 10. That's a good passage to start with. Hebrews chapter 10. We're going to read in verse one. It says,

For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never be the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

And then if you look down in verse 11, a little further down, the author says,

Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws upon their heart, and on their mind I will write them." He then says, "And their sins in their lawless deeds I will remember no more." Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin. Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the

blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean, from an evil conscience.”

We will stop the reading there. But I read that to you because that's a good way to summarize what the book of Hebrews is all about. It's about drawing near to God. The book is about entering the Most Holy Place not through the blood of bulls and goats, but through the one in perfect sacrifice the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the book in a nutshell. And just to say a few words about that... We don't really have this issue today, but when the early church first started, one of the biggest things they dealt with was the law, what to do with it. In other words, they couldn't figure out what to do with the Old Testament. Because for centuries, God had spoken to one set of people and that was the Jews and he only spoken through one set of books and that was the Old Testament, because that's how you got to God. That was how you drew near to Him. You did it by following the commandments because the law was like a bridge between you and heaven. It was like a link that connected you there. And to be fair, you could go to heaven if you were from another nation, you could come to God if you were not Jewish, but you did it through their scriptures. That was the way it worked. He did it through their Bible. But what this passage is saying is that with the church, all that's changed with Christ. It's different now, because He's the bridge for us. He's the link between us and heaven. And so the question on everyone's mind when the New Testament came about was, what do we do with the Old Testament now? Since Jesus has come and kept the law and died in our place, and went to the cross and became a new and living way, what do we do with the law? Do we keep it or do we not? Do we uphold it? Do we leave it in the Bible? And or do we take it out? What do we do with this thing?

And just to help you see this, if you would keep your fingers in the book of Hebrews and turn with me back to the book of Acts. I just want to read some of this to you and show you how the early church wrestled with this. If you look in Acts chapter eight, what you find when you read the book of Acts is that this question about the law was not easily answered for the Jews. It didn't come to them all at once. They had to really work it out. And if you look in Acts chapter eight and verse four, it says,

Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. Phillip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them. The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting in a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. So there was much rejoicing in the city.

And then down in verse 14 it says,

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they began laying their hands on them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

Now, you may read that and wonder what does that have to do with the law? Why am I reading that to you? Well, that's because the Samaritans were not Jewish, or fully Jewish. They were part Jew. They were a race that was formed when the Assyrians conquered Israel several hundred years before and intermarried with them, forming a new a new race of people who broke away from Israel and created their own laws, essentially. They wrote their

own set of commandments called the Samaritan Pentateuch. They also built their own temple on Mount Gerazim, called the Samaritan temple, where they made their own sacrifices. They had their own priesthood, they kept their own special holy days, which the Jews despised. They absolutely hated these people, because they thought they were a cult. Imagine someone broke away from you and did that, you would have the same thoughts about them. So if a Jewish person went in that area, he wouldn't look at a Samaritan, talk to a Samaritan, have anything to do with them. And yet here, you have to get this, here it says, "The Lord said Philip to witness to them and give them the gospel. That was a revolutionary thing at the time. No one had ever heard of such a thing. In fact, it was so revolutionary that the passage says the church in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to investigate because nobody could believe it. They couldn't understand how in the world did this happen with the Samaritans. And also the Holy Spirit came down upon them to also show that this was legit. Some people wonder why the Spirit keeps coming down in the book of Acts, why it's a repeated thing. It is repeated to show that these people truly are part of the Kingdom of God now. They really are saved.

And if you notice in the passage that we just read, Philip did all of this without the law, or without the ceremonial law. You can imagine he talked to him about how they broke the moral law of God, they lied, stole, etc. and therefore they needed the Saviour. But he didn't go into all the sacrifices with them as far as we can tell. He didn't talk to them about keeping the Sabbath and all these rituals.

And then to show you another example this, if you would, turn a few pages over to Acts chapter 10. In Acts chapter 10, you see another group of people that were saved in a similar manner when it says this,

Now there was a man at Ceasarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually. About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, "Cornelius!" And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon who is called Peter.

And the passage goes on to say Cornelius did that. Peter went into his house told him the gospel. He believed, and in verse 45 it says that the Holy Spirit fell upon him. There you see the same idea again: the Spirit comes down, affirms that now he is saved and the significance to this is that Cornelius was a full blown Gentile. Not part Jew, part Gentile, he's Gentile all the way. There's nothing Jewish about this man. To make matters worse, it says that he worked for Rome, and he was a Centurion or a leader in the Roman army, who were Israel's enemies. So that was another strike against him. He lived in Ceasarea, which was the home of a Roman outpost, a largely pagan city, that was strike number three. And yet Peter treated him like this. He led him to the Lord. The Jews actually had a word for people like Cornelius they call them "dogs". They thought they were as filthy as a mongrel mutt. Because of this, Peter had probably never even stepped in a Gentile home before. He was told to always stay away from them. And yet he does it here. And if you notice, he does it without the law as well, the ceremonial law, because he doesn't go into Cornelius' house and tell him to keep the sacrifices and follow the Sabbath and get circumcised. That would have been a deal breaker for Cornelius. Because the Gentiles saw circumcision as a terrible thing to do. He just told him about Christ. That was it.

And you see another thing happening in a similar way, if you look in Acts chapter 19. Just one more example this, appreciate your patience here. If you look in Acts chapter 19, here is one more example of what we're talking about. This is another group of people that are evangelized. It says,

It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." [That's John the Baptist.] Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.

Now this is a third group that the Holy Spirit comes down upon. And they're not Samaritan and they're not Gentile. These people are Jewish, but they're fully Old Testament Jews. They were disciples of another biblical figure, and that is John the Baptist. They had heard of Jesus, they believed in Him. But apparently, when John died, they fled to Ephesus, and they weren't aware of all the stuff going on in Jerusalem. So Paul runs into them, and he tells them about Christ, how he died, rose again, and they received the Spirit. But again, Paul does it without all this discussion of the law. I just wanted to take you through that, to show you how hard it was. For the Jews to get this, this was not an easy thing to understand for them.

The Lord did not just start evangelizing Gentiles right away in the book of Acts. You read about all these cities that are witness to and all these people that come to Christ from Galatia, Corinth, Ephesus and Philippi, and all these places, but it didn't start like that. It was a very gradual thing. In fact, He began by having the apostles speak in tongues in Acts chapter two. And if you ever wonder why that happened, it happened that way because for all their history, the Jews had only spoken in one tongue, and that was Hebrew. They only talked in one language that was affirmed by God, their whole Old Testament was written in the language of the Jews, and now they spoke in multiple languages to show that God was saving people from many different places all over the world. But all the while as you're reading through the book of Acts, behind the scenes, there's this burning question, and that is okay, if that's all true, what do we do with the law now? How does that fit in with this new thing that God is doing? I mean, you don't see Philip and Peter and Paul wrestling with it in these passages. But you do see the church in Acts 15 wrestling with it in a big meeting called the Council of Jerusalem. I won't read that to you. But in that council, they said, "Well, what do we do with this issue?" And they said that if the Gentiles want to be saved, let them be saved. They want to come to church, let them come to church. They don't have to get circumcised. They don't have to do all these things, they just seem to trust in Christ. And then you see other passages like Romans 14 talking about that. We studied that a few weeks ago, where Paul says, you can keep the Old Testament if you want to, the law. But don't make it a stumbling block. Don't make it come between you and other Christians. You see it discussed in the book of Galatians. And you see it in this passage, like the one we just read here in the book of Hebrews.

So if you want to turn back to Hebrews 10, I just want to read it again to you because I think it makes this make more sense after talking about that. If you look in Hebrews 10, verse 19, listen to these words now with the background I just gave:

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.

When the author says that, what he's telling you is that we don't enter the holy place through the law anymore. We don't come in through all the commandments, we go through a new and living way, and that is through Christ. You take that for granted, because you're a Gentile. That's all you know, nothing else has ever been taught to you. The Jews had no idea and so this author writes and writes an entire book, 13 chapters, to explain that to them. And just so you can see what this passage is saying, that phrase "holy place" means the most holy place or the Holy of Holies. It's referring to the spot above the Ark of the Covenant where the presence of God rested in the temple that was the center of all their religion. This is what the ceremonies and customs and rituals of the Jews were to lead up to every time you made a sacrifice, it was so you could get one step closer to the most holy place. And the author here says, "Now all you have to do is come in through Christ. He is your new and living way there. He also mentions the "veil" in verse 20. That's a reference to another Old Testament object. It's the large curtain that stood outside the most holy place, shielding you from the presence of God. It was put there to say, "You can't go in here. You don't belong." In fact, Jews said God would strike you dead if you tried to go past that curtain. And now the author says, "Not anymore. With Jesus' death, the veil has been torn. The barrier has been removed, the way to God is wide open now."

He also calls Jesus "the great high priest", because the priest was a mediator between God and man, he was the intermediary that you would have to go to in order to talk to God. I have had people ask me here in town, if I'm a priest. No, I'm not. You know why? Because you don't have to go to me to talk to God, you can go straight to Him through Christ. Verse 22, says He's the one who cleanses us and washes us. That's a reference to the cleansing rituals of the Jews. Earlier, it calls Jesus our sacrifice. That's a reference to the sacrificial system. But the point is that Jesus has changed everything for us now. He has modified the whole way we look at our faith. Because before there was this big obstacle, and that was the law, or the rules that you had to keep to follow the Old Testament. They weren't an obstacle, they were a good thing. But the problem was, nobody could keep them perfectly. No matter how hard you tried, everybody failed. But now that problem has been solved, because Jesus kept the law for us. He didn't ignore the law, He kept it. He didn't set it aside. He fulfilled it. So you can come to God through Him. Isn't that wonderful? That's the gospel in a nutshell.

One of his books on the subject, Martyn Lloyd Jones said that when Canada first became a nation, they were given their freedom from the British. And inevitably, they adopted a new law, which made them grateful because they threw the foreign rulers out and replaced them with something better. It's the same way with us. This is better for you. This is a new law, you're not lawless. As a Christian, you don't do whatever you want. You follow Christ, and it's better. A million times better. And here's what this has to do with our lives today. I mean, I think people still want to come to God, I think people still want to approach Him. According to the statistics, I've quoted this to you before, but there's something like 4000 Different religions in the world today, and all of them have a law of some type. The Muslims have five pillars. The Buddhists have four noble truths. The Hindus have the book of four Vedas. The idea is that in order to get to heaven, you have to keep all those things. The problem is they can't do it. Even the best Muslim on the planet would admit that he's failed in those pillars. Maybe he's kept four of them, but he's broken another, and therefore God should send him to hell. According to his own faith, he should damn Him for all eternity. And what the book of Hebrews is saying, and this is why this is so precious to us, is that God won't do that if you do one thing, and one thing only, and that is trust in Jesus Christ. That's the one

thing that separates us from all the other religions in the world. There's not 4000 religions, there's two, the right one and the wrong one. And the wrong the wrong one goes through all those laws and the right one comes through Christ. That's it. And here's why, because Jesus can really save you. Unlike those other religions, He can. He can really bring you into heaven. It's not a guessing game anymore. I've talked to people from some of these religions, I had one working on my teeth the other day, and asked him, do you know you can get to heaven? Kind of was his reply. That's not good enough. What this means is that when you sin, instead of beating yourself up over it and saying, if I just work harder, and pray harder, and try harder, then I'll make it right. You don't have to do that, you can just trust in Christ. And when you fail and break the law, instead of throwing your hands up in the air and saying, I quit, there's no way for God to forgive me, you can just come to Him. This is why the apostles didn't ask the Gentiles to keep the law. This is why they didn't tell them that they have to get circumcised. This is why they didn't go back to all those rituals, back to the ceremonies, back to the customs because they have something so much greater. You know, one commentator said this way: He said, "The theme of the book of Hebrews is a super abounding excellency of Christianity over Judaism, the sum and substance of it is Christ. Therefore the method followed by the Holy Spirit, in this epistle, in developing its dominant theme is to show the immeasurable superiority of Christ over all that's come before, one by one, the various objects in which the Jews boasted in are taken up in the book of Hebrews. And in the presence of the superlative glory of the Son of God, they're shown to pale in insignificance. First, Jesus is shown to be superior over the prophets, then He's superior over the angels, then He's superior over Moses, then He's superior over Joshua, then He's superior over Aaron, then He's superior over the sacrifices the saints, because in the Lord Jesus Christ, Christians have the summoned substance in reality, of which Judaism was only a shadowy figure." Couldn't we say amen to that? And as Tyler said, so well during the kids lesson, this is what you're supposed to be boasting it. This is what we brag about as Christians. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning by looking at three major themes in the book of Hebrews.

So if you're taking notes this morning, again, this is just an introduction, we're just kind of flying over the book. But I want to show you three major themes for the book of Hebrews. And the reason we're doing this is because this morning, we're going to start a study that's going to last a while. Like I said, it's going to take us to the rest of this year, and maybe on into the next. But the reason we're doing it this way is because you need to understand you have so much to boast in as a Christian, you have so much to brag about. I think we can forget that sometimes because we look at the world and we see this sin and it looks so fun, and it looks so enjoyable. But the author of this book says it's not enjoyable, because only this can bring you into the presence of God. This can save you in a way that nothing else can. And let's talk about that this morning with three major themes in the book of Hebrews.

The first one is that Jesus is superior to the Old Testament. We've already talked about that a little bit, but I just want to say a little more. Because the first major theme in this book is that Jesus is superior to the Old Testament, which means He's better than anything that you've ever had. And that's not to take away from what they had because what they had was amazing. But this is on another level. And if you look back to chapter one of the book of Hebrews, I won't read the entire chapter to you for the sake of time. But if you would, read the first few verses of this book with me. It says,

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 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. 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, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

It may not strike you too much as a English reader, but in the Greek, this has been called the most beautiful piece of Greek in the entire New Testament. It's something that any classical writer would have been happy to have written. And it's so helpful because it cuts straight to the heart of the book, when it says this in the first verse, "God has spoken to us in His Son." In other words, that's what this book is about. I mean, that's a theme of Hebrews: Before, God spoke to us in the Old Testament, now He's spoken to us through Christ. That's the comparison in the book.

And he starts off by saying, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers and the prophets, in many portions...." and that phrase, "many portions," means many times or in many different moments in history. Because in the Old Testament, sometimes He would say something through the one prophet and then through another. And then He would give a word of Revelation through one messenger, and then through another over the course of about 1000 years. Read the Old Testament, it looks like it happens pretty quickly. But that was all stretched out over a tremendous amount of time. Because that's the way prophecy worked. And it also says he spoke in many different ways as well. And that means he used many different methods in the Old Testament, because sometimes he would have a prophet speaking of vision, and other times, he would have been speaking a dream or a parable, or a proverb, or a poem, or a sermon or a word picture. In fact, some of those prophecies got quite outlandish. If you remember, the book of Ezekiel, Ezekiel had to lay on his side for 430 days to symbolize the seeds of Jerusalem. That would be awful, right? That's way worse than a PowerPoint presentation. It's also interesting, a lot of pastors today like to do cute things in the pulpit. But every time you saw one of those vivid illustrations in the Old Testament, it always had to do with judgment. There's never a feel-good thing. But the point that the author is making here is that the revelation was fragmentary, came in bits and pieces. Little bit here, a little bit there, word over this way, a word that way. But on the other hand, the verse goes on to say in these last days, God has spoken to us through one thing, and that is His Son. And that means with Jesus, everything's different because it's not fragmentary, it's not stretched out. Over time, Jesus lived for 33 years, and he gave us the message all at once. In fact, His ministry was only for a three-year period of time. But more than that, maybe. And that was it.

The phrase "last days" is important here, because it doesn't mean the last days of the book of Revelation, or the last days of the Apocalypse, it means the last days of prophecy. These are the last days of God's word to man, because when Jesus came, the word of God was complete. When the Messiah arrived, the Bible was finished, there wasn't anything else to add to it. The Old and New Testaments were wrapped up. And the author is saying here, you need to pay attention to that now, because Jesus is not just another prophet, He's the Son of God Himself. Verse two says that He is the heir of all things, that means He owns it, this world is His property. And it says that he made it, which means Jesus created it because He was with God. In the beginning, He was there from eternity past.

Verse three says, He's the radiance of God's glory. And that means He has the very essence of God. Because when you look at Jesus, you see what God is like. He who has seen Me as seen the Father, but the point is that this is the one who speaks to you now. It's none other than God himself. It's one thing for God to send you a Messenger, it's another thing for God to come on His own. That's what Jesus did.

And having said that, I need to point out to you that the author is not telling you here that the Old Testament is bad because it's not bad. He had a very high view of the Old Testament in this book. In fact, the book of Hebrews quotes the Old Testament 39 times, and it refers to it more than 70. That's more than any other book in the New Testament. Because he had a very high regard for that part of the Word of God. And this doesn't mean that the Old Testament is useless, because it's not useless for Christians. In fact, if you just want to write some of these verses down, Galatians three, verse 24, says that the law was our tutor to lead us to Christ. And that means that's what the Old Testament does. As you read, it is supposed to lead you to the Saviour. It is supposed to show you how wonderful He is because it reminds you that you can't keep the law. So it pulls you there like a tutor. Romans 15, verse four, also says, "For whatever was written in earlier times, was written for our instruction, written to teach us so that through the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope." That means that's what the Old Testament does as well, it encourages you. If you ever think you're all alone, just read back to some of the stories of those Old Testament saints. First Corinthians 10 tells us the Old Testament was a warning, so that you don't do what the Jews did and turn your back on God.

But what the author is saying here in Hebrews chapter one is that you shouldn't prioritize that above this. Whereas the Old Testament said, I can show you God, Jesus said, I am God. And whereas it said, I can tell you about Him, Jesus said, I am Him. And there's nothing better than that.

In fact, to demonstrate this, as we go through the book, you're going to see that the word "better" is used a lot in the book of Hebrews to say that Jesus gives us a better hope, a better covenant, a better testament, a better promise, better sacrifices, a better country and a better city now than anything that you've ever had. It's just better, better, better, better with Him. And the word "great" is used a lot as well to say that we have a greater salvation, a greater high priest, a greater tabernacle, greater reward, great cloud of witnesses, and a great shepherd. So there's no reason to think you're missing out. If you have Christ, you're not missing anything. And what this means is that this is how you're saved. Now you do it by listening to Jesus, He's God's final word. This is how you get to heaven, you do it by paying attention to what He said. The Jews were saved by trusting God's word as it was revealed to them and offering sacrifices and doing all that in faith. But your salvation is simpler in that you trust in a Saviour.

We've heard the expression that Christianity is not about a religion, it's about a relationship. And while that statement can be misused, it is true. Because you don't get to have Him by working your way there like those other religions do. You go to Heaven by going through Him and that's all. You simply trust in Him and He takes you there. If you remember, when Jesus was evangelizing the rich young ruler, the young man came up to him and he said, Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said, "You must go sell all you have and come follow me." Why did he say that? Because that's how you get eternal life. You follow Jesus, you have to give up your sin, give up your idols, give up your wealth and the trappings of this life that you're worshipping, and replace it with Him. You get rid of this God, you put this one in its place, you get rid of this master, and this lord, and this sovereign over your life, the god of money, and you put Him there. Jesus told Martha at the grave of Lazarus, "I am the resurrection and the life, He who believes in Me will live and not die." And that means this is how you have life now: you believe. Because Jesus is the Word of God.

It's interesting, if you read through the New Testament, one thing you notice is that within one generation of Jesus coming and dying and rising again and ascending into heaven, God stopped sending prophets. He stopped sending apostles. Last one, the apostle John died in 90 AD. Why? Because that's all they needed to know to be saved. It's

all contained right here. There's no apostles today, they're not needed. This may be one of the biggest challenges I think that we face as Christians in Canada. But as I talk to people, it's so common for them to doubt their salvation nowadays. And to say that there's no way God can forgive me because I'm not good enough for Him. So I need to do more. I need to work harder, pray harder, try harder. All that stuff. God says you don't. You don't have to try harder at all. Because this is not about you doing something, this is about Christ. This is not about you working harder. This is about the work that He has done, and it's perfect. There's nothing to add to it.

You also hear people saying that there's no way God can forgive me because I don't believe enough. My faith is so weak, and I have my doubts. But they forget what this book is saying. It says that salvation is not about you and your faith. It's about Him. It's not about your power to believe something. It's about His power to save you in spite of your weakness through the cross. Amen? Because, look, guys, if you look in this first chapter, in this first few verses, here's the message here. If Jesus can uphold the world, then surely He can uphold you right? And if He can create it and form it in the palm of His hand, surely He can keep you there. That's easy piece of cake. So you have to remember that and stop being afraid. When you doubt your salvation, some people think it's such a noble thing to do. But when you're doubting your salvation, this is what you're doing: you're saying Jesus is not enough. He may be enough for the world, but He is not enough for me. And when you question whether He's forgiven you or not, while it sounds so important, what you're really saying is, I don't think He's sufficient. And that's a terrible thing to say. We shouldn't do that.

The story is told of a time when the pastor H.A. Ironside was talking to a dying man who said he wasn't sure if he was saved. So Ironside said, "Well, let me ask you this: if God sent an angel to tell you that you were saved, would you believe it?"

"Well," the man said, "Yeah, I mean, absolutely." Ironside said, "My friend, God sent you more than an angel. He sent you, His Son. And you have no reason to ever doubt Him."

And that brings us to another major theme in the book of Hebrews. And that is that in light of this, legalism is not necessary anymore. So the first one, and these are all simple, because the book of Hebrews is about a simple gospel message. But the first major theme is that Jesus is superior to the Old Testament because they had glimpses, and we have the full picture. They had fragments and pieces, but we have the whole thing. So it doesn't make sense to go back to that. Now, it would be like walking into a room, turning on a light, and then turning it off again, so you can enjoy the darkness. No one does that; you leave the light on when you walk into a room. And it's the same way with Christ, you need to leave His light on in your life.

And that brings us to another major theme in the book. And that is that in light of all this legalism is not necessary. You just have no need for it anymore. This idea that I have to do this, and I have to do that. If Christ has done all this, it's enough. And if you look in chapter 10, we already looked there a moment ago. But I want to turn back there because Hebrews is a hard book to outline. It's not easy to put it together chronologically or logically, the author kind of follows a stream of consciousness style. And as he does this, he comes to chapter 10, where he says this in verse one,

For the law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been

cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Just to say a few words about this, if you notice, just like it was in chapter one, you don't have to wonder what the author's thinking about here, because he goes straight to the heart of it when he mentions the word "law" in verse one. In other words, this is about the Jewish law, or the law that was found in the Old Testament. He says it is a shadow of the good things to come. The word shadow refers to a vague shadow or something you would see in a fog. You can relate to this because we have a lot of fog here in British Columbia. And we saw it on the way to church today. And we all know how dangerous it is to drive through that because you can't always see what's coming. And the author says the Jews had a similar problem with the Lord. They saw Him and they knew Him, but it was through a fog. And that led to a lot of misinterpretations and confusion for them. But on the other hand, the verse says that the law is only a shadow of the good things to come, not the form of them. And the word "form" refers to the exact representation of something; you could call it a photograph. This is what you have now in Christ, they had a fog, you have a photograph; they had a shadow, you have an exact living replica of the Lord. And since that's true, it says the law can never by the same sacrifices made year by year, make perfect those who draw near, as I told you, that's the point of the book of Hebrews. It was written to help you draw near to God, and the author says the sacrifices can't do that perfectly. Now they could bring the Jews nearer to God. They could help them but there was always a drawback and that is that every time you made a sacrifice, you had to do it again because you sin again. Every time you made an offering in the Jewish temple, you had to go back and make another one because you just messed up. It was a never-ending process.

I've heard different numbers on this. But I read somewhere that on the Passover week, the Jews killed 300,000 lambs. That's a lot of dead bodies. But the reason they did it is because it didn't finish the job. He brought a temporary relief, but not an entire one, which is why he says further on in verse 10 as a way of comparison, he says, "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." And that that phrase "once for all" is very important, because he's saying, unlike those other sacrifices that had to be made over and over and over again, in those 300,000 lands, it had to be butchered endlessly, day in, day out. Bring the lamb up to the hill, kill it, take the body down, burn it, bring the lamb up to the hill, kill it, take the body down, burn it. Jesus died once. One time, because His sacrifice was perfect. It paid for every sin that would ever be committed by anyone who would ever believe from Adam, all the way down to the last believer on Earth. One sacrifice. When we're all dead and gone, I promise you, the next generation of Christians will be saved by one thing. And when they're all dead and gone, I promise you, the next generation of Christians will be saved by one thing. And when they're all dead and gone, the next generation will be saved by the same thing.

Verse 12, says in another way, it kind of gives you even more insight into this when it says, "But He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God." And that's interesting, because it was said that Jews, the priests never sat down in the temple, because they had no seats there; their work was never done. They never got a break. They were always sacrificing, always killing something, but not Jesus, He sat down because His work was finished. And not only did He sit down, it says He sat down at the right hand of God, which shows you the depth of His sacrifice, because He completely took away sin. There is no way God would let Him into His presence if He had sin on Him. There is no way He could come into the Holy of Holies, a place where God existed if sin was not put to death completely at the cross. But it was because Jesus took care of it all.

And here's what this has to do with us. You know, while we don't do the sacrifices anymore, like the Jews did, I think we are tempted to do other things to try to be saved. It's part of human nature, where we become legalistic in other ways, like keeping the 10 commandments or going to church or being a good person or praying or keeping a Sabbath or all that type of thing. And it all stems from the mindset, which says that I don't need God's help in this I can do it on my own. And what the author of Hebrews is saying to combat that is that no, you can't, it's impossible. It just can't be done. Because like it was with the sacrifices, every time you do that, you're going to mess up again. And every time you try to be good on your own, you're going to sin. So you need to trust in something greater and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. You guys have done this before, we all have, but you come home from work, yell at your kids, explode in rage, because they're all being loud. And then what do you do right afterwards, you clean the house. Why? Because you feel bad. Your conscience is killing you. It's not as complicated as all the Jewish sacrifices, but you do it to pay for your sins. Or you come home from work, and you say something rude to your wife and what do you do after that? You give \$1,000 to the church, you donate your life savings away. Right? We have a building fund now. So if any of you have done that this week. But it's the same thinking, you're trying to square things up between you and God. You know something is wrong and that's the way you fix it. And what verse four says is that it's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. We could say this, it's impossible for the blood of \$1,000 to do it. It's impossible for the blood of \$10,000 to do it. It's impossible for the blood of a million dollars to do it. It's not enough. I'm not saying it's wrong to clean your house and donate money to the church. It's not, but it's wrong to put your faith in those things. It's wrong to put your hope in those things in order to save you as a Christian, because you need to look at something else. You need to look to the one who offered a one-time sacrifice for sins and sat down.

I don't know if you've ever known any legalistic people. But one thing about legalism is that it never allows you to sit down. You never rest. You're always worked up, you're always in a tizzy. You're always anxious. Because there's always another prayer to pray, church service to go to, room to clean. With Jesus it is different. You can sit down now in Him, you can rest. Because He's enough. In fact, if you want to look in verse 22, this alludes to this as well. In this whole passage, he's just telling you why Christ is sufficient. And in verse 22, he says, "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." And the significance to that is that the Old Testament sacrifices couldn't do this for you, but Christ can, they can't sprinkle your heart. When the priests would kill an animal, he would take the blood and sprinkle it on the altar. There's even a few times where he would even sprinkle it on the worshipers. But he couldn't sprinkle your heart, he can't get inside there. But the author says Christ can. And that should be more than enough for you.

And I love what Martin Luther used to say about this, but he used to remind his people of this, he said, "Don't become Satan's martyrs." And what he meant by that is that some people work so hard to save themselves by focusing on all these other things, and not Christ, that this is what they become, they become the devil's martyrs, because they work so hard to get to Heaven only go to hell. And they work so hard to save themselves only to be lost at the end of the day, because they put all their energies in the wrong direction. And he said, as a Christian, you shouldn't do that. Put your faith in this one thing.

And that brings us to one more major theme in the book of Hebrews. Just to review these other ones, the first one is that Jesus is superior to the Old Testament. And secondly, in light of that, legalism is not necessary anymore. You just don't need it. Because if you are saved, there's no reason to try to be more saved. That makes sense. And

if you're forgiven, there's no reason to try to be more forgiven. You just need to trust in the forgiveness, it's already available for you.

And that brings us to one more theme in this book, and that is that salvation is through faith alone. A third major theme in the book of Hebrews is that salvation is through faith alone. Because if all of this is true, and Christ is all of this, and He's done all of this, then this is how you receive it, you do it through faith, not by works.

And if you turn over to chapter 11, this is a wonderful chapter to through and look at in this discussion. It's probably the most famous chapter in the book, because it's called the Hall of Faith. Over and over again, it says "By faith," someone did this and did that. And if you look in verses one through two, it says, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval." And I'm going to stop the reading there because I want to show you that when he says "By faith, the men of old gained approval," he means the men in the Old Testament. These are the men who followed the law. The Jews had a great misunderstanding that those who follow the law were saved by their works. And the author of Hebrews is saying no, they're saved by faith just like you. And to show you this, he gives you examples of the lives of several Old Testament saints, like 17 of them to be exact. The first one being Abel in verse four. It says, "By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain." When he refers to this man here, he's referring to the son of Adam and Eve. It was faith that caused him to do a better offering than his brother. It wasn't because he was better than Cain; it wasn't because he was holier or smarter or more righteous. He did it only through his trust in God and that was it. That was all. The significance to this is that Abel was the first fourth person in history. He lived before the Old Testament law even began to show that; this is a very, very, very, very, very old principle. It goes all the way back to the dawn of time.

And you see it again with Enoch in verse five. This is another one who was saved by faith. It says, "By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death. And he was not found because God took him up." That's a helpful statement here, because we don't know a lot about Enoch in the Bible. The Book of Genesis doesn't say much, but he was one of only two people who never died, Elijah being the other one. And if you read the account of him in Genesis five, one thing you see is that it says in the genealogy of the men from Adam, all the way to Noah, it says, "And then he died, and then he died. And then he died. And then he died." And then it gets to Enoch, and it says, but he didn't die. He was the one man who escaped death. Why? Through faith. That was all. God didn't look down at Enoch and say, "Boy, he's just a more handsome person than the rest of these guys. I'm not going to kill him."

Let's look at Noah in verse seven. Noah lived in one of the worst times in human history. It was so bad that God wanted to wipe men off the face of the earth, and He was sorry for making them, but before he killed everybody, He told Noah to build a boat in order to save his family, which would have made him seem crazy at the time. He told him to build an ark right in the middle of his neighbours, which would have made him seem like a laughingstock in a place like that, but he did it anyway through faith. And the same can be said for all the people in this list. Because you see it being mentioned in the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The fathers or patriarchs of Israel. You see it happening with Moses and Joshua and Rahab, or the law givers or the ones who brought them into the Promised Land. You see it with the Judges Gideon, Barak and Samson. You see it with the Prophet Samuel and Kings David and Solomon. In fact, if you look down further in the chapter, as the author goes on to describe this, he just stops giving names.

And in verse 32, he just starts talking about their deeds. He says, “And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.” And then down in verse 39, it says, “In all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.” I read that last passage to you there, because it means that none of these people received the salvation God had promised to them. They did not receive the heaven in the future. But that was the point of it, they kept going because of their faith. I've heard it said that faith is like a telescope, because it lets you see things far away. And that's what it did for these people. Because in light of their suffering, in light of their pain, in light of their difficulties in their life, they knew God had something better for them far away, and it kept them going. God always saves people through faith.

So if you're looking to justify your legalism by turning to the Old Testament, the book of Hebrews says it won't work. It didn't work for the people back then and it won't work for you. It didn't work for the Jews, it won't work for the church. In fact, I just mentioned all of those people: Abel, Enoch and Noah, they live before the law even came. They couldn't even be legalistic by the law; it wouldn't even be possible.

When I was studying for this week, I was reminded that where I grew up, I heard the Old Testament was all about the law and the New Testament was about faith. The Old Testament gave us a God of wrath and anger and hatred toward our sin. And the New Testament gave us a God of love. And the Bible says that's not true. God has always been a God of love. Salvation has always been through faith. Which means if you want to be saved today, this is what you need to do, you do the same thing these people did, you trust in God; you have faith in Him. Because if a man like Abel could not save himself by works, what chance do you have? And if a man like Enoch, or Noah, Abraham couldn't do it through the law, there's no way you could ever do it. You have to trust in God, nothing else will do.

Another lesson you see here is you have to do it every day. Your faith in God has to be an ongoing thing, because it was these people's faith that allowed them to shut the mouths of lions. But that meant their continued faith, their ongoing trust in God. And it was their faith that helped them quench the power of fire and escape the edge of the sword. But it was a never-ending thing for them. And it has to be the same thing for you. If you're saved today, you'll be saved tomorrow. And if you trust in God fully today, you'll do it the next. I want to tell you that our world is not as bad as all of this yet, but it might be someday. Fortunately, people aren't stoning us yet or sewing us into or making us go about in sheepskins, or goat skins. I think some people in British Columbia wear those out a choice. But it might come to that one day; it's getting worse. And the author says when it does, and the world does get worse, you have one thing to get you through that. And that is your faith in the Lord.

I told you before that we don't know who this letter was written to but the title to the Hebrews is helpful because it literally means to the wanderers. Because that's what a Hebrew was, he was a nickname given to the Jews when they were wandering in the wilderness, to remind you that this is what you are as a Christian. Now, this is what you are, as a believer, you're a wanderer, you're a homeless person, you don't belong here, it's not your home. So the one thing you do to get through it as you trust in God, moment by moment. And I'm sure these people here in Hebrews 11 felt that this world was pretty crazy at times. And I'm sure it felt empty to them, and shallow and

hollow just like ours does. Nothing was stable, nothing stuck. They made it by taking their eyes off of this world and putting it on something higher. And that's what the book of Hebrews is all about. It was the goal of this author to get your eyes off the evil things of this world, and put them up on the Lord where they belong.

And He does this by showing you Jesus is greater than the prophets. He's greater than the priest, and greater than anything else in history. And that's what we're going to be talking about next week. So if you would, please come back. And we'll talk about it there. But for now, let's close in a word of prayer and ask the Lord to bless our studies of this wonderful book.

Heavenly Father, we thank You, Lord, for what we have studied this morning. And we're just kind of dipping our toe in the ocean of a marvelous and wonderful portion of Scripture. Lord, we thank You that salvation is such a simple thing, it is a costly thing. It was an expensive thing, because it costs your son His life. And yet, at the same way, we know that it's only through Him. Thank you for what you've done in this. And I pray that as the study begins, or I don't know where everyone's at, in their walk with you, but I pray that someone would be saved through this book. Our salvation is so clear, it's so powerful, it's so wonderful, that we have a way to heaven now. But people's eyes need to be open to that, Lord, as we've talked about before, they need to be born again. And that's not a work of us. That's entirely a work of You. And so I pray that as we begin this, hearts would be open and softened and that Christ would be made known to them. I pray that He would be a saviour to many who are here. And for those who are already saved, Lord, I pray that they would have more and more confidence, remembering what He has done, that their joy in you would be complete, as they remember that they can sit down and rest and put themselves in the arms of an ever-loving Father. Lord, thank You for this salvation. Father, thank You that we come from many different places here as a church. But we don't have to worry about all of that. All we have to talk about is Christ. He's the one who unites us. He's the one that we love. He's the one who saves us. May He be glorified as we start this book and come back next week to study and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.