

ing the night in a den of hungry lions. And the kicker in verse 35, “Women received back their dead.” Woah. That’s resurrection power! A picture of faith leads to triumph. But...then there is verses 35-38; more pictures in our faith gallery, but they don’t seem triumphal or successful. “Mockings, prison, sawn in two, put to death by the sword, afflicted, ill-treated”. (V.39) “They did not receive what was promised.” Why??? Because God had provided something better for us.” What if we pray and have faith but God doesn’t deliver? We love the triumph through faith stories, but what about faith in tragedy? What if God calls us to faith not to escape but faith to endure? What if your marriage partner still walks out? What if the tuition money doesn’t come through? What if that business venture doesn’t succeed the way you’d hoped. What if you don’t get accepted into the program. What if your job is terminated? What if that relationship never gets restored? That illness never finds healing? Faith believes God works beyond both triumph and tragedy. Yes, (V. 32-35) God can do it in triumph. But verses 35-38, God may give us the strength to endure, “to provide something better” through it rather than provide escape from it. Sometimes God calls us to a faith in tragedy. Faith believes both are true. How is this possible? I must believe that there is something better than having it all or losing it all. I must believe that God is better than anything this life can give me or anything this life can take away from me. What would it be like to have a faith that was better than losing it all and even better than gaining it all?

Chapter 12 of Hebrews is a pep talk of encouragement. It reminds us we are not alone. We are part of a team that calls us to keep our eyes on Jesus. Stop looking around at what others are doing, the race they have set before them. Enjoy the journey. Hear the cheers. Hear white bearded Moses stab his staff into the sky and rumble out encouragement with his Charlton Heston deep voice. Listen for Rahab calling out, “come on, you got this, you go girl!” Toss aside whatever is keeping you from running hard after Jesus. What is it? Don’t evaluate by asking, “Well, what’s wrong with it? Ask what is right with it? Is it drawing me toward Jesus or holding me back? Keeping me from moving forward. We pull for each other (11:12). We strengthen each other. It’s a long distance run, not a sprint. Endure. Keep on. Hang in there.

Hebrews chapter 13 wraps up the book with some very practical challenges because of who Christ is and what He has done for you and the power He is working in you; because of your new identity in Him and the freedom from having to perform and love. You be welcoming to others, accept them, love them, initiate. Reach out the those who are ill-treated and oppressed. Reach out to the pris-

oners, the refugee and hurting. I’m excited to see this happening right here in our body, an eagerness to reach out and God is at work in very powerful ways.

A thankful heart of worship will be content. Content with what God has given or not given whether that’s a marriage partner or finances. (13:4-5) We don’t need money to be attractive or secure. In Christ, I am truly attractive and significant and secure. Don’t treat your money as sacred and your sexuality as common. Something sacred you keep private to yourself and don’t share. Something common you share with anyone. So we are to be promiscuous with our money but not with our body. Be thankful and content with what God has given. Offer up a sacrifice of praise. (13:15) Ask yourself, “Is my heart amazed by the grace of God? Is my mind gripped by the truth of God? Is my faith resting in the power of God? Is my imagination guided by the beauty of God? Is my life steadied by the sovereignty of God? Is my hope filled with the glory of God? Then offer up a sacrifice of praise to Him.

God calls on leaders to lead well (V.17-19) be faithful to Gods word, be a godly example, filled with faith. Our leaders stepped out in faith today with their commitment of giving as an example of faith. People follow and step out in faith. Pursue after joy. Pray for your leaders. Make it easy for your leaders to pursue after joy. As we follow after our great shepherd the God of peace. In an every changing world embrace a changeless Christ who is the same, yesterday, today and forever. Go to Jesus. Run to Him today.

God, may you equip us for every good work to do your will? Work in me what is pleasing in your sight. Do it through Jesus and may He be glorified as He works through me.”

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

“Hebrews: The Greatest Hits”

Sermon Series: “Greater Than: A Study Through the Book of Hebrews”

NORTHVIEW BIBLE CHURCH



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Hebrews
Pastor Norm Schwab

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What words come to your mind when you think back over the book of Hebrews? Jesus, greater than, rest, drifting, shadow, endure, draw near, priesthood, advocate, faith, peace, encourage. We have spent the last ten months walking through the verses, the individual trees of Hebrews, and this morning we will enjoy a view of the entire forest and do a fly-by of the major themes of Hebrews. I will be your tour guide and point out significant vistas as we pass overhead.

If Hebrews were not included in the Bible, what would we be missing out on? Of all the books in the New Testament, it’s Hebrews that helps us look back at the Old Testament and understand God’s plan from the very beginning. God filled the history of His people with lessons that shine light on His amazing plan for all people. The understanding of the Old Testament is essential for properly understanding Hebrews. The priestly and sacrificial systems were all shadows that hinted at what God planned to do in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament was designed to set up the New Testament. The Old Testament is just a shadow, with no completion without the New Testament. So also, the New Testament without the Old Testament is really difficult to understand as the Old Testament is an illustration, pointing toward the Illustrator, Jesus. The author looks back, not with the intention of relieving those good old days, but to help us live these days right now. Do you hear the voices of the great heroes of our faith cheering us on, the ordinary and imperfect urging us to keep going, you can do it? Stand firm in a world that is shaking all around us.

The answer to the big question the author of Hebrews wants to answer and plant firmly in our minds and hearts is “**Who is this Jesus?**” Earlier this year on Sunday, February 5 I began our study in the book of Hebrews and stood here stating that if some of us knew what difficult challenges we would be facing this year, we might be tempted to curl up into the fetal position and weep in pain and fear. Some of you have experienced great heartache and pain. I promised no sermon entitled, “Five Steps to Make It Through the Crisis”. That’s not what we need most. What we need are not more tips and tricks. What we need is more of Jesus. My job is to simply preach Jesus Christ. We need a bigger, more beautiful view of Jesus Christ. If that answer disappoints, it’s because we really don’t know who Jesus is and what is available to us in Him. Hebrews shouts out loud, “There is nothing better than Jesus. The author truly believes that if he can just get people to see Jesus in a bigger more glorious, powerful way, then a lot of things we struggle with: rest, contentment,

identity, significance...will all fall into place. As we move closer to Jesus, we see Him bigger. Jesus doesn’t become bigger any more than a mountain grows bigger the closer we drive forward. The mountain doesn’t change but our perspective of it does. The closer we get to Jesus the more we see of Him as majestic.

Who is this Jesus? Jesus is greater than anything else. Nothing is better than Jesus. Jesus is greater than anything experienced under the Law. Jesus is greater than any created being, even the powerful angels. Jesus is greater than any Old Testament character; Abraham, Moses, Joshua. Jesus is better than any sacrifice or covenant or Old Testament priest, temple or ritual. Jesus is simply better than all the shadows of the Old Testament that served to point to Jesus.

Who is this Jesus and why should I listen to Him? In the first few verses of chapter one, God has spoken to us through His son in variety of ways. Jesus is the final word that never grows stale or out of date. The Jesus we know today is the very same Jesus that the original reader knew 2,000 years ago. The details of life and homes and transportation and communication have changed tremendously, but Jesus remain contemporary. The same truths that buoyed up the original readers, give strength to us. Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever. He is the Inheritor, the Creator, the Sustainer, the Radiator of God’s glory, the Representative of God, the Redeemer and Ruler. Jesus is greater than anything we could come up with and so fix your eyes on Jesus, who is forever and with us for the long haul, He authored our faith and He will be with us in the finish too.

Question two highlights another major theme of Hebrews; **Where can I find rest?** Hebrews writes to those who are in danger of drifting. (2:1,3) D.A. Carson writes, “People don’t drift toward holiness. Apart from grace driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. No. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance. We drift toward disobedience and call it freedom. We drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated.” Understand this, drifting has no resistance, no friction; we don’t even realize that its happening but it causes a restlessness in our soul. We become isolated. We pull back and get distracted by other things. We start to buy into the beer commercial theology, “It doesn’t get

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any better than this.” We start to believe this world is all there is. We start to believe that in following Jesus we are getting cheated out of real living. So we slowly drift into unbelief that leads to disobedience and sin, which produces a hardened heart and a restless soul. And we wonder; where can I find rest?

The source of rest is being satisfied in God. Augustine wrote, “Our hearts are restless until it finds rest in God.” When I am tempted to trust in anything besides Jesus, I will be restless. Hebrews 3:1-6 challenges us to pursue substance, not the shadow. Why would I spend my time gazing longingly at a photograph of my wife Erin when I can walk into the next room and talk to her face to face? Don’t settle for a copy, a shadow, when you can have the real thing! Don’t keep drinking milk when you can sink your teeth into a juicy steak of God’s truth. And really, it’s not about the amount of biblical knowledge you have in your head. Obey what you know (however little or much that may be). Rest comes when I submit to the written Word and draw near to the Living Word. It’s the written word that always points us to the Living Word. Jesus, the Living Word didn’t stay aloof and distant. (2:1-11) He came and engaged. That is what this season celebrates. Jesus’ incarnation, the Immanuel, God with us. He came as fully human who connects with us. He disarmed Satan and frees us. His truth sets us free bringing rest. (2:17) He gets it. Jesus understands and has felt the full weight of temptation. We can’t ever accuse Jesus of not understanding the challenges we face. The more we know Jesus, the more we trust. The more we trust, the more we rest. Rest is my declaration of freedom. When I fix my eyes on Jesus I can declare freedom from my worries, freedom from becoming so easily bothered, freedom from sin. The more I place my trust in God, the more I can cease fearing the giants that loom large. In Jesus our rest is restored. (4:1-16) Do you see who is on your team now? Draw near with confidence.

Question number three. **Why do I need a priest?** Chapters 7, 9 and 10 spend time answering that question. The unbelieving pagan neighbors would ask the Hebrew Christians, “Where is your temple? Where is your priest? Who is leading your religious parade? Where is your offerings and sacrifices to your god? Where are all the bells and smells that make up a religion? How do you connect to God?” Christianity is not a religion. Christianity points me to a person. A religion says, you must do this for God to accept you and Christianity says, God has accepted you in Jesus...so now live like this.

The Old Testament law pointed out what sin was, revealed sin, and the OT priest served its purpose to sacrifice an animal and cover that sin, but the sacrifice could never remove sin. The Old Testament priest was never meant to be permanent, it

pointed to Jesus our ultimate high priest who connects people to God. My sin is what separates me from God. My sin caused a barrier between me and God. That is my greatest problem. My greatest problem is not a troubled marriage or a wild teenager or a stack of unpaid bills. My sin and guilt is my greatest problem. I am pardoned by Jesus my priest who lives forever. He made the once for all sacrifice, by His own body on the cross. Jesus now sits at the right hand of Father God and mediates for me, on my behalf 24-7.

So how did Old Testament saints get saved? The very same way we do today. All are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament sacrifices were not a means to salvation, but evidence of their faith to cover their sin until Jesus paid the price to remove their sins. Jesus’ sacrifice is retroactive to bring forgiveness of sins to Old Testament saints and proactive to bring us forgiveness today. Jesus’ work on the cross radiates out... working forward and backward to save. And so, if Old Testament sacrifices were able to cover sins, how much more so is Jesus sacrifice to remove our sins.

Many powerful leaders these days are getting exposed for their sin and their guilty conscience is being poked. They fear exposure that people might get too big of a peak at what’s on the inside of them. Some right now are worried, feeling guilty that they might be tomorrow mornings headlines because they know what they’ve done. But their biggest problem is not a guilty conscience but actual guilt. Their guilt will not be removed by religious activity and temples and bells and offerings. One is not saved by scrambling to fix ourselves or work harder. We are accepted by God, not our performance, our knowledge or obedience. We are accepted by God when we embrace the fact that Jesus paid it all.

All this grates against our modern sensibilities. Blood and sacrifice seems quite gory, yet it does help us see the cost of our sin. We want a God of love, and He is, but God is more than that. What would it be like to not have God also be a God of justice? We understand justice, we long for justice when we’ve been wronged. Maybe some would let it go if our home is broken into and things we value are stolen. We might say, “Oh, they are really good at heart, they didn’t really mean to steal.” Perhaps but what if a child of ours is brutally damaged. We would not respond, “Oh, it’s OK, everyone is basically good, he didn’t really mean to.” NO! Every bone in our body screams for justice. So too the justice coursing through God’s bones will not allow Him to simply overlook sin. God really does hate sin and all it does to cause damage to people and ravage the human heart. It’s in Christ that I am saved from the wrath of God, because He took my place. He paid my sin debt. He is my stand-in, my substitute. There are only two places for my sin to go. It’s

going to be either stuck on me or stuck to Christ. When I join myself to Christ, He becomes my defense attorney, my advocate, my priest. When I am called up before the throne of God my advocate, Jesus, says to God the judge; “Father, you demand justice. Norm here is guilty but I’ve already made payment for his sin. It would be unjust for you to receive payment twice for the same sin. Therefore, I stand before the court of heaven this morning, not asking for mercy, but demanding justice and compete acceptance of my client because his crime has already been fully paid for.” It is then the love of God that provides a way of escape from the wrath of God, by sacrificing the son of God to vindicate the justice of God and exalt the glory of God. The gospel makes no sense apart from the wrath of God. If no wrath, then no judgment or hell we need to escape from. If no judgment, then Christ was sacrificed in vain, and His death on the cross what a worthless mistake.

We need both God’s love and God’s wrath to see the complete story. God loves us so much that if you choose to go to hell, you will have to step over the body of His dead son to get there. (Of course not literally because Jesus rose again, but you get the point.) God proved His love for us by offering His son up for us, in love to satisfy His justice. Jesus stepped in to pay what we could never pay. Even if I wanted to, I can’t die for anyone’s sin, “I’m already on death row.” Only our perfect priest and Advocate Jesus, can offer up the, once-for-all, perfect sacrifice.

When we join to Him, it totally changes our identity. Be overwhelmed by the shocking truth that Jesus loves you despite being a sinner. Sinner is no longer your identity; you are in Christ. So I am no longer a slave to fear because in Christ I am a child of God. This is exceptionally good news. I am now free to love because I see how much I have been loved. I don’t have to overwork with frenetic religious activity to gain acceptance or significance because I already am accepted by God in Christ. And that is why I need Jesus as my great high priest.

Chapter 11 introduces our fourth question this morning. **“What does daring faith look like?”** Walking through the verses of Hebrews chapter 11 is like taking a stroll through an art gallery of faith heroes of extraordinary, ordinary and imperfect people. Faith is so attractive to God (V.5) such that “without faith its impossible to please Him.” Faith is forward looking, (11:1) “it is the assurance of things hope for”, even when you cannot see it coming. Faith is believing in advance what only makes sense in reverse. Its like a musical composer who can hear in his mind what was written even before a single note is ever played. So faith celebrates right now the reality of future blessings. 11:6 faith starts with the belief that “God is.” We believe and take our faith up in a Who, not a what. Daring faith re-

sponds and takes action as Noah steps out and builds his ark. (V.7) Noah’s faith grows stronger in adversity. In Abraham, we see how Faith is adventurous. Abraham packed up and moved his family thousands of miles to a location he wasn’t familiar with. God will at times move us, shake up our faith to help us see clearly what really is the source of our joy. (11:8,9) In Abraham we see a faith that waits and anticipates. He never fully saw the completion of the promises given him. (V.13) “he died in faith, without seeing all the promises.” A person of faith will expect testing, just ask Abraham. God told him he would be a father of many nations, but no son, waiting, testing. Sacrifice your only son, waiting, waiting...then God provided a ram caught in the bushes.

Moses (V.23-25) chose to follow God over the very best this world had to offer. He chose to love God rather than fame, power, and wealth as prince of Egypt. Tim Keller says we are only as durable as the thing we love the most. What do you love most? If I love something, someone who lasts forever, then I will last. But if I love something or someone most that is temporary, vulnerable than I am vulnerable. If my love, my goal, is to be happy no matter what, I am vulnerable. If my relationship with someone is what I love most, then when that becomes under threat or dies, I am shaken badly but if the One I love most lasts forever, then I too will be durable. You are as durable as that which you most love. What do you love most? Who do you love most?

In 11:29-31 we see faith often appears absurd. It runs up against the Red sea? Is there faith that God could build up a wall of water to bring salvation to His people. It runs up against the Jordan river at flood stage. Is there faith that God could part the waters? Faith runs up against the powerful walls of Jericho. Is there faith that God could tear down those walls? Are you facing a wall that needs tearing down today? Are you facing an impossible situation that needs God to build up a wall, restore and save? When everything that is standing in the way of God’s salvation looks stronger and smarter and has a better chance of success than God’s way, faith in God often appears absurd. But that is when God delights in impossible odds, as we step out and believe in advance what can only make sense in reverse. In the Jericho story we see faith showing up in places you’d least expect it to. A prostitute Rahab is not saved by her religious performance or knowledge of God and the Bible. She didn’t know much, but she acted. She was saved by faith in responding to what little she did know. Faith shows up in places you’d least expect it.

Faith shows up in triumph and tragedy. (11:32-40) In verses 32-35 it shows faith in great triumphs and success. Gideon’s weakness gives way to a massive rout of the Midianite armies. David’s weakness as a shepherd boy moves in faith to defeat a giant. Daniel overcame the odds spend-