

- Welcome to our study of one of the most challenging and rewarding of all New Testament letters - the letter to the Hebrews
 - As the title suggests, this letter has a Jewish focus
 - But don't let that fool you into thinking the letter won't have something to say to a Gentile audience like us
 - While this writer may have been concerned with thinking and behaviors unique to a Jewish mindset, we can easily find parallels to our own erroneous thinking today
 - But because the writer tackles Jewish culture, this letter can be particularly challenging for western Gentile Christians to understand
 - And in that way, a study of Hebrews can be especially rewarding for Bible students, because it requires we raise our game if we're going to interpret it properly
 - Ironically, the central message of the letter is spiritual maturity
 - That is, knowing the truth fully and then living up to the demands that our faith requires
 - It's ironic, when you consider that it requires a hefty degree of spiritual maturity to interpret correctly some of the difficult passages in this letter
 - In fact, this will be the third or fourth time I have taught this letter, and my own experience over that time mirrors the message of the letter in a sense
 - I have changed my perspective on various points in this letter
 - And I've come to new and better understanding as I've grown and matured as a Bible student
 - So you could say my teaching of Hebrews mirrors the message of Hebrews, which is:
 - To pay closer attention to what has been revealed in Christ
 - To press on to maturity
 - Leaving behind old thinking
 - And seeking to please the Lord
 - In this latest teaching of Hebrews, I have all these goals in mind
 - But I also want to remain mindful of not missing the forest for the trees

I can best illustrate the difficulty of interpreting this letter with a simple story of two pastors who go camping together. They reach the camp site, set up camp and turn in for the night. In the early morning hours, the first pastor wakes up to see a night sky filled with the stars of the heavens.

He quickly wakes up the second pastor and says, "Look up into the sky and tell me what you see." The second pastor rubs the sleep from his eyes, peers into the night sky and says, "I see millions and millions of stars."

Then the first pastor says, “Yes, but what does that tell you?”

The second pastor thought for a moment, and then replied, “Well, it means God’s infinite power created millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Which tells me that God is great and that we are small and insignificant by comparison. And it speaks to the grace of God that He would concern Himself with us. So what does it tell you?”

The first pastor replied, “Somebody stole our tent.”

- As with the study of any epistle (*i.e.*, a NT letter), we need to get our bearings as we start the study
 - By bearings, I mean we need to understand a bit about the writer, the audience and the times in which the letter was written
 - That background is very helpful in guiding our interpretation of what the letter contains
 - Immediately, we’re faced with one of the more intriguing aspects of this letter: the author is unknown
 - This is the only book of the New Testament, and one of only a few in the Bible overall, where the author is a mystery
 - As a result of this mystery, there is a long-standing debate over who it might have been
 - As early as 255 AD, Church leaders concluded the author of the book was unknown
 - Some speculate it was Paul, Barnabas, Luke, and others
 - From 400-1600 AD, the Roman Church declared the letter to be the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews
 - And there are some good reasons to think it may have been Paul
 - The writer has a firm grasp of OT pictures of Christ
 - He has an in-depth understanding of the Jewish culture, sacrificial system, law, prophets, OT scripture
 - The closing of the letter sounds a little like Paul and mentions Timothy, a protégé of Paul
 - But that’s about the only reason to think it may be Paul
- But despite the Catholic Church’s point of view, there are more compelling reasons to think it wasn’t Paul who wrote this letter
 - First, the writing style is very different from Paul’s other letters
 - A large number of Greek words used in this letter are found nowhere else in Scripture (including in Paul’s letters)

- And many of Paul's characteristic phrases are missing
 - *Kathos ge grap tai* – “As it is written...”
- The letter is missing Paul's typical introduction, prayers for the readers, benedictions or thanks
- So if this letter were written by Paul, then he would have had to receive a vocabulary and style transplant prior to writing
- Therefore, it's very unlikely that Paul was the author
- A clue to authorship is found in Chapter 2, where the writer refers to himself as one who never personally encountered Christ himself (2:3)
 - Apostles were men appointed by the Lord personally
 - And all Scripture was authored directly or indirectly by an apostle
 - Yet this author says he received the Gospel handed down from others and not from the Lord personally
- Since the early Church fathers accepted this letter as Scripture, then they must have had reason to believe the content was authored under apostolic authority
 - But if the author himself never encountered the Lord, then he could not be an apostle
 - Therefore, the author must have accompanied an apostle, much like Luke shadowed Paul, and Mark shadowed Peter
 - Then the content came from an apostle, but the writing was done by another person who accompanied an apostle
 - Perhaps the author shadowed Paul, which would account for the similarities in theology, while allowing for differences in style
 - In the end, the proper conclusion is to respect the Lord's decision to obscure the author by not naming anyone, since we can't be sure
- Moving from the author to the audience, things become much more clear
 - The audience for this letter was Hellenistic believers in Jewish churches located outside the city Jerusalem in a region called the Diaspora
 - In the first 40 years of the Church, the body consisted largely of Jewish believers
 - You could find two kinds of Jewish believers in the Church
 - First, the original believers were the Palestinian Jews living in present-day Israel
 - They were largely poor (Rom. 15, 1 Cor. 16)
 - They followed more traditional religious practices
 - They used the Hebrew Scriptures, rather than reading from the Septuagint (the translation of the OT into Greek)
 - They were taught and disciplined largely by James, Peter and other key apostles and disciples
 - Secondly, there were Hellenistic Jews

- These believers were scattered in the Diaspora, a region of ten Greek cities outside Palestine
 - These believers were typically more liberal in views and practices
 - They made a point to integrate into the Greek culture
 - They spoke and read Greek, and used the Septuagint
 - They were taught through letters and visits by Paul and other apostles
 - But they were also heavily influenced by false teachers and Judaizers who traveled from place to place countering Paul's teaching with their own false theology
 - Such theology included the belief that the Law was still in effect and that believers had to become Jews before they could be Christians
- Like the letters of Peter, James and Jude, this author wrote to these Hellenistic believers living in the Diaspora – these are known as the Jewish epistles
 - All of these letters have common themes:
 - They dispute Jewish folklore and myth
 - They reorient their understanding of Jewish history and Scripture
 - They contend with simplistic assumptions about God
 - And remind them of the serious nature of their own salvation and the coming judgment
- Hebrews quotes exclusively from the Septuagint version of the OT, with teaching that aims to correct liberal Jewish thinking common among Hellenistic Jews
 - In many ways, this letter was a response to the same kinds of spiritual immaturity that runs rampant in the Western, Gentile Church today
 - For example, the Hellenistic Jews placed an inappropriate and unhealthy emphasis on myth, supernatural folklore, and particularly, on angels
 - But so do some Christians today
 - And the writer of this letter worried that some in the Church assembly had heard the Gospel without actually embracing it
 - And today, many unbelievers congregate with believers, thinking they are Christians because they attend church
 - The writer highlights the dangers of giving in to the temptation to sin, of choosing to live an unsanctified life as a believer
 - And today, sinful lifestyles are becoming the norm in some circles of the Church
 - In fact, many of our brothers and sisters spend more time rationalizing their fleshly desires to be OK with their Christian faith, rather than submitting to the authority of God's Word and to the Spirit
 - Finally, this writer warned believers not to live in a perpetual state of spiritual immaturity, oblivious to the coming judgment

- Yet so many believers today are entrapped by the cares, pleasures, worries and riches of this life
 - And they are ill-prepared to meet the Lord at His coming
- So while the stumbles of these Hellenistic churches were uniquely Jewish in nature, the underlying spiritual problems are common to all believers
 - The need to set aside myths and immature ways of thinking about God
 - The imperative to avoid sin, to live in the Spirit
 - Knowing the demands of faith and being mindful of our approaching judgment
- Lastly, we need some understanding of the historical timing and circumstances surrounding this letter
 - Based on comments in the letter, it's likely it was written between 66-69 AD
 - This four-year period was the period during which, the city of Jerusalem was in rebellion to Roman rule
 - In AD 66, the Jews in Jerusalem had kicked the Romans out and decided they were no longer going to live subject to Roman rule
 - The Romans had retaliated by attacking Jerusalem, but they had not yet succeeded in breaching the city walls
 - While the battle raged outside the walls, the Jewish temple still stood with sacrifices operating daily
 - But anyone who understood the prophecy of Jesus, knew the end for the city and the temple was very near
 - And in fact, in AD 70, the city did finally fall and the temple was completely destroyed
 - This writer refers to the temple and the sacrificial system as if they were still in operation at the time he wrote – so we know this letter could not have been written later than AD 69
 - But then, he says these institutions were growing old and were “soon to disappear”
 - That wording leaves us to conclude the writer could see the end for the city was near, thereby dating the letter to the latter half of the 60s AD
 - The writer drew upon this to make a point: that the old was giving way to the new and that soon, even the ability to carry-out the sacrificial system would be gone – as God had intended
- Knowing the end for the city was so near, gave the writer an added sense of urgency – an urgency that comes across in his writing
 - After the destruction of Jerusalem, persecution against Jews and Christians intensified greatly
 - The Roman Empire, under Nero and Titus, goes after believers with a vengeance
 - And the writer seems to understand what's coming, by the inspiration of the Spirit

- And so he warns believers to move on to maturity, knowing that difficult times were coming
- And for many believers, the end of their earthly lives were closer than they realized
- Once again, the circumstances of this letter echo for believers today
 - We may not be experiencing persecution at the hands of our government yet, but the signs are there
 - Moreover, we can see that this age is drawing to a close
 - The Lord's return is imminent
 - Now is not the time to be distracted by sin and the world's desires
 - Now is the time to strive for maturity, understanding the nature of our days
- But before we get into all that, let's start the letter with its beautiful introduction, focused on the letter's central theme: the Lord and His preeminence

Heb. 1:1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,

Heb. 1:2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

Heb. 1:3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power...

- These opening verses present the writer's primary purpose in writing, and it reveals his plan for how he will structure his arguments
 - The theme is the superiority of Christ in God's plan
 - God has worked in variety of ways to reveal Himself
 - But all that revelation culminated in His Son, Christ
 - And the writer's method for making his arguments will be contrast
 - This letter is a study in contrasts: between what God has done in the past vs. what God has done now, through His Son
 - Throughout the letter, the writer will draw these contrasts from old ways to the new way in Christ
 - The point isn't to diminish the past, for it all had a good purpose
 - The writer's point is to elevate Christ way above anything else in God's plan
 - While the old things were good in their own way, Christ is far better than they were
 - And so Christ's preeminence demands our complete attention and exclusive devotion
 - The old must give way to the new

- They don't combine or work together - except that the old existed to lead us to the new
 - That is the writer's plan of attack as he draws one contrast after another throughout the letter
- Looking at this initial contrast, the writer contrasts the way God delivered revelation to His people in days past, as compared to the way He has revealed Himself to men today
 - First, notice God *spoke* in the past
 - Our God is a God of the spoken Word
 - He is not a silent God, like the mute idols men make for themselves
 - He has chosen to make Himself known to His Creation by His Word, by speaking to men
 - Nor was God satisfied to be found by what had been made, though all Creation testifies to Him, Romans 1 says
 - Even as He brought all things into existence by His spoken Word
 - Nor was He content to provide His revelation in written form alone, though this is how men have preserved it
 - The Lord determined to reveal Himself to men through a spoken Word, speaking to the fathers and the prophets
 - Our God is not silent
 - He will make Himself known, but that knowledge comes in times and in ways and in portions as the Lord chooses
 - The writer says these past revelations came in portions and in many ways
 - The word "portion" just means "parts"
 - No one father or prophet received the entire revelation of God's spoken Word
 - One father, like Abraham, received one part, while another prophet, like Isaiah, received another part
 - One received it in a dream, like Joseph, while another received it from a burning bush on a mountain, like Moses
 - One received a small portion, like a minor prophet, while others were given a life-long ministry of revelation
- But none of these men heard everything from God
 - They were each a stepping stone along a path the Lord planned from the beginning of time
 - Each step was making progress toward a final message
 - Exodus depended on Genesis
 - And 1&2 Samuel depended on Judges
 - And Daniel depended on Jeremiah, *etc.*
 - God's Word is progressive, like the unveiling of a novel one chapter at a time

- That's why the books of the canon are not organized according to the date they were written
- They are ordered according the progressive revelation of God
- Each book provides a portion of God's revelation, built upon what has been revealed by earlier books
 - Job was probably the first written book
 - But the revelation in that book depends on the events of earlier books
- Where was all this progressive revelation leading?
 - The writer tells us in v.2 that now we enter the last days, when all speaking is of and by His Son
 - Past revelation came by a father or prophet
 - And past revelation came in parts
 - But now, all speaking by God comes through the Son
 - Both the source of the revelation and the portion, have become much greater than what God used in the past
 - The writer calls this time "the last days" to emphasize that all that earlier revelation has now reached its intended purpose
 - We've received the full measure of God's revelation in the Person and Words of Jesus Christ
 - Abraham could not be said to be living in the last days, because more revelation came during the days *after* Abraham
 - The same was true for Moses and for the prophets later
 - There was always more revelation to come, so the "last days" had not yet arrived
 - But today, we can say we're in the last days, because the full and complete revelation of God has arrived in Christ
 - All of God's Word is completed in Christ
 - There is no more revelation to come, no greater prophet, no greater portion still be revealed
 - So when a Joseph Smith or the Jehovah's Witnesses or some other cult leader comes along claiming to have something new from God to reveal, we can know automatically they are false prophets
 - Now that the Son has come, the time for portions is over
- And Christ's preeminence extends back to the beginning of everything
 - Hebrews tells us in v.2, that Jesus is the One who made the world, as described in Genesis 1
 - And of course, Genesis teaches that the creation process was itself the result of God speaking Creation into existence
 - This is why John takes to calling Jesus by the title "The Word" in his Gospel

- Jesus is God's spoken Word, according to John

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:2 He was in the beginning with God.

John 1:3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

- In verse 3, John says that it was the Word (Jesus) that created all things
- We know from John 4:24, that God the Father is all Spirit, meaning He doesn't exist in physical form
- There is no physical substance to God the Father
- Therefore, the Creation cannot experience the Father as He truly is, because we are bound to a physical dimension – yet He is not physical
- Secondly, we know that God's Spirit is likewise invisible according to John 3:6-8
 - The Spirit can only be known by observing His work in the Creation
 - John said, all things were made by and through Jesus, and the writer of Hebrews has just affirmed that truth as well
- Notice next, the writer of Hebrews says the Christ is the radiance of the Father's glory and the exact representation of the Father's nature
 - First, Jesus is the radiance of the Father's glory
 - How do we know the sun has risen?
 - You can't actually see the sun
 - We can see the beams of light that emanate from it
 - Those rays of light are the radiance of the sun
 - And so we can know of the sun's brightness, because something has come from the sun and allowed us to perceive it
 - Likewise, the Son of God is the radiance of the Father's glory
 - In a real sense, the Son of God is the light emitting from the Father (John calls Jesus the Light of the World)
 - The world can know the Father and can perceive His glory by seeing what has come from Him in the Son
 - And Christ is the exact representation of the Father's nature
 - In Greek, the word translated "exact representation", is the same word for "character"
 - The word is also used to describe the impression made when an image is stamped into the face of a coin
 - Jesus is an exact representation of the character of the Father

- And Jesus came into the Creation so that by Him, we might know the invisible Father

John 14:7 “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.”

John 14:8 Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”

John 14:9 Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

- Paul also echoes this truth in Colossians 1, telling us Jesus is the "image of the invisible God"
- Therefore, the only Person in the Godhead Who has entered into and become a part of the physical Creation, is Jesus
 - Jesus was the actor creating the world in Genesis 1, speaking the world into existence
 - And Hebrews also tells us Jesus was the member of the Godhead who became flesh as an ambassador of the Godhead to His Creation
- So when God the Father determined to reveal Himself to Creation through His Son, He began that revelation with His Son as the Creator, speaking it into existence
 - After the Son made the universe, He continued to be the *Logos* of God, speaking God's revelation to men throughout history
 - That revelation came in those many parts, progressively revealing more and more about the Creator and His plan for redeeming His Creation
 - And all that revelation pointed to its source: to Christ Himself
 - Leading up to the day Christ appeared incarnate, giving substance to the Word and fulfilling all that it foretold
 - Someone once said that the OT is the NT predicted
 - While the NT is the OT fulfilled
 - Now that Jesus has appeared in physical form, He has given us the final, complete and full revelation of Who God the Father is
 - And as such, there can be no greater revelation to come
 - And all past revelation must be interpreted and understood in light of what we have come to know in the Person of Christ
 - We can begin to understand this process (at least to some degree) by drawing an analogy to how we communicate or reveal our thoughts in the physical world
 - When we desire to share something of ourselves to the world around us, we must first conceive an idea in our mind
 - No one can see our thoughts
 - They are invisible, yet they certainly exist

- Without our thoughts, we could purpose to do nothing at all
- If we want to reveal the invisible part of ourselves to the world, we must transfer the invisible realm of our mind into the physical realm for others to receive and understand
 - The brain communicates our thoughts to our mouth, where it becomes *logos*: spoken words
 - Once the spoken word leaves our mouth, it enters the physical world as sound waves and yields its intended effect
 - The spoken word becomes a revelation of our thoughts
 - When someone hears our spoken word, they come to know of something that was previously invisible and unknowable
 - Still, the world's knowledge of our internal thoughts will be a partial knowledge at best
- But what if our thoughts could be made incarnate, if they could take on physical form and live apart from us
 - If that were possible, then the world could come to a complete and full understanding of our invisible nature, through that incarnation
 - Our entire nature – our thoughts and character and personality – would be on display in a physical form
 - We could be fully known
- Likewise, God the Father worked with God the Son (*i.e.*, the Word) to reveal Himself to His Creation first by His Word and ultimately through an incarnate Christ
 - So truly, to know the Son by His Word, is to know the Father
- With that introduction, the writer is now poised to examine various ways in which the Hellenistic churches of his day were failing to live in the light of the revelation of Christ
 - Next week, we examine the first of those failures
 - The failure to accept the Christ as superior to all other messengers – in particular, angels

- Last week, in my introduction to this letter, I said this letter will be a study in contrasts
 - And those contrasts will center around the differences between the old ways, in which God gave revelation to men, and the new and better way
 - The old ways were not wrong, just incomplete
 - Those earlier portions were designed as stepping stones, creating a path leading us to a full and better understanding
 - And Who was at the end of that path? Christ
 - So the writer's goal in writing this letter, is to persuade Jewish believers to abandon a devotion to the old ways and lean entirely on Christ and the New Covenant
 - Now last week, I also pointed out that this letter is squarely focused on the differences between what came in the Old Covenant vs. the New Covenant
 - And that's true
 - And there are still Christians today – Gentile Christians – who need to hear this message
 - Christians who have a romanticized interest in all things Jewish
 - The Law, the festivals, the language, the culture, the teachings, *etc.*
 - And for some, that interest becomes spiritually unhealthy, as it begins to emphasize the necessity of these old things
 - Even to the point of trying to combine the two worlds in an unintended way
 - For those Christians, this letter (along with the letter to the Galatians) stands as a witness against such thinking
 - But what about those of us who have no interest in the old, who have embraced the new, without the baggage of the old?
 - How does this letter speak to us?
 - As I also said last week, we will still find a lot we can learn from the writer's contrasts
 - In particular, this writer punctuates his contrasts with five well-known warnings to the reader
 - Each warning follows from an example, in which the writer illustrates how failure to move forward along that path of spiritual maturity leaves us vulnerable to serious set-backs
 - So even if the issues holding us back are different than those of first century Jewish culture, the consequences are the same
- So let's return to the letter at the end of the introductory verses and into the first contrast offered by the author

Heb. 1:3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

Heb. 1:4 having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

- We already examined the meaning of the first half of v.3, so we pick up in the middle of that verse
 - The writer finishes his description of the greatness of Christ by saying He is the One Who upholds everything by the Word of His power
 - Paul says something similar in Colossians

Col. 1:16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him.

Col. 1:17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

- We noted last week, that Jesus is the member of the Godhead responsible for the Creation process
- By His Word, all things were made
- And all things are held together by the power of His Word
- It's natural to hear those words, as if Christ is actively keeping the universe from falling apart, as if He is working to keep Creation intact
 - But that's not the accurate sense of these words in Greek
 - The world was created by the Word of Christ, and then He ceased the Creation process, Gen. 2 tells us
- The Lord rested from the work of Creation
 - We see the writer repeat this truth at the end of v.3
 - The idea of sitting down reflects the right of a Master to sit while His servants continue working for Him
 - So Jesus is not actively working to keep the universe from falling apart
- Instead, the writer is saying the Creation exists because of the power of God's Word to create it in the first place
 - And in that sense, the Lord holds it together by the power of His Word
 - Moreover, the Greek word for "uphold" includes the meaning of "carrying forward"
 - So the full sense of these words is that Christ brought the world into existence by the power of His Word
 - And the Lord's Word is also carrying the Creation forward to its appointed end
 - Christ's Word made the ship and Christ's Word is steering the ship into port
- And in the meantime, the Lord has assumed a position seated at the right hand of the Father

- To sit at the right hand of a sovereign means that person is the most important person, after the sovereign himself
 - So by the position of Christ in the Throne Room of God, we know there is no one in the Heavens more important to the Father than the Son
 - This makes sense, when we remember that all Creation exists to know and serve the Lord
 - If all Creation owes its existence to Him
 - Then it stands to reason that everything in Creation exists to serve Christ in some way
- So now the writer is prepared to address his first topic of old vs. new.
 - If Jesus is the Creator of all things
 - And if He is second in importance only to the Father Himself
 - Then logically, we must conclude that nothing in the Creation can be as great as Jesus
- He is the Name above all names
 - Names are given to created things
 - When God created the animals, He appointed Adam to give them names
 - When we make something, we name it
 - Names are an indication that something had a beginning, and if something had a beginning, then it had a creator
- But God the Father and God the Spirit have never been created, having never been made incarnate
 - So they do not have names given them
 - They call themselves "I AM"
- But the second Person of the Godhead chose to enter the Creation as a man, and therefore, He was given a name: the Father gave Him the Name Jesus (Yeshua)
 - So Jesus is the Name above all other names
 - In other words, among all things in creation, He is the greatest
- And since this is true, we can know that Jesus is greater than any other created messenger or representative that God has ever sent to men, including angels
 - In v.4, the writer says that Jesus has a more excellent name than the angels
 - The word "angel" means "messenger"
 - Angels were a prominent part of Jewish religious life
 - They were second in importance only to God Himself
 - By the time Jesus came to earth, Jewish culture had practically venerated angels
 - We can see this in the Dead Sea Scrolls
 - The Essenes living at Qumran displayed a highly developed angelology in their

writings

- They possessed a book called the “Angel Scroll”
- And another book, supposedly written by the archangel Michael
- And to some extent, we see this angelic fascination re-emerging in some Christian circles
 - It’s almost a superstitious, or new age, approach
 - Some believe in so-called guardian angels
 - And false cults have been born out of appearances of “angels of light” that appeared with new messages for the faithful
- It’s not hard to see how Jewish culture became so fascinated by angels, when we notice how often the Lord uses angels, both in the Old Testament and in our day
 - When they appeared to men, angels usually came in powerful and imposing ways
 - They often created great fear, which caused angels to preface their message with the standard greeting, “Do not fear”
 - I like to think that angels wear name tags that say “Hello, I’m Michael. Do not fear.”
 - And they came bearing a message from God
 - As we look across all the major moments of revelation in the Old Testament, we find angels serving as the messenger of God
 - For example, let’s take a little test
 - Who spoke to Hagar in the desert in Gen. 21?
 - Who spoke to Abraham with Isaac on the mountain in Gen. 22?
 - Who told Jacob and Rachel to leave Laban and return to Canaan?
 - Who appeared to Moses in the burning bush?
 - Who went ahead of the Israelites in a pillar of cloud?
 - Who protected Daniel in the lion’s den?
 - Who spoke to Balaam through the mouth of a donkey?
 - Who told Gideon to rise up and defeat the Midianites?
 - In all cases, the test of Scripture mentions an angel as the messenger
 - In particular, we find one kind of “angel” at the center of these revelations: the angel of the Lord
 - This is no ordinary angel
 - In fact, the term “angel of the Lord” is an Old Testament reference to the Second Person of the Godhead
 - A pre-incarnate Christ
 - So in reality, these moments were not what they seemed
 - But the Jewish reader saw the word “angel” and came away thinking that

angels were all-important to God

- So in the first century, some Jewish believers were struggling to give Christ His proper place in their worship
 - In fact, these Jews still viewed angels as a superior messenger to the Messiah
 - And if an angel is superior to Messiah, then certainly the message delivered by an angel must be superior to the message entrusted to Jesus
 - So the writer must convince his readers that the Messiah is greater than an angel
 - Otherwise, he has no hope to convince them that Christ's message is greater than the ones delivered by angels
 - To do this, the writer will draw his proof from the Jews' own Scriptures, the Old Testament
 - From vs.5-13, the writer gives evidence that the Word of God has always declared the Messiah's superiority to angels

Heb. 1:5 For to which of the angels did He ever say,
 "YOU ARE MY SON,
 TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"?

And again,

"I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM
 AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME"?

Heb. 1:6 And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says,
 "AND LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD WORSHIP HIM."

Heb. 1:7 And of the angels He says,
 "WHO MAKES HIS ANGELS WINDS,
 AND HIS MINISTERS A FLAME OF FIRE."

Heb. 1:8 But of the Son He says,
 "YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER,
 AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM.

Heb. 1:9 "YOU HAVE LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS;
 THEREFORE GOD, YOUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED YOU
 WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE YOUR COMPANIONS."

Heb. 1:10 And,
 "YOU, LORD, IN THE BEGINNING LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH,
 AND THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS;

Heb. 1:11 THEY WILL PERISH, BUT YOU REMAIN;
 AND THEY ALL WILL BECOME OLD LIKE A GARMENT,

Heb. 1:12 AND LIKE A MANTLE YOU WILL ROLL THEM UP;
 LIKE A GARMENT THEY WILL ALSO BE CHANGED.

BUT YOU ARE THE SAME,
 AND YOUR YEARS WILL NOT COME TO AN END."

**Heb. 1:13 But to which of the angels has He ever said,
“SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND,
UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES
A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET”?**

- Let's look at each piece of “evidence” the writer cites and understand how it proves his argument that Christ is greater than angels
 - The whole section is set off by an *inclusio*, which is a literary device intended to highlight a section of the text
 - You can see the beginning and end of the *inclusio* in v.5, and again in v.13
 - The same phrase, “to which of the angels did He ever say...” opens the section and closes the section
 - In v.5, the writer begins his proofs with a quote from Psalms 2:7, where God speaking, calls the Messiah His Son
 - The Lord uses the word “son” to describe different actors in Creation
 - He calls believers “sons of God”
 - He calls the angels “sons of God”
 - But there is only One the Father says is His Son (singular)
 - And only this One has been begotten of the Father
 - The word “only begotten” is *monogenes* in Greek, which means “the only one who comes forth from the Father”
 - No one else has come, or will come, forth from the Father to represent the Godhead in Creation
 - Only the Messiah holds that special place
 - So Psalms 2 taught that there was to be one special representative of the Father, that is, the Messiah
 - No angel can measure up to that place
- Then in v.6, the writer draws a second proof from Deut. 32:43
 - If you go to Deut. 32:43 in your English translation, you're not going to find what you're looking for
 - Because this writer always quotes from the Septuagint (LXX)
 - And in the LXX, Deut. 32:43 reads this way:

Deut. 32:43 Rejoice, ye heavens, with him, and let all the angels of God worship him; rejoice ye Gentiles, with his people, and let all the sons of God strengthen themselves in him; for he will avenge the blood of his sons, and he will render vengeance, and recompense justice to his enemies, and will reward them that hate him; and the Lord shall purge the land of his people.

- Speaking of the coming Messiah, Moses said that all the angels of God will worship Him
 - Surely, if angels worship the Messiah, then He must be a greater messenger than the angels themselves
- Next, in v.7, the writer quotes from Psalm 104 (which is numbered Psa.103 in the LXX) where David says that Christ created the angels

Psa. 103:1 Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, thou art very great; thou hast clothed thyself with praise and honour:

Psa. 103:2 who dost robe thyself with light as with a garment; spreading out the heaven as a curtain.

Psa. 103:3 Who covers his chambers with waters; who makes the clouds his chariot: who walks on the wings of the wind.

Psa. 103:4 Who makes his angels spirits, and his ministers a flaming fire.

- Notice that the psalm opens with the Creation story
- The Lord, who is Christ, is making all things
- And among the things Christ made are the angels
- And the writer compares the angels to wind and fire
 - Fleeting vapors
 - Things that have a beginning and end
 - Things that serve a purpose in the Creation, but cannot compare to the Author of all things
- Then in vs.8-12, the writer highlights the contrast by emphasizing the eternal nature of the Messiah
 - First, in vs.8-9, the writer quotes from Psa. 45, where Jesus is called the God Who sits on an eternal throne
 - Obviously, angels are never called God and have no thrones
 - In fact, angels get very nervous anytime a human dares to attempt to worship them
 - The last time an angel demanded men worship him, it did not turn out well for that angel!
 - And in v.9, the Messiah is described as anointed by His Father to be above all companions, including angels
 - Then in v.10-12, the writer quotes from Psa. 102 to show that unlike angels and the rest of Creation, the Messiah existed before the beginning of Creation
 - And unlike the Creation, the Lord will never come to an end
 - The Lord is eternal and unchanging, but the Creation is wearing out like a garment and must be changed into something new one day
 - The writer is reflecting on the curse God pronounced on Creation in the Garden,

after the fall in Gen. 3

- In the Garden, the Lord pronounced a curse on the physical earth and all that comes from the earth
 - Literally, everything in the earth comes from the earth
 - God called forth all plant life from earth
 - The animals were formed from the dirt of the ground, Gen 2 tells us
 - And the first man was created from the ground
 - And the first woman was created from the body of the first man
 - So literally, everything traces its origin to the earth
 - Therefore, when the earth was cursed for sin, the entire earth was directed to come to an end one day, to wear out and be replaced
 - And with it, all that comes from it
 - Including our physical bodies, which must die because of the curse on the ground
 - This is the course the writer was speaking about earlier, when he said that God's Word upholds the world
 - That Word, spoken so long ago in the Garden, is still directing the course of the universe and our earth
 - Everything is wearing out just as God proclaimed it would
 - And the manner of its destruction is prescribed as well: it will wear out
 - God said that everything came from dust (or dirt) and so to dirt it will return
 - This implies a process of disintegration, and sure enough, that's what we see happening in the world
 - In fact, this process is so predictable and universal that scientists have labeled it the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics
 - All energy in the universe moves from high ordered states to lower ordered states
 - We call it "entropy"
- We live entropy every day
 - Our world is deteriorating around us
 - Our houses and cars and clothes are all falling apart
 - Our bodies are dying a little bit everyday
 - Healthy living is just the slowest possible way to die
 - And we can see the grace of the Lord in the way He decreed a slow wearing away
 - Before men face the judgment that follows death, they're given plenty of reason to consider what comes after death
 - Every person can see that life ends sooner or later

- And more than that, we can see the end approaching in our own life
 - We can't ignore our body's deterioration; mortality stares us in the face every time we look in the mirror
 - So we have all the more reason to get right with God before it's too late
- In contrast to that dying, corrupt Creation and all that it contains, we find a supreme, perfect, incorruptible, eternal Messiah Who is guiding this world to its appointed end
 - He has conquered sin and the death it necessitates
 - One day, He will bring all His enemies to a final end
 - And this is the writer's final proof that the Messiah is the highest, greatest Name above all names, including the angels
 - Only the Messiah can win this victory
 - In v.13, the writer ends his *inclusio*, quoting from Psalm 110, perhaps the greatest Messianic psalms pound for pound
 - Only seven verses, but it's packed with descriptions of Christ
 - Including that he will remain seated in that place of honor, at the right hand of the Father, until all God's enemies are under Christ's feet
 - In other words, Christ's ruling over Creation will continue until all the enemies of God are gone
 - This is an honor and authority nothing else in the Creation can possibly equal, certainly not angels
 - We serve a Lord Who made all things, Who controls all things, Who will defeat all enemies
 - And yet He is also the One Who lowered Himself to assume a name in His Creation
 - The Name above all names
 - So that He could stand in our place, taking the curse of Creation upon His own body for the sake of our sin
 - And then He rose again to fulfill His mission in destroying the enemies of God
 - This is the Messiah, the One and Only in Whom we place our trust for salvation
 - The One with Whom no angel can compare
 - What do we do with this truth?
 - If we're not careful, we can be tempted to diminish Christ's power in our life, relative to some other source of power
 - Luck, chance, our own efforts, the enemy
 - How many Christians refer to Satan's power as if it is somehow in contention with Christ's?
 - The idea that some days Satan is winning, and some days Christ is winning – that is a kind of version of this thinking

- Elevating something in the spiritual realm to an equal, if not greater, position than Christ
- The effect of this is to compromise our spiritual maturity and our walk of faith
 - It creates doubts and worries that don't need to be there
 - And those things change our behavior
 - And that's the writer's concern, which we'll study next time in Chapter 2

- People tend to judge the value of a message – at least in part – by the reputation or importance of the messenger
 - We prefer that important news comes from important and reputable sources
 - If you hear that something big has happened in the world, you turn on a respectable TV news channel to get the details
 - You probably don't flip over to the WWF channel
 - And so it was for the Jewish Christians in the early Church
 - The Jewish Church remembered the importance the Lord placed on angels throughout the course of Jewish history
 - Time and time again, the Lord delivered His messages to Israel by way of angels
 - Many times, that “angel” was actually a pre-incarnate Christ, called the angel of the Lord
 - But nevertheless, the people of Israel saw good reason to hold angels in high regard
 - And Jews respected angels all the more, because the angelic realm exists above the earth-bound existence of mere mortal men
 - Angels came in brilliant light or mysterious dreams
 - Angels had powers and knowledge beyond men
 - And angels didn't die, or get sick, or suffer in all the many ways that sinful man must endure
- So when the early Church received teaching on the New Covenant doctrines of Christ, some Jews struggled with where to rank Jesus as a messenger of Christ
 - That struggle centered on Jesus' form
 - Jesus of Nazareth was a man – fully human, yet fully God
 - And His humanity presented a dilemma for many Jews in the early Church
 - Where do we rank Jesus as a messenger, if He came in a form lower than the form of angels?
 - Can a message delivered by a man be greater than the message God entrusted to angelic beings?
 - For some in the early Church, the answer was “no”
 - Jesus was an important prophet, and perhaps even the Messiah
 - But his form as a human being meant that His message must be considered secondary to the messages delivered by angels
- In Chapter 1, the writer has worked carefully to explain from Old Testament Scripture that the Father has always declared his Son to be superior to angels
 - In fact, the OT Scriptures demonstrated that Jesus occupies a unique place in God's plan
 - He is Son, Creator, Lord and Judge

- He is eternal, while angels were created
- All angels work for Him, not the other way around
- And in fact, angels aren't just working for the Lord as His ministers of fire
 - They are also working for you and me
 - Look at v.14, where we pick up today

Heb. 1:14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?

- Angels are ministering spirits sent out to serve us
 - They are not ruling agents
 - They are not judging agents
 - Only Christ rules and judges
 - They are *ministers*, which is the Greek word for “servants”
- Angels are agents God, created as heavenly servants, and their principle mission is to serve those who are appointed to inherit salvation
 - In other words, among all the duties God gave to angels, the most important duty the Lord assigned was the responsibility of serving you and me
 - When we understand angels in this way, we keep their importance in a proper perspective
 - God didn't choose angels to deliver important messages in past days because angels themselves were important
 - God used them because that was their job
 - They were created for that very purpose
 - But then the time came for the Lord to reveal the Person at the center of those messages, and no ordinary servant would suffice – Christ Himself did it
 - Which is why the writer opened the letter explaining the many ways in which Jesus was superior to angels
 - And with that analysis, the writer has left his audience at a juncture – a decision point
 - We can choose to disagree with the writer's argument that Jesus was greater than angels
 - But if so, then we must go back to the OT texts and show the errors in the writer's conclusions
 - Or we can agree with the writer's teaching, and if so, then the conclusion must follow naturally
 - Jesus is superior to angels, and therefore, anything Jesus delivered was superior to anything delivered by angels

- The writer focuses on what the angels delivered in the form of an Old Covenant through Moses, vs. what Christ delivered in the New Covenant
- Old vs. New, Law vs. Grace, Moses vs. Jesus
- This places the Old and New in their proper context, so we can see how they work together
- The writer's point is simple...who do you say Jesus is?
 - It's the very same question Jesus Himself asked during His earthly ministry

Matt. 16:13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

Matt. 16:14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

Matt. 16:15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Matt. 16:16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

- Our opportunity to be reconciled to God, and to obtain the salvation He offers, hinges on our answer to Jesus' question
 - Who do you say that I am?
- Who is Jesus?
 - Prophet? Teacher? Criminal? Maniac?
 - Or the Son of the Living God? The Messiah?
- It serves no purpose to debate the merits of His teaching, or even to seek to imitate His exemplary life, if we don't believe His claims
 - He claimed to be the Son of God, the Messiah sent to proclaim the Kingdom was at hand
 - He claimed to be equal, one with the Father
 - He claimed to be the Creator
 - If He was not these things, then Jesus is clearly a liar – or at least seriously disturbed
 - And how could we commend the teaching of anyone under those circumstances?
- The writer is making this same argument to the Jewish members of the early Church, asking them to consider this central question: Who do you say Jesus is?
 - The very fact that some in the Church thought angels to be superior to Christ was of serious concern to this writer, because it calls into question their claims to faith
 - Saving faith requires an acceptance of Jesus as Lord
 - Paul says:

Rom. 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

- Confessing – that is, agreeing – that Jesus is the Lord, is at the core of saving faith
- Any church confused on the importance of Jesus in comparison to the rest of the Heavenly host, is a church without saving faith
- And this concern leads the writer into the first of five important warnings issued to his readers
 - These warnings form the rhetorical high points in the letter
 - In fact, we can divide the letter into five sections, each leading up to a warning to the reader
 - Chapters 1 & 2 comprise the first of those five sections and include the first warning of the letter
- The writer issues the warnings to stir his audience to action, because he's concerned over things they are thinking and doing
 - And all five warnings work to correct an aspect of Christian doctrine or duty
 - This first warning addresses the first and most important issue of Christian doctrine: the doctrine of Christology
 - That is, who is Christ?
 - And so the warning is naturally that of the need to receive Him for salvation

Heb. 2:1 For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.

- At the opening of Chapter 2, the writer begins to transition to the warning
 - And this warning is built on the premise he's presented in Chapter 1, that is, the superiority of Christ to anything in creation
 - The writer calls his audience to pay much closer attention to what they have heard from Christ
 - Given Christ's supreme importance as a Messenger, then we must give the utmost attention to what He says
 - Let's take a moment to understand the writer's statement
 - The phrase, "pay much closer attention" is contrasted with "drift away"
 - These phrases in Greek create an image of moving water
 - In fact, the Greek word for "drift" is literally the word to describe the flowing of water
 - The writer is drawing a picture of someone floating in a boat down a slow-moving river
 - And at the edge of the shore, is a firmly-planted rock
 - As we float by the rock, it catches our attention
 - We consider it carefully, but we never reach out to grasp it and stop our

- movement
 - Instead, we just watch it at a distance as we continue to drift
 - Until we drift so far away, it's no longer in sight
- That rock is the message of the Gospel, the Gospel that declares Jesus as Lord
 - This is the rock we must embrace to be saved
 - Yet some in the early Church had heard the Gospel, and even considered it for a time
 - But they hadn't embraced it
 - And so they were in danger of flowing by and drifting away entirely
 - And the evidence of their unbelief is found in their unwillingness to consider Jesus as above the angels
 - Their continued preference for angels, and the messages delivered by angels, betrayed their lack of faith in Jesus and His claims to be the Messiah
 - At the very least, they weren't clear on the purpose of the Messiah
 - And so, they were letting the truth of the Gospel pass them by
 - They may have been assembling in the church, but they were not yet part of the Church, spiritually speaking
 - There is nothing shocking, or even usual, about suggesting that some in the Church are not truly believers
 - This has always been a reality in the Church
 - And it will only get worse as we approach the apostasy in the last days
 - Every day, men and women walk into congregations and join themselves to the gathering, without actually knowing Christ as Lord
 - Hopefully, they soon come to know the Lord, but some never do
 - They hang around the faithful and mimic the Church culture, but they have never come to understand and agree that Jesus is God
 - The essence of the Gospel escapes them
- The writer begins his letter, calling out those in the Church who continue to live in unbelief, citing as his proof their continued reliance on angels over a reliance on Christ
 - And to that group, the writer issues a warning

Heb. 2:2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty,
Heb. 2:3 how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,
Heb. 2:4 God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

- The writer again draws a comparison to angels and the messages they delivered
 - The Word, spoken through angels, is a reference to the Law of Moses, delivered by angels as part of the Old Covenant
 - That Word was *unalterable*, the writer says
 - The Law of God never had a clause for amendment
 - Our nation's constitution has a provision allowing the people to change the law of the land through amendments
 - So our law is not unalterable
- But God's Law for Israel was unalterable
 - No amendments, no adjustments
 - As Jesus said:

Matt. 5:18 “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

- All the Law must be accomplished, according to Jesus
- So if someone in the nation of Israel failed to heed the instructions found in the Law, they were subject to the death penalty
 - There is no provision, or sacrifice, in the Law of Moses for intentional sin
 - If someone in Israel intentionally disregarded the instructions found in the Law, then there was only one remedy under the Law
 - They were subject to the death penalty
 - Their earthly lives were in jeopardy if they failed to heed what an angel delivered to them through Moses
 - So likewise, the writer asks in v.3, what kind of penalty should we expect if we neglect so great a salvation as the one delivered by the Lord Himself?
 - The word for “neglect” in Greek is *ameleo*, which means “to pay no attention”
 - In other words, if we ignore the salvation offered in Christ, what penalty awaits us?
 - If the penalty for ignoring an angel's instructions was physical death, then what might we expect to receive for ignoring the instructions of the Messiah?
 - Though the writer doesn't answer the question, the answer is obvious: spiritual death
- Rather than dwell on that possibility, the writer moves quickly back to reaffirming the truth of the Gospel revealed in Christ
 - In the second half of v.3, the writer testifies that this salvation, the Gospel, was the Word spoken by the Lord Himself
 - And it was confirmed to the Church by those who heard the Lord

- Those who heard were the apostles, and they confirm the Words of Christ in their writings
 - This writer speaks as one who knew and accompanied the apostles, but perhaps was not an apostle himself
 - So the Church has the Lord's appearing and Words, and we have the confirming testimony of the apostles
- But then we also have the Lord testifying to the truth of the Gospel, through signs and wonders in the early Church
 - Miracles were proof that the claims of Christ and the apostles were trustworthy
 - And from then until now, the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to the Church according to the Lord's Will, continue to testify of the truth of the Gospel
- In other words, the claims of the Gospel are trustworthy
 - They came from a superior source and were thoroughly validated by God and men
 - We simply can't neglect such a great salvation
 - And yet, some in the Church were doing exactly that
- As we have already learned, their stumbling block was a preoccupation with angels, but it goes deeper than that
 - The real concern was His incarnation and what it meant that Jesus died in the end
 - For a Jewish believer, the superiority of Christ and His message was a tough pill to swallow when they reflect on their Messiah in a frail, human body crucified by their Roman enemies
 - This image of Jesus contradicts their expectation of a conquering, all-powerful Christ coming to rule on earth
 - And so by comparison, angels appear far more majestic and important
 - And therefore, their message found in the Law of Moses appears to trump the message delivered by Christ
 - So to these wavering members of the early Church, the writer moves his discussion of angels to an explanation for why the Messiah needed to take the form of man and die



Hebrews (2014) - Lesson 2B

Chapter 2:5-15

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A teacher in a Sunday school class was teaching children about salvation by grace alone. So she asks the class, “If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale, and give all the money to the church, would I get into Heaven?” The children correctly answered, “No!” Pleased with their response, the teacher decided to test them a little more. She asked, “If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would I then get into Heaven?” Again, they correctly answered, “NO!” “Well,” she continued, “then how can I get into Heaven? In the back of the room, a five year-old boy shouted, “First, you gotta be dead!”

- Chapter 2 of Hebrews is all about the need to be dead to get to Heaven
 - Specifically, this chapter is the writer’s explanation for why the Lord of all Creation had to take a form less than angels and die as a man
 - As we have already learned, the stumbling block for the early Jewish Church was their inability to grasp how Jesus could be greater than an angel, yet He appeared in a form lesser than angels
 - The superiority of Christ and His message was a tough pill to swallow, given that his frail, human body was crucified by their Roman enemies
 - This storyline of Jesus contradicted their expectation of a conquering, all-powerful Messiah Who would come to rule a Kingdom on earth
 - So, as we discussed last week, some Jews in the early Church still thought angels were more majestic and more important than Christ
 - And therefore, they saw the Law of Moses as a more important message than the message delivered by Christ
 - In short, some Jews in the early Church were still relying on their Jewish heritage for salvation, rather than on the grace of the New Covenant
 - They had not yet embraced Christ as Lord; they were unbelievers
 - This concerned the writer, prompting him to issue that warning at the beginning of Chapter 2
- Having warned them to pay closer attention to the message of Christ, he now proceeds to explain why it was that Jesus came to earth in such a lowly form, as a man determined to die
 - And like before, the writer returns to the Old Testament Scriptures to prove his point
 - Before we look at his argument, let’s take a moment to appreciate the writer’s methodology
 - The writer always works from the Bible (the OT) to make his case
 - He backs up his argument by finding the Scriptures that say what he is saying
 - Equally importantly, the writer uses the Scriptures in context, in the way they were intended to be understood
 - He doesn’t take them out of context
 - Simply put, the writer’s point is the Scriptures’ point as well
 - This is the way all of us should approach apologetics

- Apologetics simply means the process of making reasoned arguments in justification of religious doctrine or viewpoints
- Proving that what you believe is true
- The Bible is to be our proof
 - Not our experiences
 - Not our feelings
 - Not our heritage or family history
 - Our testimonies are a source of edification for the believer – not proof to persuade the unbeliever
 - Those things might add a personal touch to our arguments, but they do not prove anything
- If you want to be able to defend your faith before others, then you must become a student of the Bible
 - You can't just read it, you have to remember it and understand it
 - Notice the writer of this letter is quick to grab quote after quote of the OT to support his teaching of Christian doctrine
 - And almost certainly, he didn't have scrolls of the OT next to him to consult
 - More than likely, he had memorized most or all of the OT, which was customary among rabbis in Jesus' day
 - Today, we have access to tools and technology that make it easier to locate Scripture without memorizing the entire Bible, but that doesn't substitute for an intimate knowledge of what's in the Bible
 - Have you ever watched two Christians arguing over Scripture or doctrine, yet neither really understands the Bible?
 - I've seen this too often, and to borrow an old saying, it's a battle of wits between unarmed men
 - We can't expect to fulfill our role as an ambassador for Christ if we aren't willing to learn the job properly
 - And the training manual for representing Christ is the Bible
 - You can't rely on what I say or any other teacher says
 - Hopefully, you learn something from teachers, and ideally, their teaching will help guide you in your own studies
 - But listening to me or anyone else isn't a substitute for regular personal study of the Bible
 - As Peter tells us:

1 Pet. 3:15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

- This writer was obviously ready, and so now, he begins to explain the necessity of

Christ becoming lower than angels for our sake

Heb. 2:5 For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking.

Heb. 2:6 But one has testified somewhere, saying,

“WHAT IS MAN, THAT YOU REMEMBER HIM?

OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HIM?

Heb. 2:7 “YOU HAVE MADE HIM FOR A LITTLE WHILE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS;

YOU HAVE CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOR,

AND HAVE APPOINTED HIM OVER THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS;

Heb. 2:8 YOU HAVE PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET.”

For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him.

- The writer introduces a quote from Psalms 8, by saying that angels are never appointed to rule over the Kingdom to come
 - Instead, the psalmist says it will be ruled by the Son of Man
 - The Son of Man is a Messianic term found in Dan 7:13-14

Dan. 7:13 “I kept looking in the night visions,

And behold, with the clouds of heaven

One like a Son of Man was coming,

And He came up to the Ancient of Days

And was presented before Him.

Dan. 7:14 “And to Him was given dominion,

Glory and a kingdom,

That all the peoples, nations and men of every language

Might serve Him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion

Which will not pass away;

And His kingdom is one

Which will not be destroyed.

- By drawing our attention to the Messianic term “Son of Man”, the writer proves that the Messiah was to be a man, born of a woman
- And yet, this same Messiah would rule over the very Creation He had become a partaker of
- In this psalm, the psalmist raises exactly the same question that the writer’s skeptical audience was asking
 - How could God give such regard to a mere man, to Christ in human form?
 - If the Son is to be so powerful, and His message so important, then why did he appear in such a lowly way?
 - This is exactly the problem that these Jews in the early Church were struggling

to answer

- Their answer to this dilemma was to conclude that Jesus wasn't as important as an angel
- But the psalmist answers the question very differently
 - He declares in v.7 that the Father made Christ to be a little lower than the angels, but only for a little while
 - The "short time" is the time Christ spent as a man walking the earth
 - During that time, Jesus was no less God, yet He willingly took the lesser form of man to please the Father
 - But then, the psalmist concludes that Jesus' time living lower than angels will give way to an eternity of glory and honor
 - He will rule over the Creation
 - And all things will be in subjection to Christ
 - Even the angels
- Just to be sure we get the point, the writer adds in v.8, that when the Father says all things are going to be subject to Christ, He means *everything*
 - There is nothing in Creation that isn't, or won't someday be, subject to the Lord
 - As Paul says elsewhere in Scripture, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Christ one day
 - Every unbeliever, every demon, even the antichrist and Satan himself will one day bow in subjection to Christ, according to Scripture
 - Those bows will not come as a matter of faith, but as a result of Christ's authority and power
 - All of this will come true, despite Christ's choice to assume a place lower than the angels for a time
 - This is an example of the problem of our perspective
 - Men can't properly assess God's plans from our vantage point
 - The Pharisees of Jesus' day couldn't accurately assess His importance by what they saw during His brief time on earth
 - And neither can we appreciate the coming glory of the Kingdom and the peace it brings on earth by observing the world around us today
 - In fact, you can't know what God is willing to do for you tomorrow based on what He has done today
 - Our perspective is too narrow
 - We are bound by time and limited understanding
 - So instead, we must rely on the Word of God and on faith in what it says, rather than relying on our sight or our own understanding

**Prov. 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart
And do not lean on your own understanding.
Prov. 3:6 In all your ways acknowledge Him,**

And He will make your paths straight.**Prov. 3:7 Do not be wise in your own eyes;****Fear the LORD and turn away from evil.**

- If we rest on what the Bible says, then we can see the world and appreciate history with eyes for eternity
- Just as the writer says, we do not yet see Jesus ruling the world, but that doesn't mean it isn't coming
 - But just because we don't see it, doesn't mean it isn't to happen
 - It's just as sure now as it will be on the day we see it come to pass
 - Our perspective isn't adequate to appreciate that truth
 - Fortunately, we don't have to rely on perspective
 - Instead, we rely on the Word of God
- So what was to be gained by sending Jesus in this lowly form? The writer explains

Heb. 2:9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

Heb. 2:10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

- So in answer to the question, why did Jesus need to become lower than angels, the writer begins with this explanation
 - First, in v.9, we see Him (Jesus) who was made for a while lower than the angles and by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone
 - This involves (requires) death
 - Then, in v.10, the writer says it was fitting for Him to perfect the Author of their salvation through suffering
 - This is a potentially confusing statement
 - So let's define some terms at this point
 - The "Him" is the Father
 - The Father is the One Who drove the plan of redemption
 - The writer says it is fitting for the Father to do what He did
 - The word for "fitting" in Greek means "to be clearly seen"
 - In other words, as we understand what happened in the light of OT Scripture, we can clearly appreciate why the Father did what He did
 - That leads us to the next Person mentioned: the Author
 - The Greek word the writer uses for "author" is a compound word, made up of two different Greek words

- Originator + leader (or pioneer)
 - This is a reference to Jesus, of course
 - Jesus is the originator of our salvation and the pioneer of salvation
 - He was the first man to die and resurrect to glory
 - He made a way available for all who would follow by faith
 - So He is the originator and pioneer
- How was Jesus the author of salvation?
 - The writer says Jesus became the Author by being perfected through suffering
 - The word “suffering” refers to Jesus’ tortuous death
 - Not just the suffering that preceded the cross
 - Also His physical death as well
 - This was Jesus’ suffering
 - So then, what does the writer mean when he says Jesus was *perfected* by suffering?
 - “Perfected” is the Greek word *teleioo*, which means “being brought to an end” or “accomplished”
 - So Jesus’ suffering brought something to an end
 - It didn’t make Jesus perfect – He was already perfect
 - It accomplished something that could only be accomplished through His death (v.9)
 - Finally, the salvation Jesus obtained was intended for a certain group (“their” salvation in v.10)
 - This group is the brethren of Christ, the children of God
 - Those men and women who are saved by faith in Jesus
 - The rest of the answer comes in the following verses

Heb. 2:11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,

Heb. 2:12 saying,

**“I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN,
IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE.”**

Heb. 2:13 And again,

“I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM.”

And again,

“BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME.”

- Jesus took on the same form as those He was called to save
- He called them brethren, that is, Jesus could truly call men and women His brothers and sisters
 - From Psalm 22, the writer shows proof that the Son was expected to come in the

form of mankind

- He would be the Father's representative among men and women
- And He calls these brethren His children, whom the Father has given to the Son
- So now we're getting to the heart of the answer of why Jesus was made lower than angels
 - First, He came as a man in obedience to the Father
 - It was the Father who made Jesus lower than angels
 - It wasn't a reflection of Jesus having less honor
 - It was a purposeful and fitting choice of the Father
 - Secondly, Jesus was made lower so He could experience suffering
 - Jesus needed to enter into a sinful Creation in the form of man so He could experience the suffering common to all men
 - Including experiencing death itself
 - These are things Jesus never could have experienced had He remained as He was in Heaven
 - Thirdly, He humbled Himself in this way to author a salvation for you and me
 - He came for His brethren, His brothers and sisters
 - Which required that He lives as they do
 - Finally, He authored our salvation by perfecting, by bringing to an end to, something that stood in the way of our salvation
 - What did Jesus bring to an end through His suffering?
 - What was accomplished?

Heb. 2:14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,
Heb. 2:15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

- Now we get to the key issue, the heart of why Jesus had to become human
 - It's a matter of flesh and blood and death and the devil
 - All the children of God share in flesh and blood
 - The Greek word for "share" means "to participate in"
 - The human experience is an experience of flesh and blood
 - We're not angelic beings; we're made in a different way
 - And so Jesus took the same form as His brethren, so that He could solve a problem that is unique to flesh and blood
 - And that problem is the problem of death
 - And death itself is the result of sin

Rom. 5:12 Therefore, just as through one mansin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because allsinned —

- Flesh and blood experiences physical death because all flesh lives under the curse made necessary because of sin
- And the author of sin is the devil himself
 - All who sin share in the same fate as the devil
 - That common destiny leads to fear of death, and that fear produces a kind of slavery
 - All mankind lives in fear of death and what follows, and that fear is so great, it's all consuming
- Whenever we're driven by our fears, we become a slave of the one who produces the fear
 - We no longer make our decisions or set our priorities based on reason, much less according to the Spirit
 - Instead, we go wherever we can, do whatever we must, to avoid the thing we fear
 - If we fear financial ruin, we become fixated on money
 - If we fear rejection, we avoid relationships
 - If we fear insects, we never go camping
 - If we fear sharks, we stay away from the beach
 - But if we live in fear of death, there's no easy solution
 - Because we are all born sinful, our conscience is forever aware of our jeopardy before a just and holy God
 - That awareness leads to fear of dying and judgment
 - And this leaves us at the mercy of the enemy, who is masterful at manipulating our fears
 - The unbeliever is forever at the enemy's disposal, as he leads them further astray by manipulating their fear of death
 - He lies to the unbeliever, saying death is the end of everything, so there is no God and no judgment to fear
 - Humanism, evolution and atheism are the result
 - And rampant hedonism is the natural response
 - He lies by saying death is too horrible to consider, so it shouldn't be discussed
 - Leading unbelievers to never confront death head-on
 - Pretending that if they ignore their dying bodies, they can think they will live forever
 - He lies that death means we should get everything we can while we can
 - The best comes now, so make the most of now
 - Greed and selfishness is the result

- Most of all, the enemy lies, saying that everyone goes to Heaven, so death is not a problem to solve
 - It's just a mystery
 - So don't give your life and your sin a second thought
 - You're good enough as you are
- Jesus came to suffer as a man so that He could take our place in death
 - He brought to an end our fear of death so that we would no longer be susceptible to the manipulation of an enemy who himself is subject to that same penalty
- As Paul writes in Philippians

Phil. 2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, Phil. 2:6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, Phil. 2:7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Phil. 2:8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

- When His suffering was done, He rose from the grave, promising His brethren we would be sanctified in the same way
 - If you have placed your trust in Jesus Christ, then the devil has been rendered powerless over you
 - You do not share his fate and punishment
 - That punishment fell on Christ instead
 - That's why Jesus was made lower than angels...so that He could die in your place
 - So now, you are free to live for Christ without fear of death and with no regard for the enemy's lies
- You can live-out the rest of your days, knowing that death simply ushers you into glory as it did Christ
 - So what's there to be afraid of?
 - Do you fear death? Why? Of what harm is death to you, Christian?
 - Why do you give back to the devil the victory that the Lord won for you?
 - Why do you live as though death brings a penalty? A penalty that Christ already took upon Himself?
- The devil knows you won't suffer a penalty, but if you still live in fear, he's happy to use it to neutralize you on the spiritual battlefield
 - Christians who live in fear of dying, or who are preoccupied with matters of death, will become so distracted they can't serve God
 - They will waste days and brain cycles focused on the wrong things
- Let's not live that way. Let's live with eyes for eternity

- Consider what follows death and live every day to make the most of that future
- Your Lord humbled Himself to grant you that victory

- In our study of Hebrews, we've come to the end of the writer's first argument in favor of accepting Christ as superior to all former revelations
 - And the writer's first argument was Christ is a greater messenger than any that came before
 - And therefore, Christ's message is a greater message
 - And Christ's superiority is undiminished by His appearing in the form of a man
 - The writer explained last week how Jesus came in a lowly form at the command of the Father and as a pioneer of our salvation
 - In order to grant us a salvation from death and slavery to the devil, Jesus had to take on flesh and blood as well
 - It was the only way to stand in our place and take the death that we deserved
 - Then, having died in our place, he took the enemy's only weapon out of his hand
 - When we place our faith in Jesus Christ, we see our sins washed away, leaving us without condemnation from God
 - So now, though our bodies may die, we have nothing to fear – for what follows is glorious
 - Therefore, the enemy is no longer able to control us through a fear of dying and judgment
 - We can ignore his schemes and live for Christ
- We ended last week in Chapter 2, with the writer making that very conclusion

Heb. 2:14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,
Heb. 2:15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

- Having brought the point to conclusion, the writer conclusively proves that Jesus' arrival as man did not lessen His power
 - It reflected His obedience and self-sacrificial love for man
 - The Father has created mankind as a special part of Creation, above all else in Creation
- Did you know that? You are even more special in Creation than the Heavenly creatures God made?
 - You are more special than even angels
 - So not only is Christ greater than an angel, so are we more precious than angels
- Consider what the writer says at the end of Chapter 2

Heb. 2:16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to

the descendant of Abraham.

- Assuredly, Christ did not give help to angels
 - What kind of help do angels need?
 - Well, the angels are very much like mankind, at least in a couple of ways
 - Like us, they are beings created for the purpose of serving God
 - Secondly, they have experienced sin and rebellion within their ranks
- Just as mankind rejected God's authority in the Garden and sinned, so did a part of the angelic realm
 - Satan, the chief cherub, started the process, of course
 - We can read about his fall in Ezekiel 28

Ezek. 28:12 “Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,
 “You had the seal of perfection,
 Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.

Ezek. 28:13 “You were in Eden, the garden of God;
 Every precious stone was your covering:
 The ruby, the topaz and the diamond;
 The beryl, the onyx and the jasper;
 The lapis lazuli, the turquoise and the emerald;
 And the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets,
 Was in you.
 On the day that you were created
 They were prepared.

Ezek. 28:14 “You were the anointed cherub who covers,
 And I placed you there.
 You were on the holy mountain of God;
 You walked in the midst of the stones of fire.

Ezek. 28:15 “You were blameless in your ways
 From the day you were created
 Until unrighteousness was found in you.

Ezek. 28:16 “By the abundance of your trade
 You were internally filled with violence,
 And you sinned;
 Therefore I have cast you as profane
 From the mountain of God.
 And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub,
 From the midst of the stones of fire.

Ezek. 28:17 “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;

**You corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor.
I cast you to the ground;
I put you before kings,
That they may see you.**

- At the time of his fall, we learn in Revelation 12:4, Satan took one-third of the angelic realm with him in rebellion against God
- The third of the angels who rebelled and sinned against God are the angels who need help
 - Like man, they are lost and without hope, unless the Lord made a way for redemption
 - They, like us, cannot return to glory and erase the sin that separates us from God, unless the Lord gives us help
- But the writer of Hebrews says Christ has never authored a plan of redemption for the fallen angels, called demons
 - Christ never took the form of an angel so He could experience judgment in their place
 - Consequently, all demons stand condemned for their sin
 - And one day, they will all be judged and punished in the Lake of Fire
 - In Ezekiel, the Lord declares that Satan will one day cease to exist

**Ezek. 28:18 “By the multitude of your iniquities,
In the unrighteousness of your trade
You profaned your sanctuaries.
Therefore I have brought fire from the midst of you;
It has consumed you,
And I have turned you to ashes on the earth
In the eyes of all who see you.**

**Ezek. 28:19 “All who know you among the peoples
Are appalled at you;
You have become terrified
And you will cease to be forever.”””**

- And then, in Revelation, we learn that all the angels who followed him will likewise be cast down from Heaven

**Rev. 12:7 And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war,
Rev. 12:8 and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven.**

Rev. 12:9 And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

- The point in all this is clear –
 - While angels are valued servants to Christ, and to us as well, they are not greater than Christ
 - In fact, they are not even as valued as mankind
 - The Father made no allowance for redemption of fallen angels
 - He has considered every fallen angel lost forever
 - On the other hand, the Lord has made a path of redemption available for men
 - He gladly helps Abraham’s descendant, the writer says
 - A descendant of Abraham in this context means someone who is of the faith of Abraham, whether Jew or Gentile
 - As Paul explains elsewhere

Rom. 4:16 For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

- The Lord has made a way to help us out of our sin, one that required His death in our place
- Only mankind has been given this blessing
- In fact, Peter tells us that angels long to see and understand God’s plan of redemption for men

1 Pet. 1:12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things into which angels long to look.

- Angels have long desired to see how the Lord was going to fulfill His promise to Abraham
- And yet, it’s we who have the privilege to know the fullness of the Gospel
- This detail in the writer’s argument is a profound truth, and it becomes all the more powerful the more we consider it
 - The Lord didn’t have to save anyone, whether angel or man
 - He chose not to save a single angel, for His own reasons

- That fact reminds us that the Lord didn't owe us salvation either
- If the Lord can decide to reject 100% of the fallen angels, then He could have certainly rejected 100% of mankind
 - But He didn't
 - Spend some time contemplating how precious His children are to the Lord
- That's why He came as a man, to be like us, and to sympathize with us

Heb. 2:17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Heb. 2:18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

- In the Law given to Israel, the Lord established a priesthood, led by a man called the High Priest
 - Now we'll talk more about priests and the priesthood later in this letter
 - But for this moment, the writer is focused on the need for a High Priest to be like those he represents
- A High Priest was an important man in Israel
 - He was the only guy who could walk into the holiest place in Israel and perform an act that resulted in the nation's receiving forgiveness for their sins
 - He could only take this action once per year
 - And no one else was allowed to make this intercession for the people of Israel
 - So everyone treated the High Priest with great respect and honor
- High Priests serve as the representative of the people before God
 - And so he must, by necessity, be like those he represents
 - He was bearing the sins of Israel on his shoulders, quite literally, in the form of the *ephod*
 - And he knew what it was like to fall to temptation
 - That qualified him to be the perfect one to stand before God and seek mercy for the people of Israel
- The writer says that's another reason why Jesus had to become like us to author salvation
 - If Jesus was to be our high priest, then He had to understand what it's like to be human
 - He couldn't be our representative before the Father without first being like us
 - Jesus is a merciful and faithful High Priest for us in His role to intercede for us before the Father

- And He understands how best to intercede, because he understands how temptation works in the life of a man or woman
 - Because He experienced it Himself
- The writer says Jesus was tempted when He suffered
 - The suffering is a reference to suffering several times in Jesus' earthly life
 - At the very least, it refers to the 40 days of fasting in the wilderness
 - When the devil tempted Jesus to disobey the Lord
 - Jesus felt every desire you or I would feel
 - Yet, He resisted to remain sinless
- Secondly, the suffering refers to the passion of Christ
 - The Gospels teach us that Jesus had the power to stop the beatings and the crucifixion with a word from His mouth
 - He could have commanded a legion of angels to stop everything
 - Imagine the temptation to stop the pain
 - But Jesus also knew the Father had determined He should die for our sins
 - So Jesus resisted the temptation to disobey
- So now the Lord is ready and able to assist us with temptation
 - As our High Priest, seated at the right hand of the Father, Christ intercedes for us with power to change hearts and circumstances to address our needs
 - But He also has the experience of living as a man, which means He has infinite mercy and sympathy for our weaknesses and failures
 - If you are tempted – and really, who isn't? – then you have no excuse for not putting that before the Lord in prayer
 - You can't say Christ can't help you with your temptations to sin
 - He's been there, and He succeeded where you and I fail
 - So He can solve your temptations, if you give Him that chance
 - The secret is, you have to put that need before Him
 - As you pray, confess your sinful temptations
 - Confess your failures to resist
 - And ask Him to take the temptation away
 - And then, when the enemy brings those temptations back again, turn to prayer in the moment
 - Watch the Lord work
 - Give Him that chance
 - Don't just wait to turn to Him in guilt after you've made the mistake and fallen to temptation

- Turn to Him in the moment of temptation
 - That's the power of a High Priest Who knows what it's like to be human in a fallen world
 - We can seek His intercession as we walk
 - Not just after we stumble
- And with that, the writer is ready to move away from the topic of angels and into the next discussion

Heb. 3:1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession;

Heb. 3:2 He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house.

Heb. 3:3 For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house.

- As we transition into Chapter 3, let's remember the writer's purpose in writing this letter
 - He has a concern that some in the Jewish Church are not appreciating the person and work of Jesus properly
 - It's likely he has this concern from things he's heard going on in the early Church
 - Jews returning to living under the Law
 - Sacrificing in the temple
 - Holding the Old Covenant in higher regard than the New Covenant
 - Living as if the Messiah had never even appeared
- In the first two chapters, the writer highlighted their greater reverence for angels and the mistaken thinking it reflects
 - And he issued a warning that they should give greater attention to Jesus as Messiah
 - And they should also understand the penalties they were risking for continuing disobedience to the New Covenant
- And now in Chapter 3 and into Chapter 4, the writer comes back to that thought, asking his audience again to consider Jesus as the Apostle and High Priest
 - The first verse opens with a call to the holy brethren, the partakers of a holy calling
 - This sounds like a reference to believers
 - And since this letter went out to many churches in the Diaspora, we can be sure he had believers in mind as he wrote these words
 - But this terminology is equally applicable to Jewish brothers, regardless of whether they knew Jesus as Lord
 - All Jews could be called holy brethren
 - All Jews are partakers of a Heavenly calling

- So we can't assume that the writer views all his readers to be believers as this point
- He asks them to consider Jesus
 - The word "consider" in Greek, is *katanoeo*, which means "to look very closely"
 - This word is used in Acts, when Stephen is retelling the history of Israel and speaks of Moses seeing the burning fire in the bush

Acts 7:31 "When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look more closely, there came the voice of the Lord:

- Have you ever glanced at something casually, and you thought you saw it correctly?
- But then if you take a second, closer look, you realize you didn't see it properly
- That's what the writer is asking here...telling his readers that maybe they didn't get the full picture the first time
- As they look more closely at Jesus, the writer asks them to consider a new comparison: Moses
 - Jesus was faithful to the Father, in the same way that Moses was faithful to the Father in serving in the Lord's house
 - This is a very specific phrase in Greek that means "a house servant"
 - Moses was a slave of the house owner, and the owner was the Lord
 - The reference to "house" is a euphemism then
 - It refers to the family of God, the people of Israel that Moses was commanded to lead and represent before God
 - Moses was an intercessor for the people, and the one who brought the Word of God to the people
 - And Moses was faithful in all these things
 - And then in v.3, the writer says that Jesus was counted worthy of even more glory than Moses
 - If you want to get a Jew's attention in any discussion, tell him that you found someone worthy of more glory than Moses
 - For most Jews, Moses is the preeminent man of God
 - The man who delivered Israel from slavery, guided them through the desert and gave them their precious Covenant and Law
 - Moses is traditionally an even more imposing figure in Judaism than father Abraham
 - But the writer says Jesus was worthy of greater honor
- And then in v.3, the writer says that Jesus is greater than Moses
 - Because Jesus is the builder of the house, not merely the servant

- This is a provocative statement
 - And it sets up the next two chapters
 - In a few simple words, the writer just said that Jesus is God
- Look at the logical progression the writer has used to bring his readers to this conclusion
 - He said Moses was a servant to God
 - And of course, God is the one who called Israel and formed them into a nation and placed Moses over that nation
 - And Moses served God by caring for that house of God, which God built, so to speak
- But now the writer says Jesus is worthy of more honor than Moses, because Jesus was that builder whom Moses served
 - Jesus is the God that called Israel and led them in the desert
 - Jesus is the God who appointed Moses to serve over Israel
 - Jesus is the One who gave Moses the Law through angels
- Take a closer look at this Messiah you think you know
 - He is not just a messenger or a prophet or a ruler
 - He is God in the flesh
 - And as God, He is worthy of oh-so much more honor than any of His servants – even Moses
 - Do you get the feeling that the writer is preparing to preach the Gospel to his readers?
 - Does it sound like he wants to introduce them to Jesus in a new and better way?
 - This is our first indication that the writer isn't speaking exclusively to an audience of believing Jews
 - He seems concerned that some of his Jewish readers didn't see Christ in the right way the first time

Heb. 3:4 For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.

Heb. 3:5 Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later;

Heb. 3:6 but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house — whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

- While every house has someone who caused it to be built, the cause of everything is God
 - God commonly works through men to accomplish His purposes
 - So in that sense, God is the builder of every house
 - The writer is simply saying that the work Moses did was under God's direction

- And likewise, the work Christ did was also in service to the Father and according to the Father's purposes
- But as we compare Moses and Jesus, we find a lessor-to-greater relationship
 - Moses is a picture of Jesus in lessor form
 - Moses' life was orchestrated by God to illustrate the life and work of the coming Messiah
- Notice in vs.5-6, the writer says that Moses' faithfulness in serving God in the house God constructed, was to be a testimony of what would come later
 - We can say it was simply meant to be a picture of Christ
 - Just as the writer says in v.6, that Jesus fulfilled that picture when He came to be a faithful Son over God's house
- If the people of Israel wandering in the desert was the "house" that God gave Moses to watch over, then what house is Jesus watching over?
 - The writer says that house is the children of God
 - The saints are the house that Jesus guards faithfully
 - All those who have trusted in God's promise to bring a deliverer, a Messiah, have become part of that house
 - The writer says we are that house
 - But then, the writer introduces that preposition we never like to see: "if"
 - The writer says we are in this house, the body of believers, the saints of the New Covenant, if...
 - If we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end
 - What does it mean to hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope?
 - And what is the end?
- First, the confidence a Christian holds on to is the confidence that our sins have been paid for in full by the blood of Christ
 - Our confidence in the sufficiency of Christ's work is what leads us to cast off all other means of salvation
 - We turn from works and superstitions and myths and humanism
 - And we turn to Christ, knowing that nothing else works and nothing else is needed
 - And then, the hope we boast about to the world is the hope of resurrection
 - When we die, we know that the Lord promised we will experience the resurrection that He also experienced
 - Death is not the end of us, so we boast to the world of that hope that one day we will live again without fear of death
 - Before we skip past these words, let's take a closer look at the word "hope"
 - We typically use the word "hope" when some degree of uncertainty exists

- We hope it rains today
- We hope we win the lottery
- We hope our children do their chores (which would be like hitting the lottery in my case)
- The Bible uses the word differently
 - The Bible uses the word like we use the word “expect”
 - In Greek, the word is *elpis*, which means “expectation”
 - So the Bible’s word for hope is like saying, “I expect to win the lottery”, “I expect it to rain today”
- And for the Christian, “I expect to be resurrected”
 - It is not wishful thinking, but absolute confidence in a future event, based on the promises of God
 - But because it remains unseen for now, it is properly called a “hope”
 - A “hope” is the expectation of something that hasn’t happened yet
- This writer says that we can count ourselves as a part of the family of God, if we are confident that Jesus’ death was a sufficient payment for our sin and we expect to be resurrected
 - These beliefs are the beliefs that define saving faith – as Paul writes in Rom. 10
 - Faith is confessing with your mouth that Jesus is Lord (the promise of His death paying for your sins) and
 - Believing in your heart that the Father raised Him from the dead – that’s your hope of resurrection
 - Do you believe He paid the price, do you believe He’ll live again? If you believe these things, you’re in the house of God
 - Then, he adds that interesting piece – holding fast that belief until the end
 - If you have been convinced by the Spirit that Jesus is Lord and that you will be resurrected, you will never become unconvinced
 - Because the conviction of the truth of those things does not come by flesh and blood, according to Scripture
 - Remember when Jesus asked Peter, “But who do you say that I am?” and Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”
 - And Jesus replied that Peter was blessed because that truth was not revealed to Peter by flesh and blood, but by the Father in Heaven (Matt. 16)
 - You cannot come to those convictions by flesh and blood – no one gets there because in their head, they decided they like it – they get there because the Spirit persuaded them
 - If you say you believe these things, but then in a future day, you decide you need something else besides Jesus to make yourself righteous
 - Or if you suddenly no longer expect to be resurrected someday and begin to fear

death again

- Then, the writer says, you're showing evidence you never really understood with the truth in the first place
- Saving faith will understand these truths such that we hold on to them to the end
 - If you have become convinced by the Spirit that Jesus is Lord, you will never be unconvinced
 - And if you have an expectation, a hope of resurrection made certain by the Spirit, then you will never lose that hope to seek it elsewhere
- But the recipients of this letter – at least some of them – were doing those very things, as we'll see in the rest of Chapters 3 & 4

- At the beginning of Chapter 3, the writer introduced three ideas, or concepts, he intends to use over the next two chapters in making a larger point
 - First, he introduced the concept of the wilderness wanderings of Israel
 - Specifically, the writer references Moses, whom he calls a servant in God's house
 - We know Moses led God's chosen people out of Egypt
 - Moses gave them God's Covenant of Law
 - And though Moses was supposed to lead them into the promised land
 - Instead, he wandered with them in a wilderness for 40 years
 - Secondly, the writer introduces the concept of Christ's superiority to Moses
 - Just as Christ is superior to angels, so is Christ a superior leader of God's people
 - As the writer explains in later chapters, Christ delivers a greater Covenant
 - And He brings a greater salvation
 - Lastly, the writer introduces the concept of perseverance, or steadfastness, as a test of our confession of faith
 - The writer uses a picture of a house to describe the collection of God's people
 - He says that we are qualified to be part of God's house if we have held fast our confession until the end
 - The word "end" refers to the end of our lives
 - Last time, we noted that this holding fast is not the means to salvation
 - It's not to say that salvation comes from the work of holding on
 - Rather, the writer is giving us the definition of salvation
 - True believers are those who hold fast their confession until the end
- So why is the writer raising these subjects of Israel and Moses in the desert, and of perseverance in our confession?
 - To understand, we need to read the next part of Chapter 3

Heb. 3:7 Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says,

"TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,

**Heb. 3:8 DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME,
AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS,**

**Heb. 3:9 WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED Me BY TESTING Me,
AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS.**

**Heb. 3:10 "THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION,
AND SAID, 'THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART,
AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS';**

**Heb. 3:11 AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH,
'THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.'"**

- The writer quotes from Psalms 95:7-11
 - In that psalm, we find a retelling of the story of Numbers 13 & 14
 - The writer is invoking a powerful reminder for his readers
 - He's referring to the rebellion of Israel in the desert, a sad point in Israel's history
 - As the psalmist recounts, the generation of Israel tested the Lord a total of ten times during their travels in the desert
 - Israel tested the Lord's patience by repeatedly questioning the Lord's faithfulness and goodness
 - They accused Him of leading them into the desert only to kill them with thirst or hunger
 - They complained about the manna
 - They worshipped a golden calf
 - They rebelled against Moses' leadership
 - Repeatedly, they tested the Lord's patience, almost daring Him to act against them
 - At the end of those ten times of testing, the Lord's patience came to an end
 - The final act of testing came when the Lord brought Israel to the brink of entering the promised land in Canaan
 - Rather than believing the good reports of Joshua and Caleb, the people chose to believe the lies of the other spies
 - They didn't believe God's promise that the land would be a blessing, a place of milk and honey
 - Instead, they chose to believe the lies spoken through the disobedient spies
 - In a real sense, they sided with the father of lies rather than the Father of lights
 - That was the moment when the last straw broke the camel's back

Num. 14:11 The LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?"

Num. 14:12 "I will smite them with pestilence and dispossess them, and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they."

Num. 14:13 But Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for by Your strength You brought up this people from their midst,

Num. 14:14 and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, O LORD, are in the midst of this people, for You, O LORD, are seen eye to eye, while Your cloud stands over them; and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night.

Num. 14:15 "Now if You slay this people as one man, then the nations who have

heard of Your fame will say,

Num. 14:16 ‘Because the LORD could not bring this people into the land which He promised them by oath, therefore He slaughtered them in the wilderness.’

Num. 14:17 “But now, I pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared,

Num. 14:18 ‘The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.’

Num. 14:19 “Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.”

Num. 14:20 So the LORD said, “I have pardoned them according to your word;

Num. 14:21 but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD.

Num. 14:22 “Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice,

Num. 14:23 shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it.

- Clearly, the Lord was disgusted with Israel’s mistrust and disobedience
 - This is the moment the psalmist was speaking about in Psalm 95
 - And this is the moment the writer in Hebrews is thinking about as he brings a warning to the Church of his day
 - We can see the what concerned the writer, as we look at the details of Psalm 95
 - First, the psalmist says, “If you hear the Lord’s voice today, then respond in the right way - don’t harden your hearts to God”
 - The psalmist was speaking about what happened to the generation who wandered in the desert
 - Collectively, they heard the Lord’s voice
 - They saw His wonders and miraculous works
 - They heard his voice as the sound of thunder
 - They saw the smoke and cloud
 - And nevertheless, most of them rebelled repeatedly
 - They heard the Lord in a physical sense, but they didn’t hear in a spiritual sense
 - Their hearts remained hardened and unreceptive to the Word of God
 - They didn’t not accept the promises of God
 - Time and time again, most of that generation demonstrated a lack of faith
 - Notice in v.10, he says they went astray in their heart

- As the psalmist points out, that generation saw incredible things, and they shared incredible experiences, but these displays were unable to turn their hearts
 - Back in Psalm 95, the word “astray” is translated “erred”
 - In Hebrew the word is *ta`ah*, which means “deceived” or “seduced”
 - They were deceived in their heart and seduced by the enemy’s lies
 - And then, the Lord says they do not know My ways
 - To not know God’s ways means to lack a saving knowledge of God
 - To not know Him truly
 - Finally, God says in v.10 that He was angry with that generation, but in the psalm, the word is even stronger
 - It says the Lord loathed that generation
 - To loath is an intense feeling of disgust and rejection
 - God never expresses loathing for His children; He only loathes those who deny Him
 - We see confirmation in Numbers 14:11, when God asked how long will this generation not believe in me?
- From all the facts in Psalm 95 and Numbers, we’re forced to conclude that generation of Israel were men and women who did not place their faith and trust in the Lord Who rescued them
 - They knew him in a fleshly sense, for they witnessed great displays
 - But they lacked a true heart
 - They couldn’t act in faith in response to His promises
 - They could only follow Him in a superficial, fleshly sense
 - Which is not truly following Him at all
 - That generation followed Moses to gain something they wanted
 - Whether freedom from slavery, or rescue from the Egyptian army or to seek a pleasant home in a prosperous land
 - Whatever it was they sought, they weren’t attracted to the spiritual blessings that come by faith alone
 - And so they acted disobediently in moments that required a faith in God’s promises, in things unseen
 - So the psalmist and the writer of Hebrews point to their bad example as a call to Christians not to repeat that mistake
- Why did the writer think the Church was in jeopardy of following after the example of Israel in the desert?
 - The writer must have had reason to believe that some in the Church were following Christ in the same way that the Israelites followed Moses
 - The Israelites saw Moses merely as an earthly deliverer

- A man who granted them escape from Egypt
- A man who promised them an easy life on earth
- But Moses was much more
 - He was the intercessor God provided
 - He delivered a covenant that bound the nation to the Lord
 - And the blessings he offered were first and foremost spiritual
 - And they depended upon faith
 - He was a forerunner of Christ, in that respect
- The writer is worried that some in the Church were following Christ in a similar, superficial manner
 - If the Church was following Christ merely because they hoped He would give them earthly benefits, then it meant they didn't know Him truly
 - And like their forefathers, they risked being condemned in the end
- The writer has already emphasized that Christ is the builder of the house, while Moses was merely a caretaker
 - And therefore, Christ is worthy of much more honor than was Moses
 - So if Israel was condemned for a failure to show faith in following Moses, what awaits a person who will not demonstrate faith in Christ?
- Now we see the reason the writer has raised these issues
 - He's concerned that some in the early Church had joined themselves to the body of Christ in an illegitimate way
 - They were like those of whom Christ spoke when he said that we must enter only by the door

John 10:1 “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber.

John 10:7 So Jesus said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

John 10:9 “I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

- Only by trusting in the Word of the Lord may we be saved
- But some in the Church were a part of the group by affiliation, but not by a personal relationship with Christ
- They had no relationship with the Lord, and in the future, they were susceptible to falling away from Christ

- At the first hint of persecution or trial or storms, they give up hope and fall away
 - Just as the Israelites who began grumbling at Moses and the Lord at the first hint of difficulty, there will be some in our congregations who step back from their faith at the first sign of trouble
 - They show they are not Christ's, because they fail to hold fast their assurance firm until the end
 - Many false teachers and their megachurches preaching happiness and prosperity will empty quickly once persecution breaks out against the Church, which the Bible says will happen one day
 - Under trying circumstances, there will be little reason for these posers to continue affiliating with the Church if affiliation only brings negative attention
- The sad and ever-present reality is that not all who participate with us in our congregations truly know the Lord
 - Not all have eyes to see and ears to hear
 - And in these last days, the Bible says the problem of false confessors will reach epidemic proportions
 - We will experience a great apostasy in the last days of the Church, Paul says

1 Tim. 4:1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,
1 Tim. 4:2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,

- Back in Chapter 2, the writer issued his first warning about those who drift away after hearing the truth
 - They heard, but they didn't believe it and they didn't stick around
 - Like a boat untethered to the shore, they slowly drift out of sight
 - Because they did not accept the truth, they never built their house on the rock of Jesus Christ
 - They are like the seed in Luke 8, thrown on hard-packed soil
 - It sits there for a time, but soon the enemy comes to take it away and it never penetrates the soil
 - So often, we see this in our families and our friends and among the occasional person who hangs around the church, but soon disappears
 - So the first warning was to not to pass by the truth, but pay closer attention to it
 - Now the writer's second warning is reaching past mere attention to the message, and is asking for a heartfelt acceptance of its truth
 - He's speaking to the one who has stuck around without embracing the truth of Christianity
 - They have joined themselves to the congregation for the wrong reasons,

without the faith God requires

- They want something from their Christian affiliation, like the Israelites who wanted escape from slavery and a chance to prosper
- They perceive an earthly benefit in Christianity, but have no appreciation for the spiritual significance of Christ
- To this group, the writer issues his second warning

Heb. 3:12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.

Heb. 3:13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Heb. 3:14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,

Heb. 3:15 while it is said,

**“TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,
DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME.”**

- The writer addresses his audience as brethren, which causes some to ask, could he be speaking to believers in this warning?
 - If so, then we would have to interpret everything he says in this chapter and the next from the perspective of a believer falling away
 - Certainly, there is a form of unbelief that is possible for the Christian
 - It would be unbelief in that sense of living in disobedience to our faith in Christ
 - Acting like an unbeliever, though we know the truth
- So how do I know that the writer isn’t speaking to believers in this case?
 - Chiefly, because the writer’s consequences for unbelief are not consistent with the promises given to believers
 - The consequences for a disobedient believer are vastly different than for an unbeliever
 - And when we get into Chapter 4, we’ll see clearly that the writer is concerned about a consequence only an unbeliever can experience
 - So we enter this discussion with an understanding that the writer is concerned about unbelievers among the faithful
- Nevertheless, we can find a message for the believer in this warning
 - While we cannot fall away from our salvation, we can fall away in obedience
 - And sin has a hardening effect on our hearts, even as believers
 - If we live in sin without repenting, we may find ourselves sucked into a life of sin that brings shame to Christ
 - The writer will address that concern later in the letter

- But for now, this second warning is focused on the false confessor
- In v.12, the writer tells his readers that an evil, unbelieving heart will fall away from the living God
 - Eventually, those with unbelieving hearts will reveal themselves
 - They will fall away from their affiliation with Christ
 - Just as those who had unbelieving hearts in Israel eventually made themselves known through their disobedience in the desert
 - The truth is usually revealed in times of testing, in moments when faith is required to take the next step forward
 - In the desert, it happened when food or water was scarce, when enemies approached or the promise of a beautiful land seemed too good to believe
 - So it will be for the unbelievers in our midst
 - As persecution begins, or personal trials ensue, their faith is tested anew
 - That's when they discover that Christianity doesn't bring them their best life now, so they lose heart and hope
 - When a heart isn't true, those moments of testing will reveal a person's unbelief
 - This is the second condition in Parable of the Sower, where the seed falls on rocky soil and doesn't have the depth to produce a root, so that as soon as the sun comes out, it withers and dies
- Notice the unique construction of this particular warning
 - This warning is unique among the five in this letter
 - It concerns the unbeliever in the group, but the call to action is directed at the believers
 - The writer asks the believers to take care that there would be no posers among them
 - He doesn't call upon the unbeliever to fix his own heart
 - For this isn't possible
 - No one raises himself to new life
 - He calls on the believers to help the one who is incomplete
 - Christ is the Author and Perfector of our faith, but the Lord has chosen to deliver salvation through the efforts of men who preach the Gospel
 - Which is why the writer places the call of action in the lap of the believers in the Church
 - They are called to solve this problem
- So how does the Church respond to the writer's instructions?
 - In v.14, he says the Church must encourage one another, day after day
 - We get a better sense of what kind of encouragement he means when he repeats the psalmist's call to do so "as long as it is still called today"

- In the psalm, the word “today” refers to the window of opportunity in each person’s life, in which we can respond to the call of the Lord
 - The psalmist called for his readers to hear the voice of the Lord and respond in obedience “today”
 - In other words, believe in the Lord without delay
- So the encouragement the writer wants repeated in the Church is the call to know the Lord before time runs out
 - We are to preach the Gospel in the Church consistently, knowing that some among us may not have embraced the truth yet
 - So we call upon them to believe, while an opportunity remains
- We can encourage each other to know the Lord without necessarily offering an altar call or other special moment in the service
 - Encouraging each other means preaching the Word consistently
 - It means ensuring that the Gospel is always front and center in our understanding of what it means to be Christian
 - Reiterating that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone
 - Never substituting some other message like prosperity, healing, social justice, environmental justice, community, or whatever becomes vogue in a future day
- In the end, faithful preaching of the Word of Christ will bring ears to hear and hearts to change
 - For faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ
 - And at the very least, it will help strengthen believers in the faith
 - Reminding us that we’ve been saved by God’s grace to perform good works that glorify the Father
 - So that we may know we are counted a child of God
- And how do we know those who are children of God?
 - The writer repeats his earlier definition in v.14
 - Those who have truly become partakers of Christ are those who hold fast their assurance firm until the end
 - The assurance he mentions is a confidence in the sufficiency of Christ’s promises
 - It’s the opposite of what the Israelites demonstrated in the desert, questioning the Lord’s promises and faithfulness
 - The smallest inconvenience led them to say that God was no longer good, that Moses was incompetent, the plan no longer sound
 - True Christians hold their assurance to the end, for as long as today is called today
 - In other words, we hold fast in these days as we wait for the fulfillment of God’s promises
 - We hold fast until we see Him face to face

- These are the days we're called to live by faith
 - Trusting in the promises of God – just like Abraham
 - And a Christian lives in that assurance until they reach the end of their days
- When you encourage someone to persevere in their faith, you're reminding them of the goodness of God and His faithfulness to His promises and the eternity of His timetable
 - And by that encouragement, you are reinforcing their witness and their opportunity to please the Lord
 - Along the way, you may run into someone who doesn't seem to respond in the same way to your encouragement
 - Your friend in the Church, your Christian neighbor
 - To that person, your encouragement may be the day of salvation
 - Preaching the Gospel isn't about special moments that you select, based on a person you're talking to whom you've deemed to need the Gospel
 - Those moments do certainly happen, but those moments are fleeting
 - Instead, see it as a continual conversation all day long
 - Speak the Gospel to everyone all the time, and along the way you'll inevitably share it with an unbeliever
 - Whether in the Church or in line at the supermarket
 - Encourage one another as long as it's called "today" – while there's still time



Hebrews (2014) - Lesson 4A

Chapters 3:14-19; 4:1-
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Robert Robinson was an English clergyman who lived in the 18th century. Not only was he a gifted pastor and preacher, he was also a highly gifted poet and hymn writer. However, after many years in the pastorate, his faith began to drift. He left the ministry and finished up in France, indulging himself in sin. One night, he was riding in a carriage with a Parisian socialite who had recently been converted to Christ. She was interested in his opinion on some poetry she was reading:

*Come thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing thy grace,
Streams of mercy never failing,
Call for hymns of loudest praise.*

When she looked up from her reading, the socialite noticed Robinson was crying.

“What do I think of it?” he asked in a broken voice. “I wrote it. But now I’ve drifted away from Him and can’t find my way back.”

“But don’t you see?” the woman said gently, “The way back is written right here in the third line of your poem: Streams of mercy never ceasing. Those streams are flowing even here in Paris tonight.”

That night, Robinson recommitted his life to Christ.

- Robinson’s experience is a good example of how a Christian falls away
 - If we concede to disappointment or discouragement, or if submit to the desires of our flesh, we can slip back into a life ruled by our flesh
 - Our faith is still intact, in that our knowledge of Christ as Lord and Savior never leaves
 - But in our behavior, we depart from the commands of Christ
 - We are departing from the life of obedience to Christ, though we can never be separated from the love of Christ
 - This was Robinson’s experience
 - But it is the kindness of God that brings us to repentance, and God was certainly good to give Robinson the opportunity to repent and return
 - The Lord never left Robinson, even though Robinson tried to run from God
 - That’s the security we have in Christ, that even when we are faithless, yet He remains faithful
- For the unbeliever, however, there is no such rescue promised
 - When an unbeliever is exposed to the truth, considers it for a time, and then falls away during a time of testing, there is no tether holding them to the Lord
 - They have no relationship with the Lord
 - Perhaps they will eventually come to embrace the truth, as the Lord permits
 - But unless and until they come to understand the truth of the Gospel, their temporary interest in Christ or Christianity buys them nothing
 - This is why the writer says in v.14, that becoming a partaker (*metochos*-companion) of Christ will lead to a holding fast our confidence until the end

- This is the central concern for this writer in his second warning
- That among us in the Church may be those who have not truly embraced Christ as Lord
- And yet, they continue to congregate with us
- For their sake, the writer asks us to encourage one another, seeking to build everyone up, and ultimately to lead everyone to a saving knowledge of Christ
 - But the sin of unbelief has a hardening effect on a heart
 - Time is running out
 - And that's why the writer continues to emphasize hearing the Lord's voice today
- And if someone fails to hear the Lord's voice, there is a certain outcome awaiting them for their unbelief
 - And that leads us to the consequence of the warning at the end of Chapter 3 and into Chapter 4

Heb. 3:14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,

Heb. 3:15 while it is said,

**“TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,
DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME.”**

Heb. 3:16 For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses?

Heb. 3:17 And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?

Heb. 3:18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient?

Heb. 3:19 So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

- The writer wanted to offer the Church an example of their nation's past to illustrate both the possibility and the seriousness of some within the group failing to believe
 - So he returns to the experiences of the Israelites in the desert
 - He asks a series of questions to cause his audience to consider the consequences of unbelief in our midst
 - His questions are all focused on the “who” of that time in the desert
 - First, he asks, “Who provoked God when they had heard?”
 - Those who heard are the Israelites, who heard the Lord's call, through Moses, to leave Egypt
 - They saw God's miraculous powers in the desert
 - They received the Covenant, and heard the Word of the Lord
 - But who was God angry with 40 years? Again, with those same people
 - They angered God in their sin, disobeying the Word of the Lord time and again and demonstrating a lack of faith

- And so the Lord declared they would all die in the desert
- Finally, the writer asks “Who was denied entrance into the promised land?”
 - That very same generation of Israel never entered the Lord’s rest, that is, the land of Canaan
- His point is that those who began the journey with Moses didn’t make it to the destination
 - A start doesn’t guarantee a finish, if that start begins in the wrong way
 - In the case of the Israelites, from the beginning, they provoked the Lord
 - And in the end, they were denied entry into the land that the Lord promised to Abraham’s descendants
 - But how could the Lord deny something He promised?
 - Paul explains how in Romans

Rom. 9:6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel;

Rom. 9:7 nor are they all children because they are Abraham’s descendants, but: “THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED.”

Rom. 9:8 That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

- The promises of God are obtained through faith
- We must believe in those promises before God assigns them to us
- In the case of that generation of Israel, their unbelief in God’s promise of a good and prosperous land disqualified them from receiving that promise
 - The writer says their nation was not able to enter the land because of unbelief
 - Just attaching themselves to Moses wasn’t enough
 - Just hearing the Word proclaimed wasn’t enough
 - Being witness to wondrous displays of God wasn’t enough to grant entrance into God’s promises
 - The test of entrance was faith – belief in those promises
- Things haven’t changed for the Church, as the writer points out in Chapter 4:1

Heb. 4:1 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.

Heb. 4:2 For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

- We should tremble at the thought that there might some among us who possess the same kind of evil, unbelieving heart
 - We aren’t merely trembling for their sake, though certainly we have concern for

their eternal future

- But remember, the consequences impacted all of Israel – Moses, Joshua and Caleb all wandered in the wilderness for 40 years as well
- When the unbelieving element in the group disobeyed God, the Lord placed the entire nation under judgment
- So we should be concerned if our congregations are long-term refuges for unbelievers
 - We certainly want them to visit, to inquire, to listen to the Word and to consider what they hear
 - But if our gathering can be a comfortable place for the unbeliever to hang out indefinitely, then we should fear, the Bible says
 - The Word of God is intended to create a response in the hearts of those who hear it preached properly
 - And that response will either be to fall upon our knees in repentance, seeking His forgiveness and mercy
 - Or it will lead us to run away in disobedience, stubbornness and pride
- But the one thing we cannot permit, is for unbelievers to remain unchanged in our midst
 - To do so is to risk angering the Lord
 - It means departing from the mission of the Church, our very purpose for being – we are to be light, salt and truth to the world
 - And it also suggests we're not presenting the Word of God in a true and forthright manner
 - We've created an environment where the world can feel comfortable in the Church
- Some churches have made this mistake today, labeling their approach to the gathering as “seeker-friendly”
 - And though they do what they do with the best of intentions, nevertheless, they are paving a road to destruction
 - They have designed an experience that appeals to unbelievers, in the hope that bringing them into the gathering will have a positive impact
 - But rubbing elbows with believers does not – by itself – bring about saving faith
 - If hanging around the people of God or even God Himself was a means to saving faith, then how do we explain Israel in the desert?
 - Christianity doesn't “rub off”
 - It doesn't enter a heart like air entering lungs
 - You don't absorb it or learn it through a socializing process
 - Perhaps in the early stages of someone's interest in the faith, a socializing period can be useful to building bridges
 - But sooner or later, if we hope to see someone come to faith in Christ, we must present the message of the Gospel from the testimony of the Bible

- And that message is always the same: Starting with sin, then moving to Christ, and ending with the need for confession
- That's been this writer's point throughout this example of Israel in the desert
 - In v.2, the writer says those who provoked God were denied rest
 - They rubbed elbows with Moses and the rest of the Israelites
 - They walked the same walk, they heard the same Word
 - But it didn't profit them, because it was not united with faith
 - The Greek word for "united" can mean "mixed together"
 - They weren't experiencing what they encountered through a lens of faith
 - They only experienced it in a fleshly sense, which did them no good
- That has to be our concern as well, should we afford safe harbor to someone who lacks true saving faith?
 - It might feel good to us in some sense, but it's doing no one any good
 - No one is profiting
 - They don't profit, because without faith, it's impossible to please God
 - And we don't profit, because we haven't served the purpose of the Church
 - We haven't pleased our Lord
 - We're potentially forfeiting reward
 - The writer has been emphasizing that the stakes for those who provoke the Lord in disobedience to the Gospel are very, very high
 - He's described the penalty for unbelief to be not entering the rest of God
 - We know that for those in the desert, the penalty was not entering the Promised Land
 - But the writer also indicated that this is a penalty still being experienced by those who reject Christ today
 - Notice in v.1, the writer says the promise of entering the Lord's rest still remains today
- How can the penalty for failing to believe be the same today as it was in the time of Moses?
 - After all, the Israelites eventually did enter the Promised Land under Joshua
 - So what exactly does the writer mean when he says those who remain disobedient in their unbelief are in jeopardy of not entering His rest?
 - The writer goes forward to explain

Heb. 4:3 For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said,

**"AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH,
THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST,"**

although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.

Heb. 4:4 For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: "AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS";

Heb. 4:5 and again in this passage, **“THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.”**

Heb. 4:6 Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience,

Heb. 4:7 He again fixes a certain day, **“Today,”** saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before,

**“TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,
DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS.”**

Heb. 4:8 For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that.

Heb. 4:9 So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

Heb. 4:10 For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.

- In v.3, the writer defines what he means by “entering rest”
 - Using the Israelites as a negative example, the writer demonstrates that those who have believed in God’s promises enter into His rest
 - Once again, he quotes from Psalms 95, where the Lord Himself equated Israel’s disobedience with forfeiting entering rest
 - But now, the writer wants us to understand that God wasn’t speaking about entering Canaan, at least that wasn’t His only meaning
 - So with a series of comments from the Old Testament, the writer explains what it means to be denied God’s rest
 - First, in v.4, the writer refers to the Creation account
 - As we all remember, the Lord took a day at the end of Creation to rest
 - The Lord rested in the sense that He ceased the Creation process
 - And in that sense, the Lord’s rest has never ended
 - Even now, the Lord is “at rest” from Creation, because the Creation process ended on Day 6 and has never restarted
- But thousands of years later, the Lord declared that disobedient Israel wouldn’t enter into His rest
 - The rest of the Lord has already begun and is everlasting at this point
 - So the only way someone can never enter into God’s rest, is if they never enter into His presence
 - And that’s exactly the meaning of the Lord’s threat
 - Those who were disobedient and unbelieving in the desert were being denied entrance into the Lord’s presence in Heaven, where He is at rest
 - Therefore, the writer says an opportunity remains for “some” to enter into the Lord’s rest
 - Not all enter into His rest, His presence
 - By faith, some will enter into the Lord’s rest

- Some are like those in the desert
 - They had good news preached to them, but still they failed to enter because they disobeyed what they heard
- And the Lord wasn't just talking about denying them entrance into Canaan, the physical Promised Land
 - The writer proves in vs.7-9 that the rest God was describing was a euphemism for entering into His presence, into salvation
 - First, the writer quotes from the Psalms again, when David called Israel to enter into the Lord's rest "today"
 - But, by the time David wrote that psalm, the nation of Israel had already been living in Canaan for many generations
 - So if entering rest merely referred to the physical land, then David wouldn't have still been calling Israel to enter the Lord's rest
 - The nation had already entered long before
 - Notice, the writer makes that conclusion in v.8
 - He says that if entering rest merely meant entering Canaan under Joshua, then we wouldn't have had David repeating the call to enter centuries later
 - So the writer concludes in v.9, that there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God
- The concept the writer is expressing here is deep and incredibly meaningful for all believers
 - The writer is explaining that the word "rest" in the Bible is a word God uses to describe entering into salvation by faith, which leads to our glory in God's presence
 - That rest is God's rest
 - It's a rest He makes available
 - It's not a rest we earn
 - It's a rest He earned by His work, and He invites us to join Him by faith
 - When we have faith in His promises, we enter into His rest
 - This is a Sabbath rest
 - And since that rest is the Lord's rest, it lasts perpetually
 - Just as the Lord rests perpetually because He will never return to the work of Creation, likewise, we will enjoy a perpetual rest by our faith
 - We do not work our way to salvation; we rest in the work God did on our behalf through Christ
 - The land in Canaan was merely a picture of that eternal rest
 - When the nation of Israel disobeyed in the desert, they were demonstrating their lack of saving faith in the promises of God
 - So the Lord denied them entrance into the physical Promised Land to demonstrate His displeasure with them
 - But in the process, He was also creating a picture of where unbelief leads

- It prevents us from entering God’s rest, His presence, His salvation
 - We will be left with our own work, which will never produce lasting eternal rest
- That’s why David said so many years after Joshua that Israel should still be seeking to enter God’s rest
 - Everyone should be seeking to enter the Lord’s presence
 - For as long as today is called “Today”
 - For as long as the Lord continues to hold back His judgment and allow us the opportunity to know Christ and be saved
 - We should seize that opportunity to enter His rest
 - As the writer says in v.10, that the one who has entered the Lord’s rest is the one who has rested from his works, just as God rested from His works
 - The day you receive Christ as your savior, you cease from your works
 - You enter into the Lord’s Sabbath rest
 - The rest that the Lord commemorated by giving Israel a day to rest in each week
 - That weekly rest that Israel enjoyed under the Law was a memorial of the Lord’s rest
 - You and I enter into the Lord’s rest, the perpetual rest, when we accept Christ as Savior
 - That’s why we can say now that we are not required to observe a weekly rest on one day of the week
 - Because we have obtained something far greater by our faith in Christ
 - We have entered into God’s perpetual rest, a rest that lasts every day of every week
 - A rest we enter by faith alone, and not by our own works
- That’s the rest the writer wants all his readers to enter
 - As he says in v. 11

Heb. 4:11 Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.

- The Greek word for “diligent” means “to make every effort”
- We should make every effort to bring everyone with us into the rest of the Lord
- And this refers to us a collective group, working together to bring all of us as a community into His rest
- Or simply put, we should be working as hard as we can to make sure everyone in our church truly knows the Lord
 - As the writer said earlier, let’s encourage everyone to remember the Lord’s kindness and mercy in the face of Christ
 - Continue speaking the Gospel and expecting a response

- Solicit testimonies, encourage believers to be baptized
- Don't let anyone fall through the cracks
- And at the same time, let's be realistic in our expectations
 - Not everyone may be willing to make the trip with us
 - Some will remain disobedient, unrepentant and unbelieving
 - What are we to do with those?
- The one thing we can't do is find a way to make them feel comfortable in their unbelief
 - We can't soften the Gospel or make excuses for their lack of repentance
 - We can't make unity a higher priority than truth
 - We can't make their participation in the congregation a higher goal than their partaking in Christ
- Let's not allow anyone to follow the example of the Israelites in the desert
 - A people who saw miraculous things around them and heard the marvelous revelation of God
 - And yet they turned away and followed their flesh...

- We've reached the end of the second warning in our study of Hebrews
 - Let's summarize the second warning briefly if we can
 - The writer began with a simple definition of being a Christian
 - We are a part of Christ's house (*i.e.*, we are the Church) if we hold fast our confession of Christ firmly until the end
 - Those who do not hold fast are those who have not yet entered into the Lord's rest
 - That is, resting from works and entering into salvation by faith alone
 - And the writer reminded us that many in Israel's history were barred from entering a physical form of rest for unbelief
 - And they suffered this fate, even in the face of amazing signs and wonders that demonstrated God's power
 - They knew He existed, obviously
 - But they failed to trust in His Word
 - Like the writer will say later:

Heb. 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

- Faith isn't merely an acknowledgement that God exists; it requires we trust in God's promises
 - The Israelites were promised reward in Canaan
 - But they did not believe those promises
 - So the writer asks us, the Church, to be diligent in encouraging one another to know and follow the Lord as long as it is called "Today"
 - So that no one among us will fall through the cracks
- As he ends his second warning, the writer adds a final word of exhortation to heed his warning

Heb. 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Heb. 4:13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

- The writer makes a statement many in the Church have learned by heart, or at least heard quoted many times, I'm sure
 - It's a statement about the power of God's Word in the hearts of mankind

- This truth lies at the heart of the Gospel and of our experience following Christ
- And it reveals the nature of our judgment and that of all Creation before Christ in a coming day
- First, notice how v.12 begins: the Word of God
 - This is a statement about the power of the Scriptures (the Bible)
 - Ultimately, of course, it's a statement about the power of God Himself, for all power extends from Him
 - But specifically, the Lord's Word has a power derived from God
 - As Isaiah says so powerfully

Is. 55:11 So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
 It will not return to Me empty,
 Without accomplishing what I desire,
 And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

- In Isaiah, we're told that once the Lord issues His Word, it moves out into Creation with a certain and unchanging power
 - It's described as if it were an agent with a will of its own
 - The Word of God isn't merely a description of reality
 - It is the agent of cause
 - The proof of that is Gen. 1 – God spoke and something happened
 - All of Creation will act in unison to accomplish what the Word of God proclaims
 - Understand the breadth of this statement: ALL Creation bows to the Word of God – not just the animate, but the inanimate
 - You may remember the moment when Jesus entered Jerusalem on the Sunday before He was crucified, Palm Sunday
 - As he rides in on a donkey, the crowds begin to sing Psalm 118, saying:

Luke 19:37 As soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen,

Luke 19:38 shouting:

**“BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD;
 Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”**

- The crowd was singing from Psalm 118, which is a Messianic psalm
- Here's a quote from that part of the psalm

Psa. 118:22 The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief corner stone.

Psa. 118:23 This is the LORD'S doing;
It is marvelous in our eyes.

Psa. 118:24 This is the day which the LORD has made;
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Psa. 118:25 O LORD, do save, we beseech You;
O LORD, we beseech You, do send prosperity!

Psa. 118:26 Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD;
We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.

- As you can see, this is a psalm that describes the Messiah
- The psalm announces the arrival of the Messiah to establish His Kingdom
- The people along the road believed Jesus to be that Messiah, so they complied with Scripture's demands and announced His arrival by singing Psalm 118
- The Pharisees were visibly upset to hear this psalm being sung for Jesus, since they did not accept Jesus as Messiah for themselves
 - Here is the scene, as recorded in Luke:

Luke 19:39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples."

Luke 19:40 But Jesus answered, "I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!"

- Notice Jesus' response to the Pharisees
- Jesus simply says that if this crowd didn't sing this song, the rocks would sing it for them
- Jesus isn't speaking in hyperbole; I believe He meant what He said, literally
 - If the people had remained silent, in disobedience to God's Word, then the very rocks themselves would have made a joyful noise to comply with God's Word
 - The Word of God declared that upon the Messiah's arrival, this psalm would be sung
 - And whatever the Word of God says, must come to pass
 - The Creation itself operates according to that Word
 - As Isaiah says, the Word WILL accomplish what the Lord desires
- And in this context, the writer wants us to understand that the Word of God will expose those who live in unbelief
 - Unbelief will not go undetected
 - The Lord will one day call all to account
- How does the Word of God expose the hearts of men? In five ways, the writer says

- First, the writer says the Word of God is living
 - It is living, in the sense that it has the power to grant men spiritual life
 - In fact, the Word of God is the only thing that brings spiritual life
 - And so, only those who have truly heard the Word of God will be made alive by it
- Secondly, the Word of God is active
 - The Greek word is *energes*, from which we get “energy”
 - The word means, “it accomplishes work within us”
 - It’s active in the way God’s Word speaks to us on unique issues in our spiritual lives
 - A group may study the same passage of Scripture together, and yet each is convicted in a different way
 - One person comes to repentance and is brought to faith
 - Another is convicted of a persistent sin and the need to walk in holiness
 - A third senses the Spirit confirming it’s time to move out in a new ministry
 - A fourth may experience encouragement and hope in seeing God’s patience and wisdom reflected in the text
- And it’s not just active in the sense of how it informs us
 - The Word of God has power to compel the Creation to respond and comply with the will of God
 - So it is in each of us
 - Learning and submitting to the Word of God has a supernatural power to transform us into the will of Christ
 - As Paul said in Romans 12

Rom. 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

- Thirdly, the Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword
 - The word for “sword” used in the Greek means a small, sharp paring knife, commonly used to debone fish
 - In ancient Rome, this type of knife was the symbol used for Roman judges and magistrates
 - Like we have a blind Lady Justice holding scales to symbolize unprejudiced judgment
 - The two-edged knife represented the judges’ responsibility to “cut both ways” in getting to the bottom of a matter
 - Here, the writer is using that symbol to reflect how the Word of God carves us up

in judging the thoughts and intentions of our heart

- The Lord's Word will be the instrument by which the Lord will perform a postmortem examination of every person's life, whether at the Judgment Seat of Christ (for the believer) or the Great White Throne of Judgment (for the unbeliever)
 - We will be judged by the Word of God, according to what it demands
 - For the unbeliever, the Great White Throne of Judgment will reveal their deeds to be sinful and not in keeping with the Word of God
 - But even for believers, the Judgment Seat of Christ will be a moment when our lives are laid bare for judgment
 - The result of our judgment is for the determination of eternal reward
 - Nevertheless, the outcome of that judgment will be based on our conformance to the Word of God
 - Our obedience to the Word in our walk with Christ
- Fourthly, the Word of God is piercing, such that it separates spirit from flesh
 - The writer actually uses four descriptions of soul and body, but each pair are synonyms
 - He says soul and spirit vs. joints and marrow
 - Soul and spirit describe the immaterial nature of our being
 - While joints and marrow describe the flesh of our existence
 - So there aren't four parts to our existence, or even three
 - We are only two: spirit and flesh
 - The writer's speaking of the Word's power to discern between the motives of our flesh and the motives of our spirit
 - The same action we take can at sometimes be sinful, and other at other times, be a result of walking in faith
 - We could make a donation to our church with the intent to support the work of the Lord as an act of faith
 - Or we could make a donation, hoping to gain the favor of leaders in the church
 - You and I are not perceptive enough to know the difference sometimes
 - But the Word of God is perceptive enough to discern when an action was driven by the flesh or when it was a response of faith in our spirit
 - Once again, the Word of God will judge us, and we will only gain God's pleasure for acts of faith
- Finally, the writer says the Word is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of hearts
 - The Word is powerful at revealing truth, that it will bring to light those good and sinful thoughts we harbored in our hearts
 - Even those thoughts we never took action on will still be subject to judgment

- Remember, Jesus Himself explained the potential for our thoughts to convict us before God

Matt. 5:27 “You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY’;
Matt. 5:28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

- Notice, it judges both our thoughts and our intentions
 - God’s Word is such a perfect judge, it will reveal not only what we thought, but also our intentions in having that thought
 - Think about that the next time a sinful thought moves through your head
 - While we’ve been forgiven from the penalty of those sinful thoughts (and all sin), they’re not going to remain hidden forever
- And to finish his comments on the second warning, the writer says there is no creature – no demon nor angel, no unbeliever nor believer – who will hide from His judgment
 - Everything about our lives will be open and laid bare to the judgment of Christ
 - Naturally, the writer expects his readers to respond to this truth in the appropriate way
 - If everything we think, want, do and don’t do, is going to be subject to judgment on a day to come, then we should strive to live now in keeping with that prospect
 - And we should want to encourage all those around us to do the same
- And with that, the writer moves forward, with an introduction to his next section of teaching, on Christ as our High Priest

Heb. 4:14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

Heb. 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

Heb. 4:16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

- These verses serve as an introduction to his next section, which really gets going in Chapter 5
 - This next section addresses a major pillar of Judaism, the priesthood of the Levites
 - Like the earlier issue of angels, this issue centers on a comparison of the value and purpose of older things with the new and better things available in Christ
- The writer introduces this section with v.14, with a statement that sounds very much like way he detoured into his second warning

- That detour began in Chapter 3:7
- In fact, take a moment with me to look at the verse immediately preceding 3:7

Heb. 3:6 but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house —whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

- This was the statement that launched the writer into the second warning
- Notice, he used the preposition “if” to pique his readers’ interest in where he was going next
- By using “if”, he was suggesting that not all of his readers were a part of God’s house
- Not all were truly believers in Christ
- But now, look again at v.14, where the writer ends his warning to this group

Heb. 4:14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

- We can see the writer getting back on point now
- He’s back to talking about that house, the one that Christ built, that is, the Church
- And he’s still comparing it to the house that Moses served in, that is, the people of God who were under the Covenant of Law
- Both “houses” have high priests serving the needs of the people
 - But we have a High Priest far superior to the one that served in the earlier day
 - And in this introduction, the writer mentions numerous ways that Christ is superior to the men who served as high priest in Israel
- First, our High Priest has passed through the Heavens
 - The writer is speaking of the proximity, or position, of Christ to the Father
 - Christ isn’t merely a man bound to the earth, far from the presence of the Father
 - Such was the condition of earthly priests that served under the Law
 - They might have been elevated to the position of High Priest by the people
 - And in their duties, they got as close to God as any man could under the Law
 - They entered the Holy of Holies to administer the blood of the sacrifice on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement
 - But that was nothing compared to what our High Priest has done in the New Covenant
 - Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father
 - There is no flesh closer to the Father than the Incarnate Christ
 - And Christ is in that position 24/7 on our behalf

- The high priest of Israel only entered the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle on one day of the year
- Only once each year did Israel send a representative before the mercy seat to seek the Lord's mercy and intercession
- But our High Priest is continually serving His people
- And the high priest of Israel wasn't just in a lesser position to serve God's people, but he also had an infinitely poorer perspective by which to serve as an intercessor
 - The high priest of Israel was only a man, and he was relatively isolated from the people
 - He couldn't meet every member of the nation of Israel to receive their prayer requests
 - He wasn't like Santa; he didn't make appearances at the Mall of Jerusalem so Israelites could sit on his lap and tell him their needs
 - And even if he could visit every Jew in advance of Yom Kippur, he couldn't have remembered all their needs
 - And his function in the temple didn't allow him to bring those needs before the throne
 - He simply performed the duties prescribed in Leviticus
 - And he called it a day
 - But our High Priest hears every prayer we raise up in His Name
 - Despite the fact that hundreds of millions of Christians can pray to Christ simultaneously, He can hear every single one
 - And he represents them to the Father with great wisdom and insight
 - And the Son's perfection and oneness with the Father ensure our prayers are received by the Father
- Moreover, in v.15, the writer says that when our High Priest hears, He does so with great sympathy and understanding
 - He isn't a dispassionate messenger relaying data
 - His humanity has equipped Him with an understanding from personal experience that informs His perspective
 - He was tempted in all things of life, the very same temptations you and I have experienced in our lives
 - He knows that moment when we are drawn away by sin, though He himself was never drawn away by temptation
 - The writer's point is, we have to seek for His guidance and power and intervention while we are encountering the temptation, not afterward
 - If you and I wait until after we have sinned, we missed a great opportunity to gain the blessing of such a great High Priest
 - Certainly, we still should approach Him after we have fallen, coming in repentance and seeking forgiveness

- And He is faithful and righteous to forgive us of our sins
- But if we stop as we face temptation and raise that moment up in prayer, we have confidence that the Lord can intercede for us in that moment to grant us victory over the temptation
 - Because He has faced the same temptation and won
 - And because He has full access to the power of the Spirit in us, He is capable of equipping us to victory over those moments
 - But we need to turn to Him as a High Priest before we fall to temptation, not just as our atoning sacrifice after we fall
- That's how the writer concludes in v.16
 - He says we should draw near to the throne of grace with a confidence that the Lord will hear and respond and equip us to receive a better judgment
 - Isn't that the point after all?
 - We know this judgment is coming. The writer just explained in it vivid detail
 - And as we contemplate it, we struggle to consider how to be ready
 - How can we face such a stern judgment, when we recognize how far we have to go in living a life that pleases the Lord?
 - Now the writer gives us a boost of confidence
 - He says the Lord is prepared to grant us the mercy and grace necessary to persevere in times of need
 - "Times of need" refers to a moment when we're experiencing temptation to sin, and we feel the weakness in our flesh, and we know where this is headed
 - We've been here before perhaps
 - And we know we should take a different course this time
 - But we feel powerless to make a better choice
- The writer says Jesus knows how you feel
 - And He is prepared to equip you supernaturally by the Spirit to succeed where before you have failed
 - He is our intercessor with the power to change our walk of life
 - But we must draw close to Him in that moment of need
 - So the next time you face temptation to sin, take a moment and pause in your tracks
 - Close your eyes, perhaps, and lift a prayer up to the Father, in the name of Christ
 - Ask Him to stop the temptation, to grant you victory over it
 - Ask Christ to give you the spiritual power to win the battle the way He did when He walked the earth
 - And watch the Lord respond to ensure you receive a better judgment

- As we begin Chapter 5 of Hebrews today, we begin a new proof of Jesus' superiority
 - The topic is the priesthood and Jesus as High Priest
 - Last week, as we ended Chapter 4, the writer made a transition to this topic by introducing Jesus as our new and better High Priest
 - One Who could sympathize with our weaknesses
 - And could intercede for us in a much better way, since He was perpetually close to the Father
 - At this point, the writer is preparing to launch into an extended discussion on Jesus as our High Priest
 - That discussion goes all the way through Chapter 7
 - But perhaps at this point, you're thinking this topic holds little interest for you and your relationship with Christ
 - Perhaps you're saying to yourself, I don't really need to understand how Jesus is a better High Priest, since I never held any regard for the high priests of Israel
 - I'm not a Jew and I never experienced life under the Law or the sacrificial system, so of what use is this analysis?
 - If you're thinking that way, it's certainly understandable, but it's very wrong
 - The writer is going to work his way into some very challenging and eye-opening concepts about Jesus' Priesthood
 - Things that will change our understanding of events as far back as Genesis Chapter 3 and beyond
 - In fact, this writer's own audience was itself unprepared for the depth of his arguments and the magnitude of his revelation to them
 - Which is why this discourse on the priesthood requires three chapters
 - At the end of this chapter, the writer will suspend his discussion of the priesthood to issue the third warning
 - The warning is the entirety of Chapter 6, and it chastises the audience of this letter for not being able to see these truths on their own
 - They had overlooked some important aspects of God's plan going back to Creation
 - And as a result, the writer is laboring harder than he ought to in explaining Jesus' role as our High Priest
- So today we examine Chapter 5, where the writer begins to examine Jesus' qualifications as High Priest, and he ends with his introduction to the third warning

Heb. 5:1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins;

Heb. 5:2 he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness;

Heb. 5:3 and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself.

Heb. 5:4 And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was.

- The writer begins with the phrase “for every high priest...”
 - In other words, he’s giving the general qualifications in Israel for a man to be appointed as the high priest
 - Before we look at the specific qualifications, let’s understand a little background on the role of the high priest, or of priests in general
 - In Hebrew, the word “priest” is *kohen*
 - It can also be translated “chief minister”, as in “chief servant of God”
 - Many Jews descended from the tribe of Levi have the last name Kohen today, reflecting their priestly family origins
 - The general purpose of a priest is to be a representative of God to men and of men before God
 - They intercede before God on behalf of needful man
 - And they represent God’s holiness to sinful men
 - Within Israel, there were many priests who took turns serving in the tabernacle
 - And among them, one man was set apart as the high priest
 - His primary duty was to officiate over a one-time atonement each year
 - Regarding the high priest, he was considered the chief representative of God before men
 - All priests are representatives of the Covenant that granted them their office
 - And the high priest is the chief representative of God under that same Covenant
 - For example, the high priest of Israel was the chief representative under the Covenant of Law given through Moses
- And so, our writer begins by reminding us that these covenants stipulated certain requirements for the high priest
 - A high priest must be taken from among men, if he is to be a representative before God on behalf of men
 - Simply put, to represent a group, you must be a part of that group
 - Those who wish to represent America at the Olympics must be American
 - State representatives to Congress must be citizens of that state
 - Those wishing to represent their school at a spelling bee must attend that school, *etc.*
 - So it is with priests before the living God
 - A priest - by definition - represents men before God

- And therefore, a priest must be a human being, a man like those he represents
 - A priest cannot be an angel or a spirit, since such an entity cannot represent human beings
- Secondly, the high priest must offer sacrifices and gifts before God
 - Under the Law, Israel could not worship God, except in the way He prescribed in the Law
 - He prescribed that their worship must come through the means of priests
 - A priest had to perform the sacrifice
 - A priest had to take the blood into the tabernacle
 - The high priest had to take it into the Holy of Holies
 - You were not able to worship God without that priest – he was your means to God under the Law
 - These acts of worship are acceptable to God only because God Himself has recognized the office and function of the high priest
 - What the writer is saying is that the high priest was essential to the worship process because God was only willing to accept worship through his intercession
 - Representatives have power and authority only if those they approach acknowledge that power
 - God sets the rules for how men may approach Him – and when we follow His rules, He receives our worship
 - When we don't follow His rules, He doesn't receive our worship
 - Again, an example will help us understand what the writer is saying
 - When you hire an attorney to represent you in a court of law, that attorney has authority to conduct your affairs only because the judge acknowledges your attorney's right to represent you
 - If your representative was not a licensed attorney, or hadn't been accepted to the Bar Association, then he won't be acknowledged by the court as a lawful representative
 - Or if you send a person to Washington D.C. to represent you in Congress, but that person was not duly elected according to the rules of Congress, then your representative won't be accepted
 - And if your representative isn't accepted, then you have no representation in the end
 - So it is with a high priest
 - God has declared that He will accept our worship and acknowledge our requests for forgiveness only through the work of a high priest
 - That representative must be one approved by God, according to the rules of a covenant given by God
 - If you want God to receive your worship and hear your petitions and grant you

forgiveness for your sins, then you must approach Him on His terms

- Which means you must come to Him through a high priest who is qualified to offer those sacrifices and gifts
- In vs.2-3, the writer explains the wisdom of God in stipulating these requirements for a high priest, using the Aaronic priesthood, established in the Law of Moses
 - The writer says that because a high priest is himself a man, he has a valuable perspective when representing the needs of sinful people before God
 - The high priest of Israel could deal gently with the ignorant and misguided men and women of Israel
 - The words “ignorant” and “misguided” are not intended to be insults, but rather, they are literal descriptions of the people
 - Many within the people of God are ignorant, or in Greek, it means “without knowledge”, as lacking knowledge of God
 - The high priest was schooled in the ways of God through the Word of God and by his experiences in serving God
 - And that knowledge distinguished him from the people who lacked that knowledge
 - Furthermore, the people could be misguided
 - The Greek word for “misguided” means “to wander”, as in “to wander from the truth and into deception”
 - The people of God can be deceived by the world and by the enemy
 - So the high priest acted as a shepherd to bring those who wandered back into the fold through discipline, feeding and encouragement
- And best of all, the high priest of Israel was well-equipped to serve, because he was a man who was himself beset by similar weaknesses
 - His personal experience in dealing with his own sin gave him the capacity for compassion and sympathy for others who sinned
 - He could put himself in other people’s shoes
 - He was to be neither indifferent to sin, nor harsh with those who fell
 - In fact, his own sin required that he act as his own representative first, even before he could represent the people
 - Under the Law, the high priest had to sacrifice an animal for the sake of his own sins before he could approach before the Lord and offer sacrifices for their sins
 - This requirement served to remind the high priest and the people that sin was a common experience for all of them
 - It kept the high priest humble, for he was forced to acknowledge he was no more worthy than those he represented before God
- We don’t meet God through an earthly priest any longer, but we still have those who minister to us in one way or another
 - “Priest”, in a biblical context, implies that we meet God through that person

- And that we appeal to God through that intercession
- That is not how we approach God under the New Covenant
- And yet, in keeping with the proper biblical definition, priests do still exist in the world today – the Church is the priesthood of this world today
 - Believers, those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ, are the priesthood of this world today, according to Scripture
 - We represent the truth about God to the unbelieving world
 - We bring God to the people, just as priests did under the Law
 - Those who are seeking God go to the Body of Christ, the believers, to find Him
 - But we are not individually helping those within the Body to reach God – we are all accessing Him through the High Priest, Jesus Christ, serving us in Heaven
- As to the issue of pastoral leadership in the Church, it's common for us to conflate priests and pastors
 - Certainly, the Catholic Church has done that
 - But even in the Protestant tradition, we can view pastors as a substitute for priests – and that's not true
 - Any leader in the Church has a particular role and function in the Body, called-out in Scripture
 - But none of those things makes a leader a priest, or your representative to God – they are not your conduit to God
 - And yet, leaders should share some of the qualities that priests had in Israel
- For example, without stretching the comparison beyond what's reasonable, I think we learn something useful in the priesthood of Israel when considering the kind of leaders we want in the Church
 - Effective service in ministry requires compassion for the weakness and ignorance of others, knowing that we share the same weaknesses
 - Leaders should exhibit humility, acknowledging their own weaknesses, without exhibiting a sense of entitlement or power
 - But a leader can't give comfort to the enemy, and our chief enemy is sin – they can't excuse sin *because* they want to be compassionate
- So we want leaders who serve our interests in truth
 - They encourage us to become better followers of Christ
 - They have sympathy for ignorance, and compassion on the lost or wandering
 - And they make sacrifices on our behalf
- Now that the writer has explained the basic qualifications of a high priest, he moves to explaining how Jesus was a superior High Priest to any that came under the Law

Heb. 5:5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him,

**“YOU ARE MY SON,
TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU”;**

Heb. 5:6 just as He says also in another passage,

**“YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER
ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.”**

Heb. 5:7 In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety.

Heb. 5:8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.

Heb. 5:9 And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,

Heb. 5:10 being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

- The writer begins the comparison with Christ’s appointment as a priest
 - As with the priest under the Law, God the Father appointed and approved Jesus as a High Priest
 - Think back for a moment to the way a man became a priest, or even the high priest, in Israel
 - The priests were appointed by God to be of the Tribe of Levi, descended from Aaron
 - That’s why we call those priests the Aaronic priesthood
 - And the high priest was likewise always to be a descendent of Aaron, usually the eldest son
 - God set these qualifications, and only by these qualifications would a man be acceptable to God
 - Likewise, the Son had to meet the qualifications set by the Father if He was to be accepted as a representative of men
 - First, He had to be appointed by the Father
 - Just as God appointed Aaron, so did the Father appoint His Son
 - The writer returns to the Psalms to prove his argument, using Psalm 2

Psa. 2:7 **“I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:
He said to Me, ‘You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You.**

- How does this passage prove the writer’s point?

- The answer comes in understanding the ancient meaning of the term “begotten”
- The word in Hebrew means “come forth”, but it carried another meaning in ancient Israel
- This is the word used throughout Genesis to reflect the genealogical qualification of a son to continue the family name
- We see the word over and over again in the genealogy chapters of Genesis
 - There, it’s translated “became the father of...”
- The writer is highlighting the term in Psalm 2 to demonstrate both aspects of Christ’s qualifications as High Priest
 - First, it reflects Christ’s taking on human flesh and being born as a man
 - Truly, God became the Father of Christ, calling Him Son, because the Son was born as a man
 - And of course, He had to be a man to serve as a suitable representative
 - Only a man can represent men before God
 - But this word also reflects that Christ was born into the proper family, descended from the proper line
 - Just as the sons of Aaron were the only ones qualified to be priests, Christ had to be a Son of the proper family
 - And that family has an order of succession, just as the sons of Aaron had a proper order of succession
- In v.6, the writer gives us the order of Christ’s succession: the order of Melchizedek
 - The word “order” in Hebrew means “succession”
 - It doesn’t mean a certain group, like an order of monks
 - It means a succession of people in an ancestral line
 - The Aaronic priesthood is an example of an order
 - New high priests only came from among the sons of previous high priests
 - And since a high priest served for life, a new high priest inherited his office by succession upon the prior high priest’s death
 - So the writer of Hebrews is explaining that Jesus did not assume for Himself the title of High Priest, but He received it in the way the Father required
 - He received it because He was born into the correct family line
 - And He inherited His priesthood through a succession of priests
 - That succession of priests is called the order of Melchizedek
 - But Christ, never dying again, never gives up His Priesthood
- Then the writer compares the work of Christ as High Priest to the work of the high priests of the Aaronic priesthood
 - In the days of Jesus’ flesh (that is, when He lived as a man on earth prior to His ascension) Jesus offered up both prayers and supplications

- The writer is referring specifically to Jesus' High Priestly prayer in John 17, in the Garden of Gethsemane, and His petitions while on the cross
 - These were key moments in His ministry, when He interceded in weakness on behalf of ignorant and misguided humanity
 - He was serving as our High Priest in those moments
- He approached the Father, the One Who was able to save Him from death
 - Obviously, the Son died on the cross
 - So when the writer says the Father was able to save Him from death, he means the Father's ability to resurrect Jesus
 - And Jesus' petitions were heard by the Father because of Jesus' piety
 - The word "piety" in Greek means "caution" or "reverence"
 - Jesus' reverence was in doing all that God required to be a suitable representative, even to the point of showing sympathy for those who persecuted Him
 - And we see God's acceptance of Jesus as High Priest in the fact that He resurrected Him from death, leaving Him in the role of High Priest forever
- Finally, in vs.8-10, the writer emphasizes the value of Jesus' sufferings as High Priest
 - Though He was sinless and was divine, He still gained from the experience of suffering as a man
 - That experiential knowledge served to teach Jesus obedience
 - We might recoil at the notion that God could be taught anything, but in this case, it makes sense
 - Before Jesus became incarnate, He was always One with the Father and therefore, perfectly obedient
 - But then again, we must presume Jesus had never been in a situation where disobedience to the Father was a viable option
 - But in the form of man, facing a horrible death, Jesus was certainly tempted to run away and avoid the pain that He knew was coming
 - The suffering of Christ was in knowing what was coming and facing it voluntarily
 - That experience taught Him obedience in a way He never could have known before He experienced it as a man
 - Like I've said when teaching on submission to authority, it's never truly submission until we're asked to do something we don't want to do
- By His willingness to submit to the Father's will, Jesus was made perfect, the writer says
 - That word "perfect" can confuse us a little, since it implies Jesus was less than perfect in some earlier moment
 - But that's the not the correct sense at all
 - The word in Greek is *teleioo*, which means "to bring to a perfect conclusion"
 - So the writer says that as Jesus suffered, His mission as High Priest was brought

to its perfect conclusion

- He could finally understand what the weaknesses of men were, what the challenges were
- He could overcome those challenges
- He could then be counted worthy by the Father to be our eternal High Priest
- He succeeded in all that He was given and was resurrected as evidence of God's approval
- And in that, the plan of God was completed
- We see this truth reflected at multiple points in the Gospels, where the same Greek word is used

John 4:34 Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.

John 19:30 Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

Luke 13:32 And He said to them, “Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I reach My goal.’

- Jesus' suffering on the cross was the accomplishment of a goal, and so that suffering made for a perfect end to that work
- And of course, it accomplished salvation for those who obey Christ
 - Obedience to Christ is a New Testament term for confessing Him as Christ, for believing the Gospel
 - Just as those in Israel could only gain the benefit of the high priest's sacrifice by accepting it on their behalf, so it is with Christ
 - We won't receive credit for His sacrifice unless we acknowledge it as a sacrifice on our behalf
- So Christ is the High Priest Who can make a sacrifice on our behalf, which the Father will regard as salvation for our sake
 - He came in the manner prescribed by the Father, as a begotten Son
 - He met all the qualifications as a man
 - Including demonstrating obedience to God and compassion for His fellow man
 - And He came in the succession, or order, of Melchizedek
 - This final detail is the most significant, in that it qualifies Christ as the promised Messiah
 - It tells us that God's promise of a Redeemer and King is now fulfilled in One Man,

Christ

- The order, or succession, of Melchizedek is an entirely different priestly order than the one given to Moses under the Law
- And it unites the Kings and Priests of Israel into a single order
- Perhaps you're not very familiar with the significance of the order Melchizedek
 - Perhaps you haven't even heard of the order before, though most of you probably remember it from our study of Genesis
 - Still, the whole conversation is probably not very familiar to us
 - Which is understandable to some extent, since we're Gentiles
 - Still, it's an important topic, one the writer expects us to understand and follow
 - Otherwise, how will he explain the significance of Christ's role as a better High Priest?
 - And sure enough, the writer decides he needs to pause in his teaching on Christ as High Priest to chastise the church a little for being unprepared for such a difficult conversation
 - Notice in v.11, the writer pivots into what will become his third warning to the Church

Heb. 5:11 Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

- Concerning Melchizedek, the writer says, "we have much to say"
 - We're not sure who the "we" is here, but it could reference a group of apostles working together
 - Or it could refer to the writer in union with the Holy Spirit
 - Either way, the writer has a message intended for this church, but he's inhibited from delivering it because of two challenges
 - First, the truth of the matter of Melchizedek is hard to explain
 - The Greek word for "hard to explain" literally means "to misjudge an interpretation"
 - In other words, the truth concerning Melchizedek is easy to misunderstand or misinterpret
 - The writer isn't saying it's hard for him to explain this truth
 - The writer understands it easily enough
 - And he's prepared to explain it well enough
 - But the nature of this complex truth makes it susceptible to misunderstanding and misinterpretation on the part of the audience
 - The second problem is with the audience, for this audience is apparently ripe for

misunderstanding the writer's analysis

- He uses an interesting term to describe their shortcoming
- He says they are dull of hearing
- The word for "dull" is *nothros* in Greek, which means "lazy" or "sluggish"
- These Christians were lazy in hearing and appreciating the truth of the Word
 - The writer isn't saying they are slow to learn or mentally incapable of understanding what he's talking about
 - Rather, they aren't interested in paying close attention and expending the mental effort required to work through the issues raised by a discussion of Melchizedek
- It reminds us that learning God's Word is not a passive activity
 - It requires effort, and it's worth it, because it yields a powerful reward
 - But if we don't focus ourselves on that work, we will naturally fall backward into a lazy Christian walk, one that regresses over time
 - This concern forms the substance of the writer's warning, which proceeds from here into Chapter 6
 - We'll take a closer look at the audience's problem and the writer's warning in the coming weeks

- This morning, we examine what is easily the most controversial and often debated warning in the book of Hebrews – the third warning
 - The heart of the warning is found in Chapter 6, but the issue concerning the writer begins at the end of Chapter 5, where we start today
 - As you remember, the writer was explaining the High Priesthood of Christ
 - And he was about to explain how Christ inherited a priestly order that is greater than the Aaronic priesthood, the one given through the Law of Moses
 - Christ's priesthood is in the order of Melchizedek
 - But then, the writer paused in 5:11 to chastise the church for not having the spiritual maturity to handle the discussion of Melchizedek
 - His comment reminds me of the famous line spoken by Jack Nicholson in the movie, *A Few Good Men*
 - You want the truth? You can't handle the truth!
 - The writer is worried his audience can't handle this truth
 - And yet they need this truth, because it will guard them from committing mistakes that injure their walk with Christ
 - So as we pick up again today, we will follow the writer's concerns for his audience and eventually enter into the warning itself
 - As I said, the warning generates a lot of disagreement among theologians and ordinary Christians
 - But that doesn't mean it's impossible, or even that difficult, to arrive at a correct understanding of the writer's meaning
 - After all, the Lord didn't author Scripture to confuse us
 - So if we remain confused, it's only because our biblical scholarship is lacking in some way
 - And I think you're going to see that the key to understanding this warning is a familiar refrain: context, context, context
- Let's start up again in v.11, and read through the end of the chapter

Heb. 5:11 Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

Heb. 5:12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

Heb. 5:13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.

Heb. 5:14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

- Concerning Melchizedek, the writer says, “we have much to say and it's hard to explain”

- But as we learned last week, the phrase “hard to explain” in Greek literally means “to be susceptible to misinterpretation”
 - He knows his audience is likely to misunderstand the truth of Melchizedek because they aren’t prepared for the complexity of the discussion
 - So it’s not that the writer is incapable of explaining the truth
 - It’s that his audience may not be prepared to understand it
- He says they are dull of hearing, which means lazy at being taught the scriptures
 - Listening implies instruction
 - They weren’t paying attention to the instruction of those sent by the Spirit to educate them on the scriptures
 - They weren’t merely lazy at listening to the subject of Melchizedek
 - They were lazy at listening to God’s Word in general
 - The issue is their dedication to biblical scholarship
- This reminds us of the gifts Paul listed in Ephesians 4 – including, among them, teachers
 - For the edification of the saints and for the equipping for the work of ministry
 - Although we are all taught by the same Spirit, we cannot pretend that we don’t need teachers
 - If we didn’t need another human being to instruct us from time-to-time, we wouldn’t have teachers in the Body of Christ by gift
- So having thrown down his gauntlet of an accusation, the writer goes forward on his tangent to explain what he sees wrong with this church’s practices
 - This sidebar takes us through the entirety of Chapter 6
 - Only when we get to Chapter 7, does the writer start back up in his discussion of Melchizedek
 - So let’s move into the reasons for his concern in this church
 - In v.12, the writer says these believers ought to be teachers by now
 - When he says “by now”, he means at this point in their walk as Christians
 - These churches had been operating for a decade, at least, by this point
 - That’s plenty of time to develop spiritual maturity and grow in knowledge of Christian doctrine
 - They can’t use the excuse of time in explaining why they haven’t learned these things yet
 - When he says they ought to be teachers, the writer isn’t suggesting that the entire Church Body should be engaged in teaching, necessarily
 - He means individually, they should be able to teach
 - Obviously, if someone is capable of teaching others properly, then it’s a sign they’ve become a good student themselves

- Additionally, he means that the Church Body collectively should have matured to the point they could be a source of edification to others
 - Instead, they were still dependent on others' instruction, rather than being a source of blessing to others in need
- It's obvious this writer expected the church to mature to this point
 - Every member of any church body is expected to embark on a journey of spiritual maturity
 - Simply put, spiritual maturity is not an optional pursuit, it's our call and mission
 - And maturity demands becoming knowledgeable about the Bible, including understanding even the most difficult passages and concepts
 - We aren't to shy away from doctrine
 - Instead, we embrace conversations about soteriology, eschatology, ecclesiology, phenomenology, and the like
 - And if some of those words are foreign to your ears, then make it your goal to learn these concepts from Scripture
 - But this writer is clearly unhappy that the church hasn't been actively engaged in this walk
 - Instead, they have become lazy, starting with a disinterest in learning the Bible
 - It should worry us that so many churches in our own day have abandoned serious study of the scriptures
 - We're at risk of raising entire generations of biblically ignorant Christians
 - And this can only lead to bad things for the Body
- In the second half of v.12 and v.13, the writer explains the consequence of failing to pursue spiritual maturity
 - He says the lazy Christians not only didn't mature, but they are now regressing in their understanding
 - They need re-education
 - They need someone to come back and re-teach them the basic truths of the Christian faith
 - He refers to the elementary principles of the oracles of God
 - The Greek word for "elementary principles" is *stoicheion*, which literally describes the letters of the alphabet lined up in a row
 - And the phrase "oracles of God" simply means the "Words of God"
 - In other words, he's told them that they need to relearn their ABCs of the Bible
 - You can't get more elementary than that!
 - He's says they've come to need milk instead of solid food
 - Obviously, when he speaks of milk and solid food, he's not giving the church dietary advice

- He's using these terms as metaphors for the kind of Bible material this church can safely consume
- Remember in our 1 Corinthians study in Chapter 3, we heard Paul saying something almost identical to that church

1 Cor. 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.

1 Cor. 3:2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able,

- Both the writer to Hebrews and Paul are using similar language for similar purposes
 - They're both explaining how the Spirit walks every Christian through a building block process of learning
 - When we're new in the faith, everything is new and the Bible is foreign to us
 - We don't know where to start, or even why, we should study the Bible
 - So the Spirit first introduces us to simple, core concepts of faith
 - We learn about the Lord, His commands, His life and death and the meaning of those things
 - We learn about the need to put away sin, to love one another, to wait for the Lord's return
 - We begin to rethink what we believe about the beginning of Creation
 - And our attention begins to look out into eternity, to the Kingdom, to the things Christ promised to us
 - Each step of understanding leads to the next, and all these steps are informed by a consistent study of the Bible
 - These early steps of learning are compared to the milk that infants need
 - Infants can't digest more complex food
 - They can only handle a mother's milk
 - But that milk is the perfect food, and as it strengthens the baby, it grows
 - That growth eventually allows the child to be weaned off the milk and turn to solid food
 - But what if the child persists on milk for too long?
 - They don't grow after a certain point
 - In fact, they regress
 - They grow weaker, malnourished, anemic
- That's the writer's concern for this church
 - Instead of using their knowledge of the ABCs of the Bible as building blocks to pursue more challenging concepts, they became lazy

- They stopped maturing
 - They got the basics, and considered that enough
 - That's like a toddler refusing solid food and remaining content for milk alone
 - These Christians were not progressing and needed to relearn their ABCs
- There's real danger in not making it our goal to be a life-long, diligent student of the Bible
 - We may think we have enough knowledge today
 - And perhaps we do, considering where we are in our walk with the Lord
 - But what about tomorrow? What circumstances will we face? What false doctrines will we encounter? What crises of faith must we be prepared for?
- The writer is telling us that if we don't continue moving on to greater things, we're in danger of losing what we have
 - Whatever we have learned is no longer enough to guide us in a manner pleasing to the Lord
 - Because our flesh and the enemy never stop trying to take us astray
 - Like the old story goes, whichever dog we feed gets stronger
 - So if we're not feeding our spirit with solid food, then we should expect to regress as our flesh and the enemy gain a stronger foothold in our lives
- And at the end of v.14, the writer shares the reward of seeking spiritual maturity
 - Spiritual maturity gives us the ability to discern good from evil
 - Knowing how to recognize the schemes and temptations of the enemy is the fruit of spiritual maturity
 - Conversely, spiritual immaturity leaves us vulnerable to evil things
 - If we can spot evil, then we can steer clear of the consequences of engaging in evil
 - But evil does not show up wearing a black hat – when you think you know what the enemy looks like, you are ripe for a fall
 - He does not look like you expect – 2 Cor. 11:14 tells us he comes as an angel of light – he will look like the right thing
 - You will like it, but for the counsel of Scripture, giving you discernment – this is the value of Bible study
 - But if we lack that ability, then it's only a matter of time before we stumble and make an alliance with evil
 - Maybe we give in to our lust, anger, fear or greed
 - Maybe we succumb to a false teaching or practice in the church
 - Maybe we offend our Lord with counterfeit or idolatrous worship
 - Maybe we fall into occultist influences
 - Whatever that evil may be, there are always consequences for playing with fire

- We'll see those consequences here in the form of broken relationships, strife, suffering, emotional trauma and regret
 - And we're putting our eternal rewards at risk
- So we should seek for spiritual maturity, but securing that maturity is a matter of practice and training in God's Word, the writer says
 - You and I can't expect to simply become mature as a function of our physical age, or even the number of years since we've been born-again
 - It's not a matter of seniority or tenure
 - It's a function of practice and training
 - Practice refers to the regular exercise of spiritual disciplines, principally studying God's Word, prayer, worship, service and fellowship
 - And may I suggest that these disciplines should largely follow in that order
 - Our first priority is to learn all that the Lord has provided to us in His Word
 - It's been given to us for a reason
 - And until we've exhausted all that it offers, there is little reason to seek our answers elsewhere
 - That's the chief complaint this writer has against this audience
 - The second priority is prayer
 - Followed by corporate worship, service to the body and, lastly, fellowship
 - So often, I find Christian priorities are almost exactly opposite of this list, assuming they even have everything on this list
 - Christians love fellowship, and who wouldn't?
 - But we'll fellowship for hours, but we won't spend more than a few minutes each week in study, prayer or worship
 - That is not a recipe for spiritual maturity
 - And therefore, it's not a recipe for avoiding evil in our lives
- So if we're stuck in an immaturity rut, where do we go next? The writer begins his exhortation in Chapter 6

Heb. 6:1 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

Heb. 6:2 of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

- First, the writer says we have to be willing to leave the elementary teaching behind
 - The Greek word for "elementary" here is different than the one used in Chapter 5:12
 - This word here means "the beginning of something"

- In other words, the writer means leaving behind the beginning things we learned about Christ
- Those are the things every Christian learns, or should learn, at the outset of their walk of faith
- We learn these things as a foundation that we can build upon in years to come
- They're essential, but they're just the beginning
- So what kind of things are we talking about? What constitutes the elementary things about Christ?
 - The writer gives us six things that he categorizes as the basics, the beginning of our Christian education
 - The first teaching in this foundation is the teaching of repentance from dead works
 - The first thing we must learn as a Christian is that works don't save us
- Even after a Christian has heard the Gospel and been saved by faith, it's entirely possible for that person to continue thinking works play a role in obtaining righteousness
 - Paul wrote the letter to the Romans, in large part, to put an end to that kind of thinking
 - It's natural to think we give God an assist in our salvation, but Scripture stands ready to correct that thinking
 - So obviously, this is a foundational teaching
- Next, the writer says let's leave behind teaching on faith toward God
 - He's speaking of teaching of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone
 - The writer isn't diminishing the importance of that truth, nor the necessity of understanding it
 - He's simply saying once we understand it, let's move on
 - Leave it behind, in the sense that we use it as a building block to reach more challenging truths
 - Thirdly, we are to leave behind instructions about washings
 - The word "washings" is the word *baptismos* in Greek
 - It can refer to a variety of ritual washings, but in this context, it likely refers to teaching about baptism
 - Notice, he uses the word "instructions", which refers to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 28 on being baptized
 - Every Christian should be taught that water baptism is an essential requirement for following Jesus
 - And once that issue has been addressed, let's move on
 - Fourthly, there were instructions on laying on of hands in the Church

- This concerns the anointing of the Holy Spirit for various gifts
 - Every believer is granted gifts by the Holy Spirit, which was often accompanied by the laying-on of hands in the early Church
 - Teaching on the anointing of the Holy Spirit had been given by Paul in 1 Corinthians, which had been written and circulated well before this letter was written
 - So every believer should understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit to gift us
 - And knowing this, we move on, rather than treading over well-worn ground
- Fifth, we should all move on from teaching on the resurrection of the dead
 - When the writer says “the resurrection of the dead”, he’s referring to the resurrection day appointed for the Church
 - That day has come to be called a different name in the Church today
 - We sometimes call it the Rapture
 - It’s the day that all Church saints will be raised into new bodies
 - Our resurrection, in other words
 - Isn’t it interesting that this topic still holds so much fascination, and even controversy, in the Church today, yet the writer says this is simple stuff
 - This is an elementary teaching we should understand early in our walk
 - And then we move on from it
 - You begin to get a sense of just how immature the body of Christ corporately is today when you consider that this is considered an elementary teaching
 - And it should be elementary, because it represents the hope of our faith
 - The hope of the Christian faith is the confidence that Christ’s death conquered death for all of us
 - So that death no longer has power over us
 - When our body finally returns to dust, we will simply get a new body
 - We will never see spiritual death because Christ paid that price for us
 - Yet today, we still have so many brothers and sisters who remain confused or ignorant about this essential teaching
 - How can they move on from something they don’t yet understand?
- And then finally, we should leave behind teaching on eternal judgment
 - Eternal judgment refers to eschatology in general, but especially to the reality of judgment for both the unbeliever and the believer
 - For the unbeliever, we should know and understand that there is an eternal place of punishment for unbelief in Christ
 - The place begins as Hell
 - And it eventually gives way to the Lake of Fire

- But it is an eternal place of torment for all who reject Christ
 - And there is no recovery
- As elementary as this teaching is, you can find some within the Church today teaching either that Hell doesn't exist, or that unbelievers who enter will be "released" at some point
 - They maintain this despite clear scriptural teaching to the contrary
 - They've substituted wishful thinking for the counsel of God's Word
 - Yet this writer says these are not tough things: they are elementary
 - And we shouldn't be wasting time rehashing them...let's move on
- In each of these six examples, we can find individuals, churches and even entire movements or denominations that are trying to redefine the meaning of these things
 - They haven't moved on and matured, as the writer says we all must seek to do
 - Instead, they've become lazy in their hearing of Scripture
 - And so they've consigned themselves to regressing into bad thinking, bad theology and ultimately, bad behavior
 - That was the writer's concern for the church in his day
 - And we should share that concern for ourselves, our families and our friends if we or they continue to neglect the Word of God
 - Pressing on to maturity is the central concern of our Christian lives, and there is a real and present danger for anyone who fails to mature in this way
 - Notice the next verse:

Heb. 6:3 And this we will do, if God permits.

- Pressing on and maturing as a Christian is a matter of our both our diligence and God's grace
- And so the question comes, if we aren't diligent, what will God do with our laziness?
- V.3 suggests it's an open question: those who regress are not guaranteed rescue
- There is no promise in Scripture that says if you become a Christian and neglect your spiritual maturity, God will rescue you
- The Bible says when we are faithless, He remains faithful – but that's in reference to salvation, not sanctification
- We will ultimately be sanctified by the glorification of the body someday – but that does mean your spiritual maturity will suddenly increase
- Though our body will be made sinless, the degree of spiritual maturity we obtain now is what we will carry with us into the Kingdom
- That's the subject of the writer's warning, which we'll study next time...

- Last time we studied in this chapter, the author confronted us with the challenge of whether we were maturing in our faith as we should
 - At the end of Chapter 5, the writer sounded a bit frustrated with this church's lack of spiritual progress
 - He felt forced to pause in his explanation of Melchizedek as the forerunner to Christ
 - The concept of Christ serving as priest in the order of Melchizedek was difficult to understand
 - Especially by an audience that hadn't done its homework
 - So he diverted his attention away from that discussion to engage the church on the dangers of failing to pursue spiritual maturity through a dedication to studying Scripture
 - At the beginning of Chapter 6, he listed six areas of Christian knowledge that he called the elementary teaching about the Christ
 - Notice he didn't call them teachings about Jesus
 - He calls them the teachings about the Christ
 - In other words, these were basic teachings that predated the revelation of Jesus as Christ
 - They are the basics of faith, which were presented as far back as the Old Testament
 - But as we looked at the list, we found several topics that can still pose a challenge for Christians today
 - Teachings on washing or spiritual gifting
 - Teaching on resurrection & eternal judgment
- So, as we began the chapter, we found ourselves already convicted by what constitutes the basics of Christian maturity
 - If these things are the basics, according to Scripture, and yet many believers are still ignorant on these topics, then what does that say about the state of our maturity?
 - Perhaps we are also in need of learning the ABCs of our faith
 - Perhaps we're also in danger of making the same mistake the early Church apparently made
 - And if so, then we may be subject to the same consequences, right?
 - Now the writer hasn't yet explained what those consequences are
 - That's coming in the second half of this chapter
 - It's the third warning of the book of Hebrews, and one of the more challenging in the entire letter
- As we dive into that section this morning, we must maintain a firm view of the writer's context leading into the warning
 - In fact, we need to remember where the writer began in Chapter 5

- In 5:12, he told this group that they ought by now to be teachers of the Word
- And he chastised them for not moving on to solid food
- Instead, they have remained on milk, which was a euphemism for simplistic, unchallenging teaching and ideas
- And then, in Chapter 6, the writer opened by telling them to press on to maturity in their faith
 - And we ended our introduction to Chapter 6 in v.3, where the writer ominously declared that these brethren will mature if God permits
 - And with that, the writer moves into the warning of what may transpire for those who fail to press on to maturity
- Now why did I take us back through those observations?
 - Because I want us to note that throughout this discussion, the writer has been focused on the consequences of failing to mature as a Christian
 - He has never veered off that topic
 - Therefore, we must understand that the warning that follows is directed at this very same audience
 - That is, this is a warning for the believer who fails to mature as God expects
 - Remember, we must guide our interpretation by the context of the letter
 - And if we overlook the context, we will move in the wrong direction with our interpretation, and so our theology will be wrong as well
- We'll return to the question of the writer's intended audience as we examine the warning, but for now, let's read the warning

Heb. 6:4 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, Heb. 6:5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, Heb. 6:6 and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

- The writer begins with the preposition “for”, or we could also translate the Greek word as “consequently”
 - In the preceding verse, the writer said the church would press on to spiritual maturity if God would permit
 - And now he says “consequently”
 - He's connecting these two thoughts, so it's important that we try to understand how they are connected
- Then writer begins to describe a certain scenario, one that he fears his audience is at risk

of encountering

- The scenario begins with the group encountering a series of experiences
 - First, this group experiences an “enlightenment”, which is the Greek word *photizo*, from which we get “photon”
 - It literally means “to be brought into the light”
- In John’s Gospel, we learn that being brought into the light is a description of coming to know the Gospel

John 1:3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

John 1:4 In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.

John 1:9 There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

- Jesus is the Light of the world, and He enlightens men
- So this group’s experience begins with an enlightenment
- Next, the writer says this group tasted of the Heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit
 - To understand what the Heavenly gift is in this context, we should note that it comes after being enlightened
 - And it leads to being made a partaker of the Holy Spirit
 - There is only one Heavenly gift mentioned in the Bible that would fit all these criteria
- Paul tells us what that gift of Heaven is in Ephesians 2:

Eph. 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

Eph. 2:9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

- Paul says the gift that comes from Heaven is the gift of faith in Christ
- And by that gift of faith, we are saved by God’s grace
- And we know that faith follows an encounter with the Light of Christ and it leads to the arrival of the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts
- Notice that the writer says that this group was “made” to be partakers of the Holy Spirit
 - The arrival of the Holy Spirit is not an optional event for the new believer
 - Nor is it a moment that depends on any action on our part
 - It happens by God’s power, according to His promise to send the Helper to all His

children

- So the writer says this group was “made” to receive the Spirit by the power of God as a result of faith
- Finally, the writer says this group has “tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come”
 - This statement has been analyzed 7 ways to Sunday, as the saying goes, but it’s very simple
 - The Greek word translated “taste” is literally the word for “eating”, as in taking in or consuming something
 - The writer isn’t trying to be cute with his choice of words
 - He’s just speaking in poetic language to describe how a person can only sample all that the Word of God contains
 - We taste it, in the sense that it’s impossible to consume all of it in one sitting
 - The Word of God is infinite in its wisdom
 - Furthermore, they have tasted the powers of the age to come
 - The coming age is a reference to the Kingdom age, when we will live in eternal bodies without sin and in the full light of Christ’s presence
 - Once again, the term “taste” is accurate to express our limited experience with the Kingdom to this point
 - By our faith, we’ve only tasted what that coming age will be like
 - We have the indwelling of the Spirit, and with that, certain spiritual gifts
 - We know the love of God and have a hope of resurrection
 - But these things are but a taste of what’s to come for us
- All in all, the list is a description of the believer who has entered into the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ
 - And of course, such a conclusion fits perfectly with the context of Chapters 5 and 6
 - The writer is concerned about believers’ spiritual immaturity
 - And he’s been chastising his audience for not pursuing maturity
 - And so he begins his warning for this same group by describing their early experiences in the faith
 - Now if someone were to assume that the writer has suddenly, and quite inexplicably, shifted his focus to discussing unbelievers, the list we just examined would raise numerous red flags
 - The experiences on the list are completely foreign to unbelievers
 - For example, unbelievers are never enlightened, according to Scripture
 - In fact, John says that men do not enter the Light of Christ, because they prefer the darkness

John 3:19 “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.

John 3:20 “For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

- Furthermore, unbelievers never experience any of the other spiritual moments in the writer’s list
 - Unbelievers are simply never aware of the gift of God
 - They are never made partakers of the Holy Spirit
 - Nor have they ever known the good things in the Word of God
 - The Bible says the Word of God is foolishness to the unbeliever
 - And of course, they have no experience with the powers of the age to come
- The writer isn’t saying that this group has watched others experience these things or experienced them vicariously
 - He has spoken of a personal experience of salvation common to a group
 - And by the context and by what he described, we must conclude that he’s speaking of a group of believers
 - In other words, this is a warning for the Church
 - A warning of what could happen to any group of believers who fail to press on to maturity
- As we look at the consequences of their immaturity in v.6, we see even more clearly that the writer is concerned for the walk of a believer
 - At the beginning of the verse, he raises the prospect of a Christian falling away
 - What does it mean for a Christian to fall away?
 - First, we know that it must speak of something that a person has control over, rather than something that lies outside our control
 - For example, a believer has no control over their salvation
 - It comes by way of a gift through the work of the Holy Spirit
 - It is maintained in our hearts by the power of the Spirit, in keeping with the promises of God
 - As Paul says in 1 Cor. 1, by His doing, we are in Christ Jesus
 - Furthermore, the arrival of faith in our hearts produces a degree of spiritual change that is irreversible
 - Paul says in 2 Cor. 5, that the believer becomes a new creature
 - Because our old nature we received from Adam has passed away, never to return
 - Salvation isn’t a question of what we think
 - The Bible says it’s a matter of who we are

- And once God changes our identity, the old identity is gone forever

Phil. 1:6 For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

- So whatever the writer means by “falling away”, it must refer to some aspect of our Christian experience that a believer can control...so what can a believer control?
 - Well, a believer has control over his or her behaviors, thoughts, attitudes and feelings
 - We see the truth of this reflected in the many, many exhortations in the New Testament to walk in the Spirit instead of the flesh
 - Paul tells us in 2 Cor. 10:5, to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ
 - And in Philippians, Paul tells the believer to have the same attitude of sacrifice that the Lord possessed
 - As Paul says:

Phil. 3:15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you;

Phil. 3:16 however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.

Phil. 3:17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

- Paul calls the Church, who have been made perfect by faith, to have an attitude of living up to that same standard
 - In other words, Paul tells us to live up to the perfection of Christ
 - Which we received by our faith
- So it should be obvious that the choice of how to live, think and feel are choices that lie in our control
 - So if we are commanded to live in obedience to Christ, then it stands to reason we have the possibility to disobey in each of these areas
 - We are called to control our thoughts, because it's possible to indulge disobedient thoughts
 - We're called to maintain healthy attitudes, because a believer can slip into undesirable attitudes
 - And when we move in the direction of disobedience to God's Word, we are falling away
 - We are falling away from obedience

- We are falling away from our mission to represent Christ
- We are falling away from pleasing the Lord
- And we are potentially falling away from our opportunity to receive eternal reward
- And this process almost always begins by neglecting the Word of God
 - The writer introduced his third warning by lamenting the way this group had failed to pursue spiritual maturity in the Word of God
 - They hadn't progressed to the meat of God's Word
 - They were stuck in milk
 - And as a result, they had become confused and deceived
 - And so they now needed to be retaught the ABCs of their faith
 - And when believers make a pattern of neglecting the Word of God, they are in grave danger of falling away in their walk of faith
 - In my experience, this rule is so certain as to be a law of the universe
 - Believers troubled by persistent sin, caught by fleshly temptations or deceived by the enemy's lies, are almost invariably people who have a weak or nonexistent Bible study life
 - Ironically, they often think themselves strong Bible students
 - Much as I suspect this writer's audience probably thought they were knowledgeable
 - But the problem is, our standard for what is enough Bible understanding is usually far lower than God's standard
 - As Warren Wiersbe once wrote:

"One of the first symptoms of spiritual regression, or backsliding, is a dullness toward the Bible. Sunday School class is dull, the pastor's preaching is dull, everything spiritual is dull. The problem is usually not with the Sunday School teacher or the pastor, but with the believer himself."

- So what happens to a believer who has entered into the Christian experience, and begun their walk of faith in the Spirit, but then they fall away into sin, disobedience and apathy?
 - The writer says this is a serious problem, one that may not have a rescue
 - That person may remain in their disobedient state indefinitely
 - Remember, he began the warning in v.3 saying that we will press on to maturity only if God permits
 - And the hard reality is that He may not permit us a second chance to mature
 - And there are two reasons why this second chance may never arrive

- First, the writer explains in v.6 that it's impossible to renew such a person again to repentance
 - The word "repentance" in Scripture can be used in a couple of different ways
 - It talks of a repentance leading to salvation
 - And following our salvation, the Bible commands believers to continually repent of sin so we can seek to live a life that pleases Christ
 - In this case, the writer speaks of a repentance that leads to a renewal
 - The word "renew" simply means "to be made new"
 - There is only one kind of repentance associated with being made new
 - This is the repentance that leads us into salvation
 - It's the repentance that is according to the will of God
- The moment of our entering into faith in the Gospel is a glorious, one-time experience
 - We can all relate to this truth, especially if we came to faith later in life as an adult
 - The truth of the Gospel arrested us and set us on a new course in life
 - It produced a spiritual renewal in our hearts
 - And by that renewal, we were pulled free of a life of sin and ungodliness and granted a new life of peace, hope, love and joy
 - But like the church in Ephesus, it's possible for believers to leave their first love and squander that "reset" moment
 - A believer can slip back and fall away into a life of disobedience, very much like the one they possessed prior to coming faith
 - But just as a believer can't "lose" salvation – even a disobedient Christian – then neither can they be saved a second time
 - And if they can't be renewed to repentance again, then they have no prospect of receiving another spiritual wake-up call
- So now...if the repentance that leads to renewal can't be repeated, what set of circumstances might draw a disobedient believer back onto the straight and narrow path?
 - This brings us to the second reason the writer says we can only press on to maturity if the Lord permits...because if we disobey, we are testing the Lord's patience
 - The writer says that when a person spurns the Lord's grace, they are crucifying again the Lord by putting Him to open shame
 - The writer is referring to the shame Christ suffered at the hands of those He came to save
 - As Christ was stripped naked and nailed to the cross, He suffered great pain and great shame
 - And the great irony of that moment is that Christ endured that shame for the sake of those who were hammering the nails and tearing his clothes
 - Likewise, when a believer takes the grace of God and abuses it through a life of sin

- and ungodliness and selfishness, we are putting our Lord to open shame again
- Each Christian is an ambassador for the Lord and a representative of Christ before a fallen world
 - When we neglect our spiritual maturity and fall away, we set such a bad example before the world, that we bring new shame upon Christ
- The writer says those who fall away can't expect a rescue, because they crucify to themselves the Lord
 - He doesn't mean they literally kill the Lord again...obviously, that's not possible
 - Notice, the writer says they are re-crucifying Jesus to themselves
 - He means that by their disobedient behavior, they are treating the Lord with contempt
 - Just as those who crucified Him the first time
 - In effect, we are repeating the process of shaming the Lord before the world
 - And as before, His shame comes at the hands of someone He died to save
 - Notice that only a believer can bring shame to the Lord
 - If anyone is still harboring thoughts that this is a discussion of an unbeliever, this statement puts the issue to rest
 - Only the behavior of a believer has the potential to bring shame to a believer
 - Unbelievers act in ungodly ways at all times, since that's all they can do
 - So there is no possibility of a believer of bringing shame to the Lord by their behavior
 - Only a believer has a relationship with the Lord, and it's by that association that a believer can bring Him to open shame
- So Christians who fall away and return to a life of ungodliness are at grave risk
 - They lack the possibility of a second renewal through repentance, and by their lives, they bring open shame to the Lord, testing His patience
 - They run the risk that the Lord will not permit them to press on to maturity, as v.3 suggested
 - Instead, the Lord may just leave them where they are, like the prodigal son mired in the mud
 - Until they reach their judgment day
 - Obviously, such a person is still saved, as we've discussed, but they are on a road to personal ruin leading to a loss of eternal reward
 - We see that consequence reflected in a short parable the writer offers to conclude the warning

Heb. 6:7 For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing

from God;

Heb. 6:8 but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

- The writer tells this parable to apply the truth he just explained, that is, of a believer who neglects the grace of God by living a disobedient life
 - In the parable, the ground pictures the people of God, who receive God's grace falling from above
 - This ground is tilled by a farmer, who expects to receive a harvest of good vegetation
 - But sometimes, despite the work of the farmer and the good rains, the land might only produce thorns and thistles
 - These are clearly not the expected outcome, and they are a severe disappointment to the farmer
 - Should the ground yield only these worthless crops, then the farmer will have no choice, but to burn the field to clear it for next year's planting
 - The farmer receives no crop
 - The picture created in this parable fits perfectly with the writer's teaching
 - God dispenses His grace to believers with an expectation that it leads to a fruitful harvest – a harvest of obedience
 - Some believers make the most of God's grace, learning from God's Word, and maturing in our walk
 - As we do so, we produce that harvest God expects
 - And we receive a blessing for our obedience
 - Or we can elect to neglect our spiritual maturity, fall away from God's Word and regress in our walk until the point we cannot please the Lord
 - At that point, we're producing thorn and thistles
 - We're useless to God's purpose
 - And we're close to being cursed, the writer says
 - "Close" in this case doesn't refer to our position before the Lord, for our position is secure in Christ
 - "Close to being cursed" refers to the way our life resembles the life of unbelief
 - Just like the lives of unbelievers, we produce nothing of value for the Lord
 - And so we are burned
- That last point creates some confusion for those who assume any reference to burning must mean the fires of Hell
 - But the most common way fire is used in the Bible has nothing to do with unbelievers or the judgment of Hell

- The most common picture of fire is one of purification or judgment for the believer
 - In the OT, Israel is often reminded that the Lord will test them in furnaces or purify them by fire
- And in the NT, Paul tells us that the believer's works will be tested by fire
 - In 1 Cor. 3, Paul explains that we will see our life of service to Christ tested at our judgment moment
 - And if those works are not pleasing to the Lord, they will be burned up
 - And we will have nothing remaining to receive reward
- That's the concept the writer is explaining in this parable
 - The believer who falls away lives close to being cursed (but isn't cursed)
 - And their unfruitful life will experience the fires of Christ's judgment
 - And this is the likely outcome for anyone who makes a point to live in disobedience
 - Because we have no reason to expect the Lord to rescue us
- Which is all the more reason not to take that chance in the first place
 - Let's press on to maturity from the start, rather than testing the Lord's patience by squandering the fresh start He gave to each of us
 - And if you're one of those who may have taken two steps forward and one step back, then take note of the writer's warning
 - Let today's lesson be that spark from God's Word to bring you back from the brink
 - Don't bet that the Lord has another rescue waiting in the future
 - There is no such promise in Scripture
 - On the contrary, there is a firm warning that disobedience is a one-way trip to personal ruin

- We've waded into the third warning of Hebrews
 - And the moral of the story was "we don't always get a second chance..."
 - The writer expressed his concern for this church because they weren't making spiritual maturity a priority
 - They were a little lazy, a little neglectful
 - They weren't moving forward into greater knowledge of God's Word
 - And into a greater life of obedience and faithfulness
 - What the church didn't seem to understand, was that failing to move forward puts a Christian at serious risk of sliding backward
 - Without a steady diet of God's Word in our spiritual life, we are susceptible to missteps, deceptions and fleshly temptations
 - And as we move further and further down that path, we may be on a one-way trip
 - The writer warned the church that we might not get a second opportunity to obey and to be blessed by our obedience
 - God may not grant us the grace that leads us to recover, turn back and restart a walk of obedience and discipleship
 - Instead, the Lord may permit us to stay where our sin has placed us
 - Living-out the rest of days in rebellion and in the consequences that naturally follow
 - We may end our life living like the prodigal son in the mud of the pig sty
 - And God has good reason not to extend us second chances
 - The writer says we are putting the Lord to open shame each and every time we pursue an ungodly, disobedient lifestyle
 - We have already received an opportunity to repent and set our lives on a new course when we were brought to faith in Christ
 - If we squander that opportunity, then we're playing the odds that the Lord will overlook our disobedience and rescue us again
- The writer finished the warning with a parable about a farmer and his field

Heb. 6:7 For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God;

Heb. 6:8 but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

- As we learned last week, the parable teaches about the two possible ways a believer can respond to the grace of God and the consequences of each response
 - First, a believer can receive the grace of God and turn it into a harvest for the Lord

- His investment in us is returned in spiritual fruit
- And we in turn receive a blessing, which we understand is a picture of eternal reward awaiting us in the Kingdom
- But a believer can also return God's grace with unholy, unpleasing works
 - We can forgo study of God's Word, allowing our spiritual maturity to atrophy
 - We can get distracted by the riches, pleasures, worries and cares of this world
 - And as we retreat into a selfish, self-serving life, we are like a field producing a worthless crop for the Lord
 - And so our work will be burned up in a future day of judgment
- So it's mature, obey to be rewarded – or shrink back, disobey and suffer loss
 - It's simple and yet, it's sobering, and now that he's put this challenge in front of this church, they're probably wondering if it's too late for them
 - Remember, he's already called them out for not being able to follow his teaching, though they ought by now to be teachers
 - So perhaps they've already squandered the chance to mature?
 - Certainly, his audience might have been tempted to come to that conclusion
 - So the writer moves into an encouragement, hoping to spur the church into a better place

Heb. 6:9 But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.

Heb. 6:10 For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.

Heb. 6:11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end,

Heb. 6:12 so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

- The writer turns a corner, leaving behind his chastisement, and turning toward encouragement
 - He says we're convinced of better things concerning you
 - The "we" here is probably the apostles, collectively
 - And the better things they believe this church will receive are the things that accompany salvation
 - There are things that accompany salvation, things that elsewhere Paul calls "spiritual fruit"
 - In Galatians, Paul lists the fruit of living in the Spirit of our salvation

Gal. 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Gal. 5:23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

- These are the characteristic behaviors and attitudes that accompany salvation in the life of an obedient believer
- They develop in believers who are diligent to strengthen themselves through healthy spiritual disciplines, while crucifying the flesh in its desires
- And they lead us into receiving a blessing of eternal reward
- Why is this writer convinced that these believers will right the ship and continue to move forward in their faith?
 - Did he have prophetic knowledge or was simply speaking in optimistic terms?
 - I think he was optimistic, because he knew this audience was to receive and read this letter
 - Knowing they would read his words and be convicted by them, was reason enough to have an optimistic attitude
- Once again, it comes back to the Word of God
 - The writer's confidence wasn't in the power of these people to get themselves back on track
 - His confidence was rooted in the power of God's Word to bring them back
 - As they learned the truth, the Word would convict them and inspire them to better things
 - Just as their lack of attentiveness to the Word led to their struggles, so would the power of hearing God's Word stir them back to abiding in the Lord
 - And for that reason, I think the writer's optimistic tone is equally appropriate for those who read this letter today and take it seriously
 - If you're the kind of Christian to give attention to Hebrews 6, then there is good reason to be optimistic about your spiritual future
 - Just the fact that you are attentive to the meat of God's Word, says something about your current and future opportunities
 - It's the Christians who AREN'T studying the Bible – much less Hebrews verse-by-verse – who are at risk
 - The ones who are backsliding and in danger of experiencing the consequences the writer described are those who have no idea what Hebrews 6 says
- But we can never grow complacent or sit on our laurels
 - The walk of a Christian is a never-ending pursuit of pleasing the Lord
 - Notice the writer says in v.10 that the Lord will not overlook the good works these believers have accomplished in their walk
 - There's no need to worry that something we've done in faith will go forgotten or

overlooked

- But also notice, the writer emphasizes our works must be done in love toward the brethren
- It's the work within the Body of Christ that should be the focus of our life, including the work that takes the Gospel to the world, of course
- But our work within the Body lays the necessary groundwork making evangelism outside the Church possible
 - We fund missionaries and Church outreach
 - We pray for those in the Church and the lost
 - We train others to carry the Gospel
 - We disciple those who come into the faith
 - And so on...
- But also notice the writer's statement in v.11 that he expects everyone in the Church to follow this same example of diligence
 - His comment makes the point of what it means for our walk as a Christian
 - And remember, the standard we're seeking isn't found in another Christian
 - Because if we measure our walk of obedience and spiritual maturity against others, then we'll be tempted to make comparisons to those who make us feel good
 - Those who are in even worse shape than we are
 - There is always someone else in the body of Christ who attends church less frequently, studies the Bible less consistently, prays less, contributes less, volunteers less, *etc.*
 - So by comparison, we find an excuse to avoid making any changes to our lives
 - But our standard is that found in the Word of God itself, and if we look at those expectations sincerely and honestly, we'll always find somewhere we don't measure up
- Secondly, the test doesn't come until the end
 - Notice the writer says at the end of v.11, that we must remain diligent until we realize the full assurance of our hope until the end
 - The hope of the Christian faith is our hope in resurrection of the body
 - And in the inheritance in the Kingdom that follows
 - Later in this letter, the writer declares that faith is two parts

Heb. 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

- We believe that God is, meaning that we believe the Lord lives, having been resurrected

following His death

- Secondly, we believe that the Lord is a rewarder of those who seek Him
- Just like the patriarchs of earlier days, we believe in the promise of a second life, one lived with a reward that comes to those who please Him
- So the writer says we must remain diligent if we expect to receive the full certainty of our hope until the end
 - He's talking about the full measure of reward that's available for each believer who serves the Lord
 - Why lose anything?
 - If you click coupons, and buy in bulk to save earthly wealth,
 - Then why not think in similar ways about your Heavenly treasure?
 - Live in ways pleasing to the Lord to ensure the greatest possible reward
 - For in doing so, you will reflect the greatest honor and glory upon Christ
- So the writer says let's not be sluggish or lazy...but be imitators of past followers of God, who inherited the promises by living patiently, according to their faith
 - Men like Abraham, who becomes the writer's example of who we should imitate

Heb. 6:13 For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,

Heb. 6:14 saying, "I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU."

Heb. 6:15 And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise.

Heb. 6:16 For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute.

Heb. 6:17 In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath,

Heb. 6:18 so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.

- As we remember, Abraham was the man God granted a miraculous promise
 - God's promise, called the Abrahamic Covenant, assured Abraham he would receive great things, which the writer summarized in v.14
 - Specifically, He would receive descendants who would become a great nation
 - He himself would have a great name, and he would receive an inheritance that included a huge parcel of land
 - He would also bring a blessing to all the nations of the earth
 - And when Abraham heard these words, he believed God, and his faith made him righteous
 - By believing in God's promises, Abraham receive righteousness from God

- We would say he was saved by his faith
- But Abraham also had to have patience
 - His faith was tested at many times
 - First, Abraham had to wait 25 years to receive the promised son, Isaac
 - And then, he died even before he saw the nation he was promised come into being
 - And he died before he received the land God said was going to be his – he knew it would come in a future lifetime
 - Moreover, Abraham still hasn't received the land he was promised
- Still, Abraham had to live patiently according to God's promises, diligently seeking to please the Lord so he could receive the full measure of the promise
 - The writer quotes in v.14, from Genesis 22, a well-known incident in Abraham's life
 - It's a moment when we see Abraham doing exactly what the writer is asking of his audience
 - God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac
 - And Abraham complied, believing that the Lord would resurrect Isaac, if necessary, to fulfill His promise
 - Following Abraham's obedience, the Lord swore an oath to give Abraham everything the Lord promised earlier
 - An oath is always the final step of assurance in any human dispute
 - If a man would swear an oath in ancient times, he was pledging his very life in the dispute
 - If his word is proven false, then his life would be taken
 - So an oath was considered the highest pledge possible
 - Now, we know God's Word by itself is enough to assure us of anything
 - As the writer reminds us in v.18, it's impossible for the Lord to lie in anything
 - So why did the Lord take the extra step of swearing an oath to Abraham concerning a promise he had already spoken?
- First, let's look in Genesis 22

Gen. 22:16 and said, “ By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son,
Gen. 22:17 indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies.

- It was Abraham's obedience that led God to grant him this extra degree of assurance
 - Abraham was already declared righteous in Chapter 15, after he first believed God's

Word

- And it was that same faith that led Abraham to act in obedience to do something so incredible as sacrificing his son
- So faith came first, but then came years of patience and obedience
- And by that patience and obedience, Abraham received the full assurance of his hope in the promises of God
- Secondly, the writer tells us in v.17, that the Lord took this extra step of swearing an oath by His own Name not because His promises were in doubt
 - Rather, He did so to demonstrate a connection between Abraham's works and God's pleasure
 - Abraham completed his assignment, which was an unbelievably difficult request
 - And he did so because his faith in God's Word propelled him to live obediently
 - And as he obeyed, his faith was made evident and the Lord's Name was glorified
 - And when we live this way, the Lord blesses us all the more according to His mercy and grace
 - As James teaches us:

James 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

James 2:22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;

James 2:23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God.

- Abraham's faith was perfected in his willingness to obey the Lord in all things
- That's the purpose of our faith: To live a life of works done in faith, so that we can please the One Who has bought us
- Faith is perfected in the sense that it has fulfilled its purpose in God's economy
- Our faith is perfected in the way a field is perfected when it produces a good crop
- Finally, the Lord delivered Abraham an oath for the sake of his heirs, the writer says in v.17
 - The Lord wanted to make clear that when we serve and please the Lord, He is pleased and we are assured to receive a blessing
 - We have strong encouragement to take refuge in God's promises
 - If the Lord was willing to swear an oath to Abraham – an oath that wasn't even necessary – it's further evidence to us that the Lord is serious about our behavior and our rewards

- He wants us to live according to our faith, with patience and self-sacrifice
- And when we do these things, we are assured that our hope will not be empty
- So we can learn from Abraham's example in remaining diligent to grow in maturity and to serve the Lord in patience
 - The writer tells us to take hold of the hope that is set before us
 - The writer imagines our hope of resurrection and reward in the Kingdom like a gift sitting on a table before us
 - God had placed this opportunity for reward before us
- Even though we've been saved by our faith, nevertheless, we can move forward as Christians but leave our hope behind
 - We can leave behind our hope of resurrection, that is the hope of our eternal life
 - We can become so deceived by the flesh and the enemy that we never take hold of the hope of eternal life that our faith has given us
 - What a shame any time a Christian lives ignorant of the hope they already possess by their faith in Him
- And it's also possible for a Christian to leave behind their hope of eternal reward
 - We may forget that even though we were saved by our faith, our works still matter
 - We overlook that we're expected to invest time in the Word of God, so we can walk according to it
 - We neglect to show patience in the face of trial, temptation and the struggle of daily life
 - We forget it's important to persevere into holiness
 - We are expected to serve the Lord until the end of our lives
 - If we live as if the things we have now are all we'll ever have, then eventually, we will be like this one the writer speaks of
 - One who falls away
 - Gets away from the disciplines of the faith
 - And has an attitude that seeks only to please ourselves
 - Instead, we need take hold of that hope of reward and let it motivate us into pursuing a life of spiritual maturity
 - Live with eyes for eternity
 - Considering everything we do with an attitude of whether we're seeking to please the Lord or ourselves
 - Living with patience, so we can realize the full assurance of the hope until the end

- Over the past three lessons, we've studied the third warning in the letter to the Hebrews
 - We can summarize the writer's warning as set your goal on pursuing spiritual maturity through the Word of God
 - Don't fall away to the life we knew before our coming to faith
 - Because doing so, poses the risk that we may never return to a life of serving and pleasing God
 - Instead, take hold of the hope of resurrection and eternal reward
 - And always remember that God is faithful to keep His promises to you regarding these things
 - So we can live with eyes for eternity
 - And remember why the writer launched into this warning in the first place
 - He wanted to explain the mystery of Jesus as a priest in the order of Melchizedek
 - But this teaching is complex and built upon other truths of Scripture
 - And without the necessary spiritual maturity, the writer questioned whether his audience was ready to understand what he needed to explain
 - Because he knew his audience had failed in pursuit of maturity, he issued them the warning we've been studying
- But now it's time for the writer to return to his original point of Melchizedek
 - And so we pick up with him at the end of Chapter 6, as he transitions back to his proof that Christ is a greater priest than any found in the Law

Heb. 6:19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil,
Heb. 6:20 where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

- Ending his comments from Chapter 6, the writer calls our hope in resurrection and rewards an "anchor to our soul"
 - The picture he's painting is easy to appreciate
 - An anchor serves to hold a ship steady and in one place while it floats
 - Without an anchor, a ship drifts and can't be sure of its position
 - If you've ever been on a boat without an anchor as it drifts, perhaps while you're fishing, then you know the feeling of not being able to detect your own movement
 - You have no reference point on the water
 - You're likely moving away from your intended location, but you can't tell, and you therefore can't correct
 - That's a good analogy for how a Christian will live if they are not focused on our

anchor, the anchor of our souls

- As we've learned, that anchor is both our hope of resurrection and the expectation of reward for living in a manner pleasing to the Lord
- When you plant those anchors in your life, you won't drift away from the Lord
- You won't fall away, as the writer feared
- But if you ever lose sight of these promises of God, then you will drift away from Him and from a life set on pleasing Him
 - Your salvation is no less sure
 - And, to some extent, your inheritance is still available
 - But you are unnecessarily piercing your soul with many griefs as Paul says in 1 Tim. 6
- Then the writer adds that our eternal hope enters within the veil
 - The power of our hope lies in the confidence that Jesus, as our High Priest, has moved beyond the veil
 - He has the power to make our hope real
 - It's because Christ enters within the veil, that we possess the hope of resurrection and reward
 - He has put to an end the thing that stood between us and the hope we now possess: our sin
 - The writer's mention of the veil takes us back to the conversation of the priesthood
 - The veil he's speaking about, of course, is that cloth curtain that separated the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place of the tabernacle
 - This veil was all-important in the Jewish religious experience
 - It was a barrier separating men from knowing and enjoying the glory of God
 - 99.999% never experienced stepping beyond the veil, but they all thought about it when their high priest stepped beyond the veil
 - And it was a symbol of how sin separates us from the hope of eternal life
 - So entering beyond that veil was an all-important desire for the Jewish people
 - Beyond that veil was the mercy seat, the place where the glory of God resided and where atonement for their sin could happen
 - In a round-about way, it was imaging yourself as sinless, without worry of being judged negatively
 - Under the Law, the sins of Israel were removed by an application of bull's blood on the mercy seat
 - This procedure was spelled out under the Law of Moses
 - Only the high priest of Israel could enter
 - And this man could only enter once a year, on a day called Yom Kippur, the day of atonement

- On that day, the priest sprinkled the blood of a bull on the mercy seat, satisfying the wrath of God for the sins of the nation
 - By this ritual, the Lord counted the sins of the nation covered for another year under the Covenant
- But there are obvious problems, or limitations, in this system as the Lord designed it
 - First, the high priest suffered from the same weakness as the people he served
 - He suffered in sin like those he served
 - And therefore, he was under the same penalty of death as the rest
 - So he was required to make a sacrifice for his own sins before he was qualified to apply the sacrifice for the people
 - And because he was a sinful man, he died like all men, so he had to be replaced from time to time with a new high priest
 - Not a very reassuring system for those in Israel, who depended on the intercession of the high priest
 - Even the very best high priest eventually died, and someone would take his place – that doesn't suggest a very final solution to our sin
 - Secondly, the blood of the bulls and goats was clearly inadequate to remove the people's sin forever
 - The sacrifice of Yom Kippur was repeated annually, because the sin of the people never ended
 - There was never a point when the people felt relief from their sin
 - For as soon as one sacrifice had been performed by the High Priest, the cycle began again
- So we need a better priesthood if we're ever going to put an end once and for all to this separation
 - So in v.20, the writer says that Jesus is that better priest because He serves in a better order of priest, the order of Melchizedek
 - Now we're beginning to sense why it's important to understand this order of priests
 - Because it's this order that puts to an end the problem of sin
 - It's this order that solves all the limitations of the order of Aaron formed under the Law
 - So then in Chapter 7, the writer launches into the full discussion of this superior order of priesthood
 - And the writer begins by explaining the order's namesake, that is, the man Melchizedek

Heb. 7:1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed

him,

Heb. 7:2 to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace.

Heb. 7:3 Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually.

Heb. 7:4 Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils.

Heb. 7:5 And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham.

Heb. 7:6 But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises.

Heb. 7:7 But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater.

Heb. 7:8 In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on.

Heb. 7:9 And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes,

Heb. 7:10 for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

- The man named Melchizedek is a bit of an enigma in Scripture
 - He appears first in Genesis 14, in the story of Abraham defeating the four kings of the north
 - These kings came into Canaan to defeat the five kings of the cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zoboim and Zoar
 - In the process of this battle, the four kings of the north took captive all the people of the city of Sodom, including Abraham's nephew, Lot
 - Abraham hears of these events and acts quickly to attack the retreating kings and free his nephew
 - In Chapter 14 we read this:

Gen. 14:14 When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.

Gen. 14:15 He divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus.

Gen. 14:16 He brought back all the goods, and also brought back his relative Lot with his possessions, and also the women, and the people.

Gen. 14:17 Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of

Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).

Gen. 14:18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High.

Gen. 14:19 He blessed him and said,
**“Blessed be Abram of God Most High,
 Possessor of heaven and earth;**

Gen. 14:20 And blessed be God Most High,
Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.”
He gave him a tenth of all.

- In v.18, Abraham is met by a man who is a king, a man called Melchizedek
 - This man's name is not actually a name at all
 - The word “Melchizedek” is a title, much like “Pharaoh” and “Caesar” are titles, and not names
 - His title means “My king is righteous”
 - But the writer says the name means “king of righteousness” in v.2, which isn't literally correct
 - The writer is making a play on the name, because this man was a king of a city called Salem
 - Salem (which is present-day Jerusalem) was a Jebusite city in that day
 - In fact, the suffix of his title, “zedek”, is a Jebusite name
 - Later, David conquers the Jebusites and takes Salem for Israel, making it the capital, and renaming it Jerusalem
 - The word “salem” means “peace”, as the writer points out in v.2
 - So not only could we say this man is the king of righteousness
 - But we could also say he is the king of peace
- The man is also a priest, which means he was an intercessor for the people before God
 - And both Abraham, and now the writer of Hebrews, testify that this man was a true priest of the God Most High
 - He wasn't a priest to some pagan religion
 - And he wasn't a self-appointed priest or pretender
 - He was actually a man appointed as a priest by God Himself
 - Furthermore, Abraham recognized this man to be a person of authority and worthy of Abraham's honor
 - Notice in Heb. 7:2, Abraham pays a tithe to this man
 - Now, we know the tithe wasn't for Melchizedek's benefit
 - Abraham wasn't giving Melchizedek the spoils because he wanted to honor Melchizedek

- When men tithe, they do so to honor God
 - So if Abraham handed his tithe to Melchizedek, it means that Abraham believed that this man was an intercessor before God
- Finally, the writer notes in v.3, that this person appears out of nowhere in the narrative of Genesis – which is very uncharacteristic for Genesis
 - Moses never spends time addressing Melchizedek's genealogy
 - There is no mention of his birth or parents
 - And there is never a mention of his death
 - This is highly unusual, considering how careful Moses is to always record the beginning and end of every significant person in the story of Israel
 - The genealogies of Genesis are the key feature connecting the events of the Garden to the Messiah Who comes to correct for the mistake of Adam
 - And yet here's the very important player who is never linked to any genealogy
- So the mystery of Melchizedek leaves us asking who was this man?
 - Remember, this man served as a priest before there was the Law of Moses
 - There was no tabernacle
 - There was no sacrificial system
 - The priests of Aaron had not yet been established, for Aaron had not yet even been born
 - So how did this priest come to be a priest?
 - Where did his priesthood originate?
 - Why did Abraham view him to be his superior before the Lord?
 - And finally, how is this ancient priest related to Christ as our High Priest?
- Before we consider who Melchizedek was, let's deal with one possibility
 - Many have noticed that the unique characteristics of this man create a clear and obvious picture of Christ
 - Christ is the King of Righteousness
 - Christ is the King of Peace
 - Christ is both a priest and a king, something that priests under the Law could never do
 - And though Christ was born a man, He had no beginning, since He existed from the beginning with the Father
 - And Christ will have no end, now that He lives to the Father forever
 - He is the Alpha and the Omega
 - So clearly, Melchizedek is a picture of Christ, and the writer of Hebrews is in the process of making the very same point
 - But some have speculated that Melchizedek was more than a picture of Christ and

was actually a pre-incarnate theophany of Christ

- In other words, some hold that Melchizedek was not a man at all
 - He was Christ appearing to Abraham in the form of a man
 - Much like the pre-incarnate Lord appeared to Abraham at his tent Genesis 18
- But this interpretation makes a common mistake in confusing a picture for the substance
 - Ironically, this confusion only serves to prove what the writer of Hebrews was concerned about in the first place
 - Concerning Melchizedek, there is much to say and it is hard to explain
 - And even today, some Bible students continue to miss the main point
- Melchizedek was a real man who served as a priest of God in Abraham's day, and before we understand who is truly was, let's rule out the theory that he was a pre-incarnate Christ
 - First, the writer's description of Melchizedek precludes as interpretation that this man was a theophany
 - The writer says this man was "like the Son of God"
 - The term "like" in Greek is *aphomoioo*, means "to be made in the likeness of something"
 - So the man Melchizedek was made in the likeness of the Son of God
 - This is the opposite situation of a theophany
 - A theophany is always the Son of God being made in the likeness of something else, like a burning bush or a man visiting Abraham
 - So Melchizedek isn't a theophany; he's a shadow, a picture of Christ
 - Furthermore, the writer says in v.8 that this "mortal" man received Abraham's tithe
 - If the writer calls Melchizedek a mortal man, then certainly he had a beginning and an end
 - Mortal means he was an ordinary human being, and not a theophany
 - Finally, we learned in Hebrews 5:1 that a priest is always taken from among men to represent those in whose likeness he shares
 - The writer explained that since men must be represented by a man, Christ took the form of man so that He could become our High Priest
 - The writer says that Melchizedek was a priest to the Most High God, and as a priest, he represented men before God
 - Melchizedek could only have done this as a true man
 - If this were a theophany of Christ, then it came prior to Christ's incarnation
 - And if it predates Christ's incarnation, then Christ was not yet a man and therefore unable to serve as a priest before men
 - We could list other reasons why Melchizedek could not be a pre-incarnate

appearance of Jesus, but the point has been made

- This man was a real, historical figure
- He was king over the Jebusite city of Salem
- And he served as a priest of God to men on earth in that day
- Such that even Abraham sought for him when he desired to worship and tithe to the Living God
- So we return to our central question...who was he?
- The first thing to remember from a few lessons ago, is that the term “order” doesn’t mean a society or organization, like an order of monks
 - The word literally means a “succession”
 - It refers to handing down an office from person to person through a succession of office holders
 - For example, the office of high priest in the Aaronic order was held for life and then handed down to a successor upon the death of the current office holder
 - That succession started with Aaron, so we call it the Aaronic order
 - But there was only one high priest at any time
 - Similarly, the order of Melchizedek describes a succession of priests
 - Each person in this order held the office for life
 - And the next office holder received the office upon the death of the prior office holder
 - Each man who held the office inherited the title Melchizedek, but that wasn’t his actual name
 - So the name of this man was obscured by Moses, who only recorded his title
- But we find a critical clue in 2 Peter 2:5, when Peter declares that Noah was the preacher of righteousness in his day

2 Pet. 2:5 and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;

- That translation from the NASB Bible is very unhelpful, in that it obscures the real words Peter wrote in Greek
 - A more literal translation of this verse taken from Young’s Literal Translation reads this way:

2 Pet. 2:5 and the old world did not spare, but the eighth person, Noah, of righteousness a preacher, did keep, a flood on the world of the impious having brought,

- The more literal translation reveals that Peter was saying Noah was the eighth person of righteous
- Peter wasn't saying Noah was one of eight people on the Ark, though that was true also
- He was calling Noah an eighth person of righteousness
- As in the eighth man in an order, or succession, of people called righteous
- From Peter, we learn that Noah was the eighth person to hold the office of Melchizedek
 - And if Noah was the eighth, then it's relatively simple to follow the succession backward to learn the previous seven men to hold the position
 - Noah inherited the position from his father Methuselah
 - And Methuselah inherited it from Jared
 - Jared inherited it from Mahalalel
 - Mahalalel inherited it from Kenan
 - Kenan inherited it from Enosh
 - Enosh inherited it from Seth
 - And Seth inherited it from Adam
 - What we're learning, is that ever since the fall of Adam, the Lord has appointed one man to serve as His priest on earth
 - That man was always found in the line of the seed promise
 - Each man held the office until he died
 - And the office of Melchizedek was inherited by the next man in the seed promise line
 - This priesthood predates the priesthood of the Law, and it continued on, even after the Law was put in place
 - And it's a superior priesthood, one that by its very name foretells its purpose, that is, to bring in righteousness
 - We'll come back to the relationship between the priesthood of the Law and the priesthood of Melchizedek later
 - But for now, we only need understand that this priesthood is the one that Christ belongs to
- So, who was the priest that met Abraham?
 - Well, Noah was Melchizedek, but he died shortly before Abraham's battle with the kings
 - So it was Noah's son, Shem, who was the next man in the line of the seed promise
 - Shem inherited the office of righteousness and became the Melchizedek that Abraham met
 - In fact, Shem outlived Abraham, so Abraham never inherited the title Melchizedek himself

- It passed from Shem to Jacob
- We know Shem settled in the area of Canaan
 - And apparently, Shem also became the king of the city of Salem
 - Making him not only a priest of righteousness but also a king of righteousness
 - And in that way, his life became a shadow of Christ, Who was both Priest and King
 - Interestingly, there is Jewish rabbinical teaching that Shem was Melchizedek
- We know Abraham was a descendent of Shem
 - Shem was Abraham's great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandfather
 - So, in a patriarchal culture, Abraham naturally viewed Shem as his superior
 - That's why the writer says in vs.4-7 that this man Melchizedek was Abraham's superior
 - Even more interesting, the king that Abraham had killed, Chedorlaomer, was also a descendent of Shem
 - So Abraham had killed a distant cousin, another member of Shem's family
 - So Shem met Abraham, presumably to restore peace in the family through an offering (bread and wine)
 - While Abraham tithed to Shem in recognition of his authority over the family and in thanks for the victory
 - Even in this gesture, we find another picture of Christ, in that He reconciles us to our Father
- In vs.8-10, the writer says this analysis proves that the priesthood of Melchizedek was a greater priesthood than the one that follows in the Law
 - The priests of the Law were descended from Levi, who himself was descended from Abraham
 - So just as Abraham showed Shem respect because he was Abraham's elder, then by logical extension, Levi would have done the same thing had he been alive
 - And likewise, Aaron, who was descended from Levi, would have acknowledged Shem as his superior, had Aaron been alive to meet him as Abraham did
 - Therefore, the writer says that Levi and Aaron were present in Abraham's loins
 - Meaning that this priest was superior to any order that came later
 - And the Melchizedek priesthood must always be considered superior to the one given in the Law
- This priesthood of Melchizedek is important, because it demonstrates that the Lord has been at work since the beginning, providing an intercessor for sinful men
 - Long before Moses and the Law, the Lord made a provision for a priesthood, a priesthood called "the Lord is righteous"
 - It stood for generations, moving from man to man

- In each generation, there stood a man – and only one man – who could intercede on behalf of those who wanted the Lord’s mercy
- And that man served until death
- One day, this priesthood was inherited by Jesus Christ
 - When Jesus’ earthly father, Joseph, died, Jesus received the office of Melchizedek, My Lord is Righteous
 - This explains why Joseph died by the time Jesus’ earthly ministry began
 - Jesus had to inherit the order of Melchizedek during His earthly life
 - That’s why you see the genealogy in Matthew’s Gospel passing through Joseph – he was passing the seed line and the order of Melchizedek down to Jesus
 - Since Jesus became man, to serve as our intercessor
- So, for the first and last time, the order was held by One Who was truly Righteous – Jesus Christ
 - But since Jesus lives forever, the order will never pass down to another person
 - The order will be held forever by Jesus, who is a priest in the order of Melchizedek
 - Having rightly obtained it through inheritance
 - Next time, we see the writer explaining this point fully

- Who is Melchizedek and why do we care about him?
 - Last week, we learned who he was
 - He's more than a metaphor or myth or picture
 - His name is actually his title, meaning my Lord is righteous
 - The man who met Abraham was part of an order or succession of men, beginning with Adam and continuing until Christ
 - Melchizedek was the priest of the God Most High
 - The man who held that title in Abraham's day, was the ninth man to hold the position and he was one of Noah's sons, Shem
 - His appearance in Genesis was orchestrated by the Spirit so that Melchizedek would present a compelling picture of Christ
 - Moses never revealed that Melchizedek was Shem
 - Instead, he left the man's genealogy a secret, never revealing his origins or his death
 - Furthermore, Shem had become the king of a Jebusite city called Salem, which was eventually to become Jerusalem
 - So that in all these details, we could see that the Melchizedek priesthood is the priesthood Jesus would eventually inherit from Joseph
- So the writer has answered the question, "Who is Melchizedek?"
 - But now, we need an answer to the question, "Why should I care about him?"
 - And that answer comes in the next part of Chapter 7
 - And in this part, we find probably the most challenging portion of the teaching on Melchizedek
 - It was probably this part that the writer was thinking of when he said he had much to say and it's difficult to understand
 - But the complexity of this teaching can be broken down into three simple ideas or points
 - First, the writer explains the significance of God having established two different priestly orders

Heb. 7:11 Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron?

Heb. 7:12 For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also.

Heb. 7:13 For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar.

Heb. 7:14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with

reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.

Heb. 7:15 And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek,

Heb. 7:16 who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life.

Heb. 7:17 For it is attested of Him,

**“YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER
ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.”**

- The writer points out that if the Levitical priesthood were able to address man’s problem of sin, God never would have established another priesthood
 - The Levitical priesthood was the priesthood established in the Law of Moses and given to Israel to regulate sacrifice in the tabernacle
 - If this priesthood were sufficient, God would have left well-enough alone the writer says
 - But in Scripture, we find another order of priests, the order of Melchizedek
 - Now, the Melchizedek order came first historically, and the Levitical order followed
 - And with the Levitical priesthood, came also a Law given to Israel
 - And that’s to be expected, because with a change in priesthood, comes a change in Law also
 - So perhaps we might conclude that the Levitical order was an improved version of priesthood
 - And if the Levitical order was capable of making men perfect, then it should have been the last word from God concerning priests
 - Then the when Messiah arrived, we would expect Him to come in the line of Aaronic priests
 - So He can meet the requirements to be the High Priest men desire under the Law
- Secondly, the writer points out that the Messiah could never meet the test to serve as a Levitical priest, so something had to change
 - In v.12, the writer says that the only way to change the rules for who can serve as priest is if God Himself changes the Law that regulates His people
 - Remember back in Chapter 5, that the writer said a priest must be appointed by God from among those he represents

Heb. 5:1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins;

- A high priest must be appointed by God in order to be acceptable to God

- God isn't going to accept as His representative any man except the one He designates
- And God designates priests according to a Law, or set of requirements, that stipulates who can be a priest
- According to the Law of Moses, only men in the tribe of Levi and in the family of Aaron could be priests
 - On the other hand, according to the blessing pronounced by Jacob on his sons, the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah
 - But if Messiah must come through Judah, then that would mean the Messiah couldn't qualify as a priest under the Law
 - Notice in vs.13-14, the writer says that Jesus (*i.e.*, the "One") belonged to the wrong tribe, one that can never officiate at the altar, under the Law
 - And if the Messiah can't be a priest, then He can't be our intercessor
 - He can't carry the people's sins before the Lord
- So the writer's final point in this passage is that the Messiah had to come in the order of Melchizedek rather than the Levitical, showing the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood
 - In v.15, the writer says this is clearer still if another priest arises in the likeness (or manner) of Melchizedek
 - "This" refers to the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood
 - The superiority of the Melchizedek order is clearly evidenced by the fact that the Messiah was designated to a different order
 - Again, if the Levitical order were the superior order, then the Messiah would not have sought His qualification under an earlier order
 - While Jesus couldn't meet the requirements for the Levitical order, He was the only One Who could meet the requirements in the order of Melchizedek
 - In vs.15-16, the writer says these priests of Melchizedek had to be qualified by more than a physical requirement
 - Levitical priests were qualified merely by having the right family line
 - But to enter the Melchizedek order first required that a person inherit the seed promise
 - They had to be born at the right time and to the right family, according to God's choice
 - This is the ultimate evidence of God's approval, since He alone determines the day and family of each person's birth
 - Furthermore, the Father promised that the Messiah would hold the order forever
 - In v.17, the author quotes from Psalms 110 to prove his argument
 - David wrote that the Messiah would be a priest in the order of Melchizedek forever
 - But the only way to hold the order of Melchizedek forever is by never dying

- As each Melchizedek died, a new man inherited the office
 - But the Father set the requirement for the Messiah by an oath, declaring that He would serve as a priest in the order of Melchizedek forever
 - So by Jesus' indestructible life, He proved Himself to qualify for the position, according to the Father's requirements
- So now, the writer summarizes why it's important that Jesus came as a priest of a different order

Heb. 7:18 For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness

Heb. 7:19 (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

Heb. 7:20 And inasmuch as it was not without an oath

Heb. 7:21 (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him,

“THE LORD HAS SWORN

AND WILL NOT CHANGE HIS MIND,

‘YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER’”);

Heb. 7:22 so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

- The writer uses an “on the one hand – on the other hand” comparison between the Aaronic priesthood Jesus' priesthood
 - On the one hand, he says, the Law (which established the priesthood of Aaron) had to be set aside after a time
 - It was temporary by design and purpose
 - The Law was weak and useless when it came to the main purpose of priests: putting away the sin that separates us and necessitates an intercessor
 - The Law never achieved this end
 - It could not make sinful men perfect
 - Therefore, it could not give us any hope that we could draw near to God
 - Our sin would be forever a barrier, since the Law of Israel never did away with sin
 - At best, it covered it temporarily, allowing fellowship with God at a distance
 - Elsewhere, Paul says the Law was a temporary custodian to protect Israel and preserve her until the coming of the Messiah

Gal. 3:19 Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

- The Law created a temporary institution, the Levitical priesthood, to last only until the promised Seed arrived to fulfill a promise
- And that promise had its own priesthood
- That Seed was Christ, Paul says
- You have the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ
- The Law of Moses was ordained because of sin; the Law of Christ was ordained so that we might obtain righteousness
- That's why the priesthood associated with the promise is called "Melchizedek", which means "The Lord is my Righteousness"
- When He arrived, He would assume His position as the priest Melchizedek
 - With that change in priesthood, came a change in Law as well
 - And so the Law of Moses would have met its purpose

Gal. 3:23 But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

Gal. 3:24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

Gal. 3:25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Gal. 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

- So to summarize, the order of Melchizedek is the priesthood associated with the Seed Promise given to Adam and Woman and carried down to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, on its way to Christ
 - This is the priesthood that leads us to righteousness, because it is the priesthood of Messiah
 - It was established not on the basis of works of Law, but by the Word (or oath or promise) of God
 - By this priesthood, men are made righteous, because it depends on the righteousness of our Lord, and not on our own
 - That's why the priesthood is called "the order of Melchizedek", which means "my Lord is righteous"
 - And it is a priesthood that exists forever, since our High Priest never dies and will never be replaced
 - In all these things, the order of Melchizedek is superior to the Levitical order
 - The Levitical order comes by way of a covenant of Law, based on works, not a promise of God
 - Therefore, like Law itself, it cannot make men perfect and only serves to cover over the sins of men
 - It is weak and useless in that regard

- Therefore, the covenant that established the one (the Law) is inferior to the covenant that established the other
 - The writer is alluding to his next topic of covenants, which comes up in Chapter 8
 - At this point, he's simply observing that if the Old Covenant established the Law and the Levitical priesthood
 - And if those things are weak and being replaced by better things
 - Then naturally, the covenant that established them is likewise being replaced
 - We'll wait to say more about these covenants for Chapter 8
 - And so now, the writer finishes by applying the meaning of these things to the way we worship and follow Christ as believers

Heb. 7:23 The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing,

Heb. 7:24 but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently.

Heb. 7:25 Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Heb. 7:26 For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens;

Heb. 7:27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

Heb. 7:28 For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.

- So where do we go for intercession before the Living God?
 - In the writer's day, there were two priesthoods seemingly at work within the Jewish world
 - On the one hand, you had the Levitical priests, who continued to operate in the tabernacle, at least in the day this letter was written
 - And on the other hand, we have our Lord, the High Priest in Heaven, who we could approach
 - One was especially attractive to our flesh, since it involved ritual and Law
 - While the other was strictly a matter of faith, since it depended on nothing more than worshipping in Spirit and Truth
 - In light of those options, some Jewish believers were returning to the temple and to practice of the Law, even though they had placed their faith in Jesus as Messiah
 - They saw the Levitical priests as their intercessors, even though they knew Jesus was their Lord
 - And so they went back to the temple to seek God's forgiveness through those

priests

- What they didn't understand was that there was another and better priesthood, that is, Melchizedek
- Obviously, this behavior is incompatible with faith in Christ, but it's not a disqualification
 - What I mean is, a true Christian can fall prey to this kind of false thinking
 - We can seek intercession from someone or something other than Christ, even though we have come to know Him truly
 - If a Christian remains so spiritually immature and untaught, they can be deceived and misled into thinking and doing the wrong things
 - Today, some Christians fall into believing that we must go into a booth and confess our sins before a man who calls himself a priest
 - That is seeking intercession through a priest other than Christ and it's wrong
 - Yet some Christians are fooled into thinking it's necessary
- If we know Christ to be our Savior, we seek forgiveness from Him alone and we need no other
 - And the writer points out the worthless nature of the Levitical priests, calling them "former" priests
 - When he wrote this letter, these priests still existed
 - Yet he calls them "former", because they no longer serve a purpose
 - They served in large numbers throughout their history because they were always dying off and needed to be replaced
 - Why should we take the problem of our sin before men who themselves are dying due to sin?
 - Why do we sit in a booth and confess our sin to a man who is just as sinful as we are?
 - And why trust someone who dies in the end, because it means that person was no closer to perfection than we are?
 - The answer: we shouldn't
 - What we need is someone who has already obtained what we seek: the peace with the Father that only sinlessness can provide
 - We want someone who has escaped the penalty of death
 - We want a Priest who had no sin of His own, so He can stand before the Father and represent us perfectly
 - We want a Priest who never dies, so He can see our salvation through until the end
 - And of course, Jesus is that High Priest
 - The writer says in v.25, that Jesus lives forever and can make intercession for us forever

- Not only is He qualified to intercede, but He also has the power to extend what He has to us to make us perfect
 - He holds his Priesthood forever, since He will never pass it on to another person because He never dies
- In v.26, the writer wraps up his argument saying it was befitting for us to have a High Priest Who was holy Himself, innocent from sin, separated from sinners and exalted
 - He is the kind of High Priest we always needed and the Lord always planned to give us
 - He never offered up a sacrifice for Himself, as the Levites did
 - Because He had no sin of His own
 - He offered Himself instead, for the sins of all the people
 - The entire chapter is summarized by v.28
 - The Law appointed priests who were weak
 - But an oath of God appointed His Son to be the perfect High Priest of a different order
 - That oath was written after the Law existed – the Psalms were written after the Levitical priesthood came into being
 - And therefore, we must conclude the greater priesthood waited for our Lord
 - And so, that is the high priesthood we look to for intercession
- But no discussion of priesthood would be complete without acknowledging that we form a priesthood of our own
 - While Christ is certainly our High Priest, every believer is part of a priesthood
 - Peter says

1 Pet. 2:9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

1 Pet. 2:10 for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

- We are a priesthood, in the sense that we serve as ministers for God on behalf of the world
- We represent God before the people of the world
- We teach them about His commandments
- When their prayers are not heard, we pray on their behalf
- When they are seeking a reconciliation with God, we show them the way
- We never stand in the place of Christ, nor do we ever say a person must go through us to

reach the Lord

- But we are an army of servants our High Priest may use to minister to the world
- We are now the people of God and we proclaim the excellencies of Him Who called us out of darkness
- So though we are not in danger of making the same mistakes as the writer's audience, we still have our own concerns when it comes to priesthood
 - Namely, are we serving as the priest we are called to be, in service to our High Priest?

- We've concluded our study of the order of Melchizedek priesthood
 - We learned that Melchizedek is a title given to the priest of God Most high
 - This priesthood predated the Levitical priesthood
 - And it continued concurrently with the priests of the Law
 - Until it was inherited by Christ, Who came in the form of man, specifically to enter into this order
 - I know this teaching challenged many of us, as the writer himself indicated it would
 - I've heard from some of you and, I've received email from those who listen on the Internet, that the study of Melchizedek was not what they expected or had heard in the past
 - I get that, since I too, was surprised by what I learned
 - It's not uncommon for Bible students to approach our studies with certain assumptions that may ultimately prove incorrect
 - And when our assumptions run squarely into the revelation of the Spirit in the Word of God, we should expect a bit of a shock from time to time
 - That reminds me of the story of an elderly man who lay dying in his bed

When one day, death's agony was suddenly pushed aside as he smelled the aroma of his favorite homemade chocolate chip cookies wafting up the stairs.

Gathering his remaining strength, he lifted himself from the bed. Leaning against the wall, he slowly made his way out of the bedroom, and with intense concentration, supported himself down the stairs, gripping the railing with both hands. In labored breath, he leaned against the doorframe, gazing wide-eyed into the kitchen.

There, spread upon the newspapers on the kitchen table, were literally

HUNDREDS of his favorite chocolate chip cookies! Was I in Heaven? Or was it one final act of heroic love from his devoted wife, seeing to it that he left this world a happy man?

Mustering one great final effort, he threw himself toward the table, landing on his knees in a rumpled posture, one hand on the edge of the table. The aged and withering hand quivering, made its way to a cookie near the edge of the table; feeling the warm, soft dough actually made the pain of his bones subside for a moment. His parched lips parted; the wondrous taste of cookies was already in his mouth; seemingly bringing him back to life.

He reached for another cookie. When suddenly, his hand stung with a sharp pain, causing him to drop the cookie and recoil in surprise. He looked up to see his wife, standing over him, holding the spatula she had just used to smack his hand.

“Stay out of those cookies!” she said, “They’re for your funeral!”

- So if your assumptions about the order of Melchizedek were rudely dismissed, then please forgive me
 - But I stand convinced that this is the point of the writer’s teaching
 - And as we move ahead in the teaching, I think you will see that it is this revelation of Christ, acting as part of another priesthood, that is so important to understanding the rest of the author’s teaching
- So we’ve established Christ as our High Priest in a better order, one that predated and preempted the Aaronic priesthood
 - And as all priests are called to do, Jesus performed the work of a priest in offering sacrifice to God on behalf of men
 - But in Jesus’ case, He gave Himself as a perfect sacrifice once for all
 - And now, He has seated Himself at the right hand of God, having performed His priestly duties
 - For unlike the priests working for the Covenant of Law, Jesus has no need to repeat His sacrifice
 - But if Jesus has served as our High Priest in performing service to the God Most High, then where did He perform this work?
 - For every priest officiates before an altar
 - And we know Jesus was not a member of the Aaronic priesthood
 - So He never officiated at the earthly tabernacle, because He wasn’t qualified to do so, according to the Law
 - Therefore, where did Christ officiate in His capacity as our High Priest?
- That question begins a three-chapter section that explores the implications of having a High Priest Who belongs to a different order than the Aaronic order
 - As he said, Jesus wasn’t a priest in the order of Aaron, so then He must have come under a different Law
 - For where there is a change in priesthood, there is by necessity, a change in Law also
 - And if He serves under a different Law, then He must also have had a different tabernacle in which to serve
 - Since the earthly tabernacle was instituted under the Law
 - And likewise, the sacrifice that Jesus offered must have been different than those offered under the Law

- So let's move forward with the writer into Chapter 8, where he begins with the question of where Jesus served and under what covenant?

Heb. 8:1 Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,

Heb. 8:2 a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.

Heb. 8:3 For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer.

Heb. 8:4 Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law;

Heb. 8:5 who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "SEE," He says, "THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN."

- Take note of the way the writer begins this chapter: "Now the main point...is"
 - That opening phrase refers back to all we've been learning about Melchizedek in Chapter 7
 - And we've learned a lot about the order, the fact that Jesus inherited it and serves perpetually in this order
 - That He holds it forever, because He will never die again
 - And since this order predated the Aaronic order, even the Levitical priests recognized the superiority of the Melchizedek order
 - Which the writer proved, when he reminded us that Abraham, the great-grandfather of Levi, gave tithes to Melchizedek
 - But even after we've learned all this, the writer now tells us that we haven't heard his main point as yet
 - In other words, understanding Jesus as the fulfillment of the order of Melchizedek is foundational to understanding the rest of the writer's arguments
 - In fact, after we're done examining this entire epistle, we're going to see that getting Chapter 7 right is central to understanding most of the chapters that follow
- And the main point is this: Jesus is a priest appointed to serve as a minister before the Living God in a Heavenly tabernacle
 - The writer calls this tabernacle a "true" tabernacle
 - And it's not the tabernacle established by the Law given to Moses and Israel
 - It's the one built by God, not man
 - It's the tabernacle where true worship and true sacrifice take place

- It's the one that God truly occupies
- This is the place where Christ serves as a High Priest
 - Notice in v.3, the writer says that every High Priest is appointed so they can serve God in the context of a tabernacle, by offering gifts and sacrifices
 - And since the Father calls Jesus our High Priest, then it must be that Jesus would perform the duties of a priest at an altar in a tabernacle
- And as the writer says in v.4, Jesus had no claim to serving in the earthly tabernacle
 - According to the Law of Moses, Jesus was not qualified to serve as a priest, since he wasn't born of Aaron's family – He was born of Judah
 - He was disqualified from offering gifts and sacrifices
 - But it was never the Father's intent that His Son would be a priest under that earthly system
 - Jesus was designated to be a priest of a different order, as we read in Psalms 110
- Now we start understand the importance of Jesus' priesthood having a different origin than the Law given to Moses
 - Being part of a different and better order, means everything associated with the priesthood must be different as well
 - The Law of Moses established the Aaronic priesthood and it established the tabernacle where they served
 - So if Jesus serves as a different priesthood, then He must be serving in a different tabernacle
 - And if He is serving in a different tabernacle, then the earthly one must be inferior to the one that receives Jesus' sacrifice
 - And so the writer says in v.5, that the tabernacle on earth was merely a copy, or shadow, of the Heavenly things
 - A shadow is the illusion, or suggestion, of something – but not the substance of that thing
 - In fact, when the Lord gave Moses the design of the tabernacle, He told Moses to be especially careful to follow the Lord's instructions exactly
 - Because Moses was building a tabernacle according to a pattern

Ex. 25:9 “According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it.

Ex. 25:40 “See that you make them after the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain.

- If the earthly tabernacle is built according to a pattern, then there must already exist

another tabernacle from which this earthly tabernacle gets its design

- You may have seen an architect prepare small scale models of shopping centers or skyscrapers before they begin construction
 - You haven't seen the real thing yet, but you can get a sense of what to expect when you look upon that small model
 - That model isn't the real building, but it's built upon the pattern of the real thing
 - And once the real building is in place, the model has little value, except as a curiosity
 - The majesty of the real thing far surpasses the glory of the model
- So it is with the earthly tabernacle, as compared to the Heavenly one
 - God gave Israel an earthly model of the Heavenly structure
 - It's inferior in every way to the Heavenly one it's patterned after
 - For a time, it served to give Israel, and the world, a sense of what God would accomplish on our behalf in His heavenly tabernacle
 - So until the High Priest of that Heavenly tabernacle appeared, the scale model had to suffice
- But when it was time to reveal that greater Priest, then it meant it was time for the Heavenly tabernacle to become the focus for men
 - Once the real skyscraper is finished, we stop staring at the model
 - Instead, we stare up at the much more impressive building that the model pictured
 - Likewise, now that the true tabernacle is operating with our High Priest installed at the right hand of the Father, so God's children are directed to ignore the earthly model
 - Instead, look up
- Even though the real tabernacle has entered into operation, we still can't see it, obviously
 - The Bible says one day, it will appear when we see the New Jerusalem appear in the New Heavens and Earth
 - But until then, we have a model of our own to help us see the glory of the one in Heaven
 - It's a picture, so it doesn't take priority over the Heavenly tabernacle
 - But still, it serves a good purpose in helping us to appreciate the power of God to unite us with Himself through the work of the intercessor, Christ
 - As Paul explains in Ephesians

Eph. 2:19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,

Eph. 2:20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,
Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,
Eph. 2:21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a
holy temple in the Lord,
Eph. 2:22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the
Spirit.

- Today, all members of the Body of Christ, all believers born-again by the Spirit, are the temple or tabernacle of God on earth
 - We are a “building” built on a foundation of God’s Word, which was delivered by the prophets and apostles
 - And of course, Christ Himself is the cornerstone of this building
 - The Spirit in us is “fitting” us into one another, like stones being worked by a mason until all the sides and corners match up perfectly
- In our case, the Spirit is the One conducting the molding process in our spirit, knocking off the rough edges of our nature
 - Wearing away sin and fashioning us into men and women who reflect the glory of Christ
 - Collectively, we are being made into a building worthy of the King of Kings to indwell
- But no matter how mature and holy this building may become, it still pales in comparison to the glory and holiness of the true tabernacle in Heaven
 - For now, we serve as a reminder of the glory to be revealed
 - As we look around and see the changes taking place inside us and among us, then we gain hope for what we’ll see in Heaven
 - If God can take this fallen, sinful body and turn it into something useful, then what will He do with a tabernacle not constructed by human hands?
 - And similarly, if God’s dwelling place is intended to reflect glory upon Himself, are we setting our goal to use our bodies, our very lives for that same purpose?
 - We absolutely should
 - As Paul tells us

Rom. 12:1 **Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.**

- Now, if the inauguration of a Heavenly tabernacle with a better High Priest offering better gifts and sacrifices means the earthly tabernacle has been rendered irrelevant and unnecessary...
 - Then what does that mean for the Old Covenant that established that earthly

model?

- That's the question the writer wants to explore for the next three chapters
- The writer already said in Chapter 7, that a new priesthood means a new Law
- And now he's said that a new priesthood means a new tabernacle is operating
- So what else is new?

Heb. 8:6 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.

- Answer? We must have a new and better Covenant
 - The ministry of Christ is more excellent in every way, when compared to anything that was given to picture that ministry
 - It's an undeniable truth: a picture or a model can't begin to compare to the glory of the real thing it represents
 - A picture of a diamond can't compare to the beauty of an actual diamond
 - A baby doll is nothing compared to a real baby
 - And anything given to picture Christ is meaningless, when compared to Christ Himself
 - So the arrival of Christ inaugurated a new and better Covenant with better promises than the one that preceded it
 - Just to be clear, the comparison is between the Old Covenant given to Israel through Moses
 - And the New Covenant promised to Israel in Jeremiah 31
- The writer says that Jesus is a priest or mediator in a better order, in a better tabernacle, under a better law and with better promises
 - A covenant is basically a promise
 - It's the biblical mechanism through which someone makes a promise to someone else
 - The Lord began making promises to men in the Garden
 - And He has continued to operate throughout history by way of a series of promises
 - This is always how God works within His creation: by a Word of promise
 - God states in advance what He will bring, and then it depends on men to have faith in that promise
 - The Old Covenant mediated by Moses contained certain promises for Israel
 - But the writer says those promises weren't as good as the promises the Lord grants us through the New Covenant Christ mediates

- And it's because those earlier promises were insufficient, that God saw fit to plan for another covenant
- And to make that point, the writer reminds the readers how God announced the New Covenant in Jeremiah

Heb. 8:7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second.

Heb. 8:8 For finding fault with them, He says,

**“BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD,
WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT
WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH;**

Heb. 8:9 NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS
ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND
TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT;
FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT,
AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD.

Heb. 8:10 “FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL

**AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD:
I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS,
AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS.
AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD,
AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.**

Heb. 8:11 “AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN,
AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, ‘KNOW THE LORD,’
FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME,
FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM.

Heb. 8:12 “FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES,
AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE.”

- The writer introduces the text of Jeremiah with a simple, logical observation
 - If the first covenant was faultless, then the Lord would never have spoken of another covenant
 - He calls the Old Covenant the “first” covenant, not because it was literally the first covenant God gave men
 - Instead, he is simply calling the Old Covenant the first, because it came earlier than the New Covenant
 - But back to his point, if the Old Covenant were perfect in all respects, then it would have been the last word on covenants
 - But many years later, the Lord spoke to Israel through Jeremiah about the need for a new and better covenant

- One that would replace and improve upon the one given through Moses in the desert
- The quote the writer gives us in vs.8-12 is from Jeremiah 31:27-34
 - This is the high-point of Old Testament prophecy
 - It's the point when Israel was suffering under great misery for their sins under the Old Covenant
 - And it's in the midst of their well-deserved suffering that the Lord announces that He intended to bring Israel a solution
 - A New Covenant that wouldn't lead them into further misery for sin
 - But instead, it would have the power to rescue them from that sin and the misery it brought to the nation
 - The writer quotes the Lord in v.8, declaring that this new set of promises would be different than the ones God delivered to Israel's fathers in the desert
 - That older Covenant contained promises that were conditional
 - They offered the nation the opportunity for great blessing under God's hand
 - But those blessings were contingent on Israel's performance in keeping the Law
 - Unless they kept the Law perfectly, then they forfeited the blessings
 - And incurred curses instead
 - It's not God's fault that His promises in the Old Covenant weren't very advantageous for Israel
 - It was the inability of sinful men to keep God's Law that made those promises so unattractive
 - But that's exactly why the Lord saw fit to establish new promises in a New Covenant
 - Notice in v.9, the Lord says the people did not continue in His Covenant
 - By their inability to continue in the Covenant, they suffered greatly
- Now compare the promises of the Old with the promises God gave Israel in the New, beginning in v.10
 - First, the Lord will put His Law into their minds and on their hearts
 - He means that those who enter into the New Covenant will receive a supernatural understanding and appreciation for God's Law
 - The righteousness of God will literally be infused into their very nature
 - It won't depend on their ability to keep the Law in their own efforts, as did the first Covenant
 - The effect of this New Covenant will be to literally produce righteousness, without which, no one will see the Lord
 - The Old Covenant said: here's what it is to be righteous, and if you can achieve this standard, then you can have these blessings

- The New Covenant says: You don't have the hope to become righteous on your own, so I'm going to give you the righteousness required, then you can receive all the blessings
- Notice at the end of v.10, that the effect of this "writing in the heart" is that those in this Covenant will be God's people and He will be their God
 - In v.11, the Lord says that no one in this Covenant will teach another to know the Lord
 - Because all will know Him
- Under the Old Covenant, Israel had prophets exhorting the nation to know and follow the Lord, because not all those in the Old Covenant knew Him truly
 - That's the weakness of the Old Covenant
 - The Old Covenant belonged to all who were born into Israel, but being born into Israel is not the same as becoming a child of God
 - Many born physically into Israel were never born-again into God's eternal family, because they never possessed the faith that saves
 - Because that Old Covenant didn't have the power to create faith in the heart
 - It merely set standards that revealed the sin of the people
- But the New Covenant is an instrument that brings a promise of faith to every member of the Covenant
 - It promises that all will know the Lord and all, one day, will obey Him
 - And it brings the promise that God will extend mercy to everyone in the Covenant
 - And He will not hold their sins against them
 - If we're honest, we'll realize that we're not really doing a good job in obeying Him – we see change and progress
 - Now we know the Lord and see the difference between sin and righteousness – we see the difference between the Heart of God and the heart of man
 - Understand that the promise hasn't been completely fulfilled yet, there is still that part of the promise that we will be resurrected and have a body glorified like Christ's
 - But there will be a time when all those promises written in Jeremiah will be fulfilled for all those in the New Covenant
 - These are wonderful promises, promises that are far better than anything in the Old Covenant
 - Where the Old made promises contingent on human performance, the New is based exclusively on God's power and faithfulness
 - Where the Old led to condemnation, the New leads to righteousness
 - That's why the writer says the New Covenant brings much better promises
- And this New Covenant is the one that establishes Christ as our High Priest and sacrifice for our sins

- The arrival of Christ in the order of Melchizedek means that the time has arrived for the New Covenant to come into effect
 - And as the writer says in v.13:

Heb. 8:13 When He said, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

- The Old gives way to the New
- You can't put new wine into old wineskins, as Jesus says
- We can't fit the framework of Christ into the Old, we can't fit them together in some way
- Like a scale model, it has become obsolete now that our High Priest in the order of Melchizedek has been revealed
- The promises of Jeremiah 31 are not fully reality yet for all of Israel, or even for Gentiles, because we have yet to be fully glorified as God has promised
 - But one day in the future, they will become true for Israel
 - And that arrival of Christ, in the appearance of the Priest that goes in the order of the New Covenant, means that God was ready at that point to bring the New in and turn the Old off
 - By faith in Jesus Christ, we enter into this new and better Covenant
 - Next time, we consider how the “scale model” of the Old served to teach men about the greater glory of the New

- When high school students are preparing to apply to college, they all experience a rite of passage called standardized testing
 - The SAT or ACT tests are well-known to every high school student
 - And on these tests, you will find one particular kind of question that many students really dislike: the analogy question
 - For example: medicine is to illness as education is to an Aggie
 - Well, the writer of Hebrews is in the middle of his own analogy of sorts
 - He is comparing the Old Covenant with the New in all its key components
 - In each comparison, the writer is making an analogy
 - And in each analogy, the point is always the same: the New beats the Old hands down
 - In fact, the writer shows in each case that New is the better covenant
 - And since the New is always a better covenant by God's design, it was always intended to replace the Old
 - The Old was never anything more than a placeholder in God's plan
 - It served a temporary purpose until the New arrived
- In Chapters 7-8, the writer set up this analogy using the Priesthood of Jesus as his starting point
 - Since Jesus wasn't qualified to be an Aaronic priest, He can't be serving the Father under the terms of the Old Covenant
 - Therefore, Jesus must be a Priest of a different order
 - And He must be serving the Father under a different Law or covenant
 - The writer then proceeded to show us that Jesus was a Priest under the order of Melchizedek
 - That's an order that predated (or existed before) the Levitical priesthood of the Law
 - As the appearance of Melchizedek in Genesis 14 proved
 - And it is Jesus' priesthood that is superior to the Levitical priesthood
 - As Psalm 95 proved
 - So we could say that as Levi is to the Covenant of Law, so is Jesus is to the Covenant of Grace
 - There was a New and better covenant planned for God's people
 - And when God was ready to reveal that better covenant, the Old Covenant was intended to disappear
 - The writer ended Chapter 8 with that very claim

Heb. 8:13 When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

- Now in Chapters 9-10, the writer will explore two more analogies
 - First, in Chapter 9 the writer examines the place of worship, which is the tabernacle (or temple), which is the center of Jewish religious observance
 - That building was the product of the Old Covenant and the Law it delivered
 - It was in the Law itself that God stipulated that the people build a tabernacle where God's glory would dwell among the people
 - So if a New Covenant has arrived, what are we to make of that building in God's plan for His people?
 - Then in Chapter 10, the writer examines the activities that took place inside that building, namely the sacrificial system itself
 - Under the Old Covenant Law, Israel was commanded to perform certain sacrifices regularly in the tabernacle/temple
 - So the writer will show through analogy how those rituals are replaced with better things in the New Covenant
 - In all these discussions, the writer is working very patiently to explain that the things of the Old haven't been thrown away or dismissed senselessly
 - In fact, they aren't being thrown away at all
 - They are being replaced
 - We still have need for a priest
 - We still have need for a house where God will dwell
 - Men still have need for atoning sacrifice
 - And by analogy, the writer is going to show that those needs are served in a better way by the New Covenant than by the old
- Looking at the first verse of Chapter 9, we clearly see the writer outlining these intentions over the next two chapters

Heb. 9:1 Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary.

- We can see him introducing his analogy when he begins to compare the Old Covenant to the New in the areas of regulation for worship and the earthly sanctuary
 - Those two areas are the topics for Chapters 9 and 10
 - Interestingly, the writer addresses the two topics in reverse order to the order he introduces them in v.1
 - He will explain his analogy of the tabernacle first in Chapter 9
 - And he will move to an analogy of the regulations for worship (that is, the sacrificial system) in Chapter 10
- I'm going to cover these two chapters a little differently than my usual approach

- By that I mean, I am not going to spend a lot of time examining the details of the tabernacle and its construction, or the sacrificial system, as it was practiced under the Law
- The writer himself will summarize those things for us
- If you want to dive into the details of those topics, I point you the VBVM Exodus study online
- Instead, I want to focus on the writer's larger point, which is how and why these things were replaced by the New Covenant
 - His purpose in writing to the Church is to teach us concerning the New Covenant and its superiority, so that's where I want to focus as well
 - And to understand how the New operates, we first need to understand the purpose God had in giving the Old in the first place
- So let's begin with that brief background: how did the Old arrive and why?
 - First, the Bible teaches that the Old Covenant was established between God and a certain nation of people: Israel
 - We find the Law and all that it established in the books of Genesis to Deuteronomy
 - But most of it is found in Exodus and Leviticus
 - The Covenant was a generational agreement, meaning it bound not just one generation of Israel, but every generation of Israel
 - God declared in Deut. 29 that everyone in Israel will be held accountable to this Covenant
 - Not just those who stood at the mountain with Moses
 - But all generations of Israel that would come later throughout history
 - And it was not given to the Gentiles
 - Furthermore, the Old Covenant is a conditional covenant, or a parity covenant
 - It spelled out certain blessings God would bring Israel
 - But, those blessings were contingent on Israel's performing up to the standards of the Covenant
 - Specifically, all Israel was required to keep the Law perfectly forever in order to receive the blessings of that Covenant
 - If they failed to meet this standard, Israel would instead receive the curses of the Covenant
 - Over the course of many centuries, Israel drifted away from practicing the Law as God intended
 - Increasingly, the nation became corrupted by the surrounding nations and by their evil kings
 - They distorted and perverted the rituals God gave them
 - So eventually, the Lord judged the nation for their failure to follow the

Covenant, just as He promised in the Law

- God knew Israel would fail in keeping the Law, since no sinful man can keep God's Law perfectly
 - So in the Law itself, God also provided a sacrificial system for Israel to follow
 - By following the sacrificial system, Israel could continue in the Lord's blessings, despite their inability to keep the Law
 - By performing the sacrificial rituals, the nation maintained good standing in the Old Covenant
 - But the sacrificial system was not intended to address eternal life for an individual Jew
 - Under the Old Covenant, and individual's salvation came just as it comes for us today
 - The Jew had to believe in God's promised provision of a Messiah
 - And by their individual faith, they were saved
 - Meanwhile, the sacrificial system of the Old Covenant made it possible for the nation to continue in the blessings of the Old Covenant, despite their sin
 - We'll come back to this discussion in Chapter 10, when we look at the sacrificial system
- So after that very brief summary of the purposes of the Law, let's look at the writer's first analogy, between the tabernacle of the Old Covenant and the Heavenly tabernacle of the New Covenant

Heb. 9:2 For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place.

Heb. 9:3 Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies,

Heb. 9:4 having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant;

Heb. 9:5 and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

Heb. 9:6 Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship,

Heb. 9:7 but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance.

- We're in the first part of the analogy, where the writer is explaining the practices of the Old Covenant
 - And specifically, notice what the writer is emphasizing

- He's focused on the design of the tabernacle as a series of chambers or rooms
 - The room with the most glory and beauty and significance was the innermost chamber
 - It's called the Holy of Holies, and it contained the Ark of Covenant
 - More importantly, it was the only place within the tabernacle where the glory of God was visible
- But that room was closed off by a veil, so that no one could actually enter and see this wonderful place
 - Except for a high priest
 - That man could enter, but no one else in Israel could enter
 - But that high priest could only enter once per year, on the Day of Atonement, as prescribed in the Law
 - And even when he did enter, he must first perform a sacrifice for Himself, since he also was a sinful person
- And then outside the Holy of Holies was another chamber, where only the Levitical priests could enter
 - In this chamber, called the Holy Place, the priests served by offering daily sacrifices
 - These sacrifices were required by the Law on account of the sins of the people
 - It was by these daily sacrifices that the nation could remain in the Covenant of Law, despite their inability to keep the Law's regulations
- Furthermore, the two chambers were decorated with very unique and specific furnishings
 - There was an oil lamp, a table with bread, an altar where incense was burned, and of course the Ark with the mercy seat
 - These objects were something to behold
 - But so few people ever had the chance to see them in all their glory
 - Because unless you were a high priest, you never saw any of them
 - And unless you were the high priest of Israel, you could never see the Ark and mercy seat with God's glory resting upon it
 - All these rules and restrictions were set up by the Law and the Old Covenant that established it
 - And the writer lists these details as the first half of his analogy
 - He wants us to understand that this pattern was given to Israel to tell a story
 - That story was about Christ and the work He would do as a High Priest in a new and better covenant
- So now the writer turns to the second half of the analogy to explain why these things were given and what they meant

Heb. 9:8 The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing,

Heb. 9:9 which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience,

Heb. 9:10 since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.

Heb. 9:11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation;

Heb. 9:12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Heb. 9:13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh,

Heb. 9:14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

- We know the writer has moved to explaining the analogy, because he says the Holy Spirit was signifying something in all that was given to Israel
 - In other words, when Moses relayed the instructions of the tabernacle to the nation of Israel, he was relaying things given by the Spirit of God
 - This is further evidence that all Scripture is inspired and intended by God to teach us important things
 - For example, while we know that we are no longer under the Law, nevertheless the Law is still useful as instruction
 - In studying it, we learn about God's plan for Israel and the way the Law pictured Christ's fulfillment of that plan
 - So what was the Holy Spirit teaching us about the Old vs. New Covenants?
 - First, the writer says the multiple chambers and all the barriers to accessing the glory of God was a sign that the way to God had not yet been revealed
 - For as long as the tabernacle stood in keeping with the Lord's purposes, it was like a billboard
 - It was telling Israel your sin is a barrier to accessing God
 - And the solution to sin has not yet been given by God
 - So the tabernacle stood like a sign declaring "continue waiting..."
 - The solution Israel was waiting for was the Messiah, of course
 - And the New Covenant that the Messiah brings
 - And even the design of the tabernacle service itself reinforced the idea that the solution to sin was still yet to be revealed

- And until the Messiah arrived, they were blocked off from God
- In vs.9-10, the writer highlights the way sacrifice was carried out in the tabernacle to prove his point
 - He says all the sacrifices and washings and other rituals prescribed under Law couldn't cleanse the worshipper's conscience
 - A worshipper who participated in the sacrifices and washings required in the Law never experienced relief from the guilt of sin
 - Only in a temporary, limited way, could they experience some sense of resolution
 - But because they also knew that future sin would bring about the need for future sacrifice, they couldn't feel a truly clean
 - They still understood that their sin was a problem
 - Since it continued to form a barrier to God
 - The knowledge that the Law required continuing sacrifice served to remind them that they were not truly cleansed
 - Therefore, they knew that none of the sacrifices under the Law were actually solving the problem of sin
 - The washings, food restrictions and drink requirements only served to protect the physical body
 - They could not address the fundamental problem of our dead spirit
 - Therefore, something greater than the tabernacle and sacrifices of the Law was still required to reconcile men to God
 - The only way to know freedom from the guilt of sin is for God Himself to cleanse our conscience by assigning His righteousness to us
 - That's the difference between law and grace
 - By law, we are reminded continually that we have sin and we need atonement
 - But by God's grace, we are made to be righteous, through Christ's sacrifice on our behalf
- So in vs.11-14, the writer finishes his analogy by describing the greater tabernacle of the New Covenant
 - That tabernacle, the writer says, is not found on earth
 - This tabernacle is one not built by human hands
 - That is to say, it was built by God
 - We learned earlier in the letter, that the earthly tabernacle is patterned after the Heavenly one
 - It is like a small scale model intended to teach us
 - In the case of the Law, the Aaronic high priest entered with a basin of blood taken from a bull
 - As he entered, he sprinkled it on the mercy seat over the Ark to atone for the

sins of the nation of Israel

- The writer seems to be suggesting that this ritual is patterned on the sacrifice Christ was to perform in the Heavenly tabernacle in His own blood
- So that just as the high priest applied blood to the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, so did Jesus in His tabernacle
 - Remember the SAT analogies?
 - This suggests that Jesus went to the Heavenly tabernacle soon after His death to apply His own blood
 - Notice in v.12, the writer says Jesus entered by way of His own blood, not with the blood of bulls and goats
- But if Jesus did enter the Heavenly tabernacle and apply His own blood to the mercy seat, when did He accomplish this work?
 - Some believe that we get that answer in John's Gospel, after Jesus' resurrection
 - In Chapter 20, the resurrected Lord encounters Mary Magdalene
 - When she sees Jesus alive, she embraces Him

John 20:16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher).

John 20:17 Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'"

- This encounter happened on the day of Jesus' resurrection, and so perhaps, He was speaking of His ascension to apply His blood in the Heavenly tabernacle
 - If so, then this was an entirely different ascension than the one Jesus performed in Acts 1
 - That later ascension would have been to sit at the right hand of the Father
 - The significance of sitting indicates that work has been finished
- So like the SAT analogy, the work of the earthly high priest was a lesser example of the greater work Jesus intended to perform on our behalf in the Heavenly tabernacle
 - Jesus' atoning work was greater because the sacrifice He offered was infinitely better than the one offered by the Levitical high priest
 - The earthly priests were commanded to use the blood of bulls and goats in their sacrifices
 - But the blood of an animal is only sufficient to cleanse the body, the writer says in v.13
 - What he means is that an animal's sacrificial death was a payment for the sins under the Law, and so it permitted the restoration of a Jew who had violated the Law
 - A Jew who obeyed the Law and sacrificed an animal as God directed was

- permitted to remain a citizen in good standing within Israel
 - If a Jew failed to perform the required sacrifices, they were to be cut off from Israel, according to the Law
 - So the blood of these animals cleansed the flesh, in the sense that it permitted the physical restoration of a person
 - Just as today, a criminal is returned to society after paying his debt in prison, so was a Jew restored physically by the blood of a bull or goat
- But as the writer noted earlier, the person's conscience was not cleansed in this process
 - They might have satisfied the requirements of the Law through the sacrifice of a bull or goat, but that didn't address their debt before God
 - They were still sinful and therefore, they still awaited a solution from God
- So in v.14, the writer applies the analogy once more, saying if the blood of a bull or goat could restore earthly fellowship, then the blood of Christ Himself was the solution to reconciling us in fellowship with God
 - Christ's blood was capable of atoning for our sins once for all so that we might be called a friend of God
 - All our sins were covered by the blood of Christ, because His life possessed two unique qualities nothing else possessed
 - First, Jesus was a man, so He was a perfect substitute for those He died to save
 - The death of an animal isn't sufficient to satisfy the wrath of God against our sin, because they are not an equal substitute for us
 - Imagine if someone owed a debt to the bank
 - And then one day, they showed up to pay off the debt using Monopoly money
 - Obviously, the bank wouldn't accept Monopoly money to pay off the debt, because the person owed them real money
 - Only a payment with real money would satisfy the debt
 - Likewise, the debt we owe God for our sin is a human life
 - As Paul says in Romans 6:23, the wages of sin is death
 - So the death of a bull or goat or lamb isn't capable of paying the debt we owe for our sin
 - Only a human life can substitute for our life
- Secondly, Jesus' blood has the power to atone for our sin, because His life was perfect and without sin
 - Notice in v.14, the writer says Jesus offered Himself without blemish
 - He lived a sinless life, never committing even one sin
 - Jesus' willingness to resist the devil's temptations under extreme circumstances in the desert was evidence of His resolve to remain obedient to the Father

- Therefore, Jesus' death was undeserved and so it was available as a payment for you and I
 - Go back to our example of the bank debt again
 - What if a person walked into a bank to pay off a debt
 - But in this particular case, imagine this person had never taken out a loan at that bank in the first place
 - What would the bank do with his payment?
 - Assuming the bank kept the money, they could apply that payment to someone else's debt
- That's exactly what Christ's death did for you and for me
 - The payment Christ made in His own blood was a payment for a debt that Christ did not incur
 - Since He had no sin of His own, He had no debt to pay
 - And yet, He paid it nonetheless
 - So the Father is willing to apply that payment to the account of anyone who accepts Jesus' payment in their place
- So the writer says in v.14, that if we accept the payment of Jesus, His blood is capable of cleansing our conscience from dead works
 - Doing works to please God – whether works done under the Law of Moses or any other set of rules – cannot cleanse our conscience
 - Works cannot erase sin, and animal blood cannot pay our debt
 - So our conscience continues to feel the weight of condemnation
 - We know in our spirit that we remain in trouble with God
 - On the other hand, if we accept the payment of Christ on our behalf, we feel the weight of condemnation lifted
 - Our sins are forgiven and we are freed to serve a living God
 - As sin is to condemnation, so is Jesus Christ to eternal life

- We just finished celebrating Christmas
 - So, it is appropriate in a way, that last week we studied at v.11 of Hebrews 9
 - In the first 8 verses of Chapter 9, the writer has used an analogy to explain the superiority of the New Covenant
 - His analogy will have two parts: the tabernacle and the sacrifices
 - In Chapter 9, we're looking at the tabernacle, it's design and purpose and even the way the Lord inaugurated it for service
 - The writer is explaining to his readers that each of these aspects of the Old Covenant was given to picture, or represent, Christ
 - They were part of an analogy that God designed to teach mankind about the need for a Savior
- I said it was appropriate to have celebrated Christmas this week, because in v.11, the writer mentioned the appearing of Christ
 - Let's begin reading there...

Heb. 9:11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation;

- In v.11, the writer says everything God was doing in the Law and the Old Covenant changed when Christ appeared as our High Priest
- You remember that the heart of this letter revolves around the understanding that our high priest belongs to an order called Melchizedek
- The fact that Jesus comes as a priest in that order, and not the one given in the Law, means that the Law must change as well
- We stopped in v.14 last week, as the writer gave us the essential and most important difference between the Old and New Covenants
 - While the Old Covenant tabernacle existed to permit a sinful people to remain in fellowship within the nation of Israel, the New Covenant goes much farther
 - It restores fellowship between mankind and God
 - While the Old Covenant ensured that Israel could continue to receive earthly blessings in the land
 - The New Covenant guarantees eternal blessings in the Kingdom
 - The tabernacle sacrifices cleansed the body, but the New Covenant tabernacle cleanses the soul, the conscience
- With that, the writer now zeros in on this change in covenants, for after all, that's what this analogy is all about
 - We are in a Covenant with the Living God, but it's not the Covenant the Lord gave Israel at the mountain

Heb. 9:15 For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Heb. 9:16 For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it.

Heb. 9:17 For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives.

Heb. 9:18 Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood.

Heb. 9:19 For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people,

Heb. 9:20 saying, “THIS IS THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT WHICH GOD COMMANDED YOU.”

Heb. 9:21 And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood.

Heb. 9:22 And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

- The writer begins with “for this reason...”
 - That phrase directs our attention back to the previous passage
 - Because the Old Covenant tabernacle service and the priests who served in that place could not cleanse our conscience, something better was required
 - So “for that reason,” Christ became a mediator for a New Covenant
 - The writer is answering the question that some in Israel might have been asking at that time
 - The question was, “Why would God have replaced a covenant He created for Israel? Explain what’s wrong with the Old Covenant?”
 - The answer is, “because the Old Covenant doesn’t address the fundamental problem of sin barring us from Heaven”
 - To solve that problem, a new and better covenant was required
 - One that brought with it a better priesthood, a better sacrifice and a better tabernacle
- In the second half of the verse, the writer answers the next question, “What makes the New Covenant better?”
 - The answer begins with a death
 - The New Covenant is better because it provided a sacrifice to pay for all the sins committed under that first covenant
 - The New Covenant actually wiped away all the debt that Israel racked up under

the Old Covenant

- It's like someone came along and offered to pay off all your credit cards at once
- Look carefully at the second part of v.15
 - The writer says that Christ became a mediator of a New Covenant so that by a death, He could redeem the transgressions
 - The word "redemption" in that verse means to pay a ransom
 - And the word "transgression" is sin
- So the sins of Israel under the Old Covenant were a debt to God that required repayment
 - And the wages of sin are death, so a human death was required
 - The Old Covenant tabernacle service never called for human sacrifice
 - So that Old Covenant had no means to repay the debt required by the Law
 - Furthermore, even if a human sacrifice were to take place, there was no human being who could qualify as a sinless sacrifice
 - So the Old Covenant sacrifices could only cleanse the body, not the soul
- But the New Covenant offers a sacrifice capable of paying the ransom for all who are condemned by their sin under the Old Covenant
 - That sacrifice, of course, was Christ Himself on the cross
 - At His death, the New Covenant was established
 - And by it, a payment is offered to satisfy the requirements of the Old Covenant
 - This is the meaning of Christ's words when He declared He came to fulfill the Law
 - And who may enjoy the blessings of this New Covenant?
 - The writer says those who are called into faith by the Father are made part of this Covenant
 - The Covenant given to Israel was a parity covenant, that obligated both parties to certain performance
 - But the New Covenant is a suzerainty covenant, which means the covenant is granted by the greater to the lesser
 - There are no terms for the lesser
 - The lesser is simply the recipient of the greater party's decision to grant the covenant
 - We who have been called by God into grace have been granted the blessings of the New Covenant
- Now notice at the end of v.15, the writer says that those who are called into the New Covenant will receive an eternal inheritance
 - The idea is simple: every human being's eternal future has two possible outcomes
 - Either they will fail to enter into the New Covenant

- And so they must pay the wages of sin in their eternal death
- Or they will be called into the New Covenant by faith, so that Christ's death may pay that price on their behalf
- And then they will be able to share in Christ's inheritance in the Kingdom
- The writer has connected the death of Christ on our behalf with our receiving an inheritance
 - And we understand that connection from our everyday experience
 - We understand how a person might create a last will and testament so that after their death, people they love will receive a portion of their inheritance
- Well, the writer says you can think of what Christ did for us in the New Covenant as something similar
 - In vs.16-17, the writer reminds us that where there is a covenant, there must be a death to create it
 - And until a death occurs, the terms of the covenant aren't in effect
- The word for "covenant" in Greek is also translated "testament", as in a last will and testament
 - The terms of wills are established before someone dies
 - But, they only go into effect after a death occurs
- When the benefactor dies, those the person loves will benefit from the testament or covenant
 - So it was in the New Covenant and Christ
 - The New Covenant is like Christ's last will and testament, intended to bless those He loves

Every testament (or covenant) works this way

- The writer says in v.18, that even the Old Covenant worked that way
 - Before the terms of the Covenant could begin, and the people receive the blessings of that testament, something had to die
 - And in the case of that Covenant, God instructed Moses to sacrifice animals to put the terms into effect
- The writer recounts that moment on the mountain, in Exodus 24, when Moses and the elders met with the Lord at the altar to establish the Covenant
 - They performed a sacrifice on an altar that Moses built
 - The blood of the animals was poured out into a basin
 - And that blood was sprinkled on the book of the Covenant and on the people
 - The blood signified that an agreement was in force, and that it could only be broken by death
- Once the tabernacle was built according to God's instructions, a similar ritual was required by God

- The high priest took the blood of animals and sprinkled it at various places in the tabernacle
 - In particular, it was sprinkled on all the items inside the tabernacle itself
 - This ritual cleansed the items for use in the tabernacle service
 - And of course, after the tabernacle service began, there was a continual need for blood to be applied, because Israel continually sinned
 - Therefore, the writer says that all things had to be cleansed with blood, whether the tabernacle, the priests or the people themselves
- Once again, the writer is making an analogy using the earlier tabernacle
 - The Old Covenant required the applying of blood to cleanse sin, because sin always requires a death
 - But since this is an analogy, the blood of the tabernacle stands for something much greater
 - So now, the writer is ready to explain how the New Covenant takes these details and improves upon them for our sake

Heb. 9:23 Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

- Just as what happened in the earthly tabernacle has also happened in the Heavenly tabernacle
 - On earth, the tabernacle had to be cleansed of sin before it could be ready for use
 - So has the tabernacle in Heaven been cleansed
 - Why would the Heavenly tabernacle need to be cleansed?
 - First, Paul tells us that there is wickedness beyond this earth

Eph. 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

- Paul specifically says there is wickedness in the Heavenly places
- Of course, he's referring to Satan, who occupies both Earth and can visit the Heavenly realm, according to Job 1
- Secondly, the prophet Ezekiel tells us that Satan defiled the Heavenly sanctuary by his rebellion against God

Ezek. 28:12 “Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,

“You had the seal of perfection,
 Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.
 Ezek. 28:13 “You were in Eden, the garden of God;
 Every precious stone was your covering:
 The ruby, the topaz and the diamond;
 The beryl, the onyx and the jasper;
 The lapis lazuli, the turquoise and the emerald;
 And the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets,
 Was in you.
 On the day that you were created
 They were prepared.
 Ezek. 28:14 “You were the anointed cherub who covers,
 And I placed you there.
 You were on the holy mountain of God;
 You walked in the midst of the stones of fire.
 Ezek. 28:15 “You were blameless in your ways
 From the day you were created
 Until unrighteousness was found in you.
 Ezek. 28:16 “By the abundance of your trade
 You were internally filled with violence,
 And you sinned;
 Therefore I have cast you as profane
 From the mountain of God.
 And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub,
 From the midst of the stones of fire.
 Ezek. 28:17 “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;
 You corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor.
 I cast you to the ground;
 I put you before kings,
 That they may see you.
 Ezek. 28:18 “By the multitude of your iniquities,
 In the unrighteousness of your trade
 You profaned your sanctuaries.
 Therefore I have brought fire from the midst of you;
 It has consumed you,
 And I have turned you to ashes on the earth
 In the eyes of all who see you.
 Ezek. 28:19 “All who know you among the peoples
 Are appalled at you;
 You have become terrified
 And you will cease to be forever.”””

- If you look carefully at this passage in Ezekiel, you will see what the writer of Hebrews is

talking about

- First, the writer says Satan was an angel created by God and perfectly made
 - Notice in v.12, we hear that Satan had the seal of perfection
 - He was full of wisdom and beauty
 - In v.15, he was blameless, at least for a time
 - And he was splendidly adorned in jewels, Ezekiel says
 - Secondly, notice where Satan lived and how he served God
 - In v.13, he was in the Garden of Eden
 - Naturally, we assume this refers to the garden than Adam and Woman occupied
 - And of course, Satan was in the earthly Garden in Genesis 3
 - But if we look more closely at this passage, we see clues that suggest this Garden isn't the same one as that in Genesis 3
 - For example, Satan was on the Holy Mountain of God
 - The Holy Mountain of God is Mt. Zion
 - Mt. Zion is the name for the Heavenly Jerusalem that exists in the Heavenly realm
 - The writer of Hebrews mentions this later in his letter in Chapter 12
 - And in Revelation 21, we hear that this Heavenly Zion will descend from Heaven to become our new dwelling place for eternity
 - Also notice that after Satan sinned, God cast him to the earth, to the ground
 - So it would seem that there is a Heavenly garden called Eden, which the earthly Eden represented
- Furthermore, notice that Satan served God as the covering cherub
 - The covering cherub refers to those angels whose wings covered the mercy seat on top of the Ark of the Covenant
 - We already know that the tabernacle given to Moses and Israel is a pattern of the one in Heaven
 - So now we know that the golden covering cherubs made for the earthly tabernacle are pictures of real cherubs who cover the glory of God in the Heavenly tabernacle
 - And the first and most glorious of those cherubs originally was none other than Satan himself
 - But then notice, in v.18, Ezekiel says that Satan profaned his sanctuaries
 - The word in Hebrew for “sanctuary” literally means “holy places”
 - Satan profaned the holy places
 - There are two holy places in the tabernacle
 - The Holy Place

- And the Holy of Holies
 - Both of these places in the Heavenly tabernacle were defiled by Satan, Ezekiel says
- How did Satan come to defile the Heavenly tabernacle?
 - First, God says Satan was filled with violence, because of pride
 - Specifically, Satan took note of the abundance of his trade
 - “Trade” is a term in Hebrew meaning “merchandise” or “trade”
 - In this context, it refers to Satan’s trade as the covering cherub
 - He was the angel closest to the glory of God
 - He was assigned to cover it, to husband it
 - And because he was so close to God’s glory, he was filled with violence
 - What was supposed to be an honor to Satan, became a cause for him to rebel against God
 - He so loved seeing his privileged position next to the glory of God, that he began to think he was equal to God
 - This is the essence of pride: we so love what God has done in creating us, that we stop thanking Him and begin thinking of ourselves – we love ourselves more than we love Him
 - Secondly, Satan was corrupted by his own perfection
 - Satan started thinking he was inherently great and beautiful – even more so than God Himself
 - Notice in v.17, Ezekiel says Satan’s heart was corrupted by his splendor
- Next, what action did Satan take to pollute the Heavenly tabernacle?
 - The answer to this question is a little less clear, but I think I see what he did
 - First, remember Satan’s position as the covering cherub
 - His station was in the holiest place in the tabernacle
 - Secondly, we know the tabernacle on earth is based on a pattern of the tabernacle in Heaven
 - And we also see that other aspects of Creation are patterned after things in Heaven
 - The temple mount is a representation of Mt. Zion in Heaven
 - And the Garden of Eden on earth appears to be a representation of the Garden of God in Heaven
 - Therefore, to understand how Satan may have profaned the tabernacle in Heaven, we should ask: does Satan ever profane the earthly tabernacle?
 - The answer is most definitely
 - He does so on numerous occasions, but most notably, in the Abomination of Desolation described in Daniel and by Jesus in Matthew

- This is a moment when Satan seats a man in the Holy of Holies and declares himself to be God
 - Satan accomplished this with Antiochus Epiphanies, shortly before Christ's birth
 - And he will repeat it again with the Antichrist in the Tribulation
- So by analogy, I believe Satan was a covering cherub who became convinced by his importance and beauty that he could be God
 - And so in a rebellious moment of violence and pride, Satan seized the mercy seat in the Heavenly tabernacle, declaring Himself to be God
 - And in doing so, he profaned the Heavenly tabernacle
 - We see the result of that act of rebellion in Ezekiel
 - In v.16, the Lord says He cast Satan down from the mountain of God (in Heaven)
 - In v.17, we hear that Satan was cast to the ground
 - The Hebrew word for "ground" is the word for "earth"
 - And again in v.18, the Lord declares that Satan was cast down to the earth
 - We know that Satan fell into sin prior to the events of Genesis 3, where he met with woman and seduced her to sin
 - So it seems that Satan was roaming the earthly Garden of Eden, because he had been cast out of the Heavenly Garden of God
 - Jesus described seeing this moment in the Gospels

Luke 10:18 And He said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.

- Therefore, the writer of Hebrews says that the Heavenly tabernacle was in need of cleansing before its High Priest could set up shop inside and begin His work
 - The cleansing was accomplished by blood, just as the earthly tabernacle was cleansed by blood
 - But this cleansing was done by the blood of Christ, which He delivered to that Heavenly tabernacle in His own body
 - Once Christ appeared in the tabernacle, He cleansed it from all unrighteousness as a preparatory step to His serving there
 - Just as the high priest of Israel had to cleanse the earthly tabernacle with animal blood before the tabernacle service could begin
 - It's by the blood of Christ that the Heavenly tabernacle is restored and our High Priest is installed
 - Now that our High Priest is installed, the New Covenant is in effect
 - And now that it's in effect, it's perpetual and without end – it's a suzerainty covenant that doesn't depend on performance

- In light of this, consider the question, “Can your works save you?”
 - The thing that stands in our way is a defiled sanctuary that hasn’t even been touched by human hands
 - How does a human work on earth to solve that problem in Heaven? It can’t.
 - This shows, to an even greater degree, how far human works are from the real solution that reconciles us to God
 - Which is the death of Christ alone and His blood applied in a Heavenly realm that we haven’t even visited yet
 - Next week, we’ll finish looking at how that blood was applied

- Over the New Year's holiday, a lot of families like to go to the movies
 - And when you go to the movies, you are sure to see coming attractions of future movies
 - Sometimes, those trailers give away too much of the movie's plot and sometimes, even spoil the ending
 - But if a movie trailer is done properly, it will tell you just enough to get you excited about seeing the movie when it's released
 - You can think of the Old Covenant as God's movie trailer of coming attractions
 - For example, the OC provided a place where God would dwell among men, but it wasn't God's true home
 - It allowed for sacrifices to address the problem of sin in Israel, but those sacrifices didn't actually satisfy God
 - And the OC created a priestly order to intercede for the people of Israel, but that intercession wasn't sufficient to appease God's wrath
 - So what value did the OC serve? It was God's coming attractions trailer for the New Covenant
 - The New Covenant cleansed a true, permanent dwelling place for God
 - The New Covenant provided a sacrifice to cover all sin
 - And the New Covenant works through a Priest Who can bridge the gap between men and God
- That's what the writer of Hebrews wants his audience to understand, without confusing the movie trailer for the movie itself
 - Once a movie debuts at a theater, the trailer isn't needed, nor does it provide value
 - Imagine if you saw a movie trailer for some exciting new movie, and you were so eager for the movie to appear in the theaters
 - And then after a long wait, the movie finally debuts
 - But if instead of rushing to the theater to see the movie, you just watched the movie trailer over and over again?
 - Someone would probably tell you to stop watching the trailer...just go see the movie
 - So it is with the Old and New Covenants
 - Once the New appeared, then the Old was no longer needed
 - But in a sense, that's what these Jewish believers were trying to do
 - They were replaying the movie trailer over and over again instead of seeing the movie
 - They were continuing to participate in the practices of the Old Covenant, even though the New Covenant had debuted
 - That's why we've seen the writer carefully walking his audience through various elements of the Old Covenant, so he can compare them to the New

- With each comparison, he shows from Scripture how the New Covenant is the full meal deal
 - While the Old Covenant was a preview of a coming attraction
- So far, the writer has covered the better priesthood and a better tabernacle in the New Covenant, and now he's ready to explain the better sacrifice of the New
 - That better sacrifice is Christ Himself, of course
 - At the end of Chapter 9, we saw that the true tabernacle of our High Priest Christ in Heaven had to be prepared, just like the earthly tabernacle was
 - It required a cleansing of sin through an application of blood
 - The sin that contaminated the tabernacle was that of Satan's rebellion, according to Ezekiel 28
 - And the only blood that could properly cleanse the Heavenly tabernacle was that of Christ Himself
 - So as Christ died and was resurrected, He brought His own blood into the Heavenly realm for application on the altar
 - Paul sums this up in Colossians 1

Col. 1:19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, **Col. 1:20** and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

- Let's pick up at the end of chapter, where the writer begins to transition to his final comparison of Old and New sacrifices

Heb. 9:24 For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;

Heb. 9:25 nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own.

Heb. 9:26 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

- At some point following Christ's resurrection, He ascended into Heaven in physical form, and in that form, He entered the Heavenly tabernacle
 - What an awesome and amazing spectacle it must have been when the victorious, glorified, death-conquering King returned to the Heavenly realm having completed the plan the Father assigned
 - Choirs of angels and all the saints Christ led free from captivity must have

rejoiced like never before

- The scene must have been as glorious as any we could possibly imagine, because God's plan of redemption was reaching its climax
- That's the moment the writer is describing here
- As Christ entered that tabernacle made of precious stones, brilliant shining glass and gold, He entered the Holy of Holies, the writer says
 - This is a place no human hand has ever touched, since it was made by Christ Himself, Who is the maker of all things
 - Our earthly tabernacle lined with gold and fine linen was a mere copy of this superior structure
 - It couldn't compare to the glory of that Heavenly structure
- And then, as the Son of God returned to His Heavenly home, now living in the form of a man, He entered with His own blood
 - How did the Lord deliver His blood into Heaven?
 - The only thing we have to guide us is the Old Covenant ceremony that pictured this moment
 - As the writer explains in v.25, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies carrying a basin with the blood of a bull
 - The blood was drained from the body of the bull while at the altar
 - And then, it was carried into the Holy of Holies to be applied to the mercy seat
- Therefore, we should assume that as the Lord entered the earthly tabernacle, some of His blood was taken at the altar and then He Himself carried it into the Holy Place, as the writer says
 - In vs.25-26, the writer says Christ's application of His blood in the Heavenly temple was superior to the point that it only needed to happen once to cleanse all men of sin
 - Unlike the priests in the Old Covenant, who repeated the sacrifices daily and annually, Christ's sacrifice was a one-time event
 - Christ's death and His application of blood in the tabernacle happens only once, at the consummation of the age
 - But the death of an innocent man is sufficient to cover the sin of any guilty man who accepts that payment
 - And Christ's death has limitless power to save
 - Not just one person, but a multitude of humanity were redeemed with His single act of sacrifice
 - Because His act of sacrifice satisfies the Father as payment for the sins of those who believe
 - Paul describes this relationship in Ephesians

Eph. 1:18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

Eph. 1:19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might

Eph. 1:20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,

Eph. 1:21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

Eph. 1:22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,

Eph. 1:23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

- Paul describes the saving power of Christ's death for the sake of the elect
 - He asks the Church to know the hope of the calling we've receive from God
 - And then he describes the riches of glory of Christ's inheritance in the saints
 - Christ's inheritance refers to His resurrected life and the Kingdom He rules afterward, and that glory is also for us, the saints, those who believe
 - First, we have this surpassing greatness of God's power to raise dead bodies back to life
 - And following His resurrection, Christ was seated in the Heavenly places, following His application of blood in the tabernacle
 - After His work in the tabernacle was complete, the Lord took His seat next to the Father
 - In eastern culture, sitting down designated that a servant had completed his work
 - So to be seated, means to cease from work
 - From this seated position of authority, Christ now may rule over all Creation, including over His Church
 - And By His Spirit, Christ indwells His Church
- And all those Christ indwells are covered by His sacrifice as Paul goes on to explain

Eph. 2:4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

Eph. 2:5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

Eph. 2:6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

Eph. 2:7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

- The process of our redemption began while we were spiritually dead and not even looking for a Savior
 - Because the Lord loved us, He extended His grace to us to make us alive in Christ
 - We were born spiritually dead – no one saves themselves
 - No dead body can do anything to cause itself to come back to life
 - Similarly, no unbeliever can do anything to make themselves become spiritually alive – something outside yourself must do that to you
 - We were born-again by God's Spirit
 - Then notice, Paul says we were raised and seated with Christ (past tense) in the Heavenly places
- What Heavenly places is Paul taking about? And how can we be said to be raised there already?
 - Paul's referring to the moment Christ entered the Heavenly tabernacle and the Holy Place on our behalf to make intercession for us with His blood
 - Remember the Old Testament high priest? He entered the tabernacle on behalf of Israel, because they weren't allowed to enter on account of their sin
 - He was the nation's representative, so He entered there in their place
- Likewise, Christ was our representative and High Priest when He ascended and entered the Heavenly tabernacle
 - As He entered, He applied His blood to the mercy seat
 - By His work of sacrifice, He was assuring us of a resurrected life
 - After Christ's blood cleansed the tabernacle, the Lord's wrath for our sin was appeased
 - We can say we have been raised with Christ, because nothing stands in the way of our resurrection
 - He conquered death on our behalf, so He assures us we will be raised
- Finally, we have been seated with Christ, in the sense that we have ceased working for our salvation, by our faith in Christ
 - We are seated, in the sense that we have no more work we can perform to assure ourselves salvation
 - In that sense, Paul says we have been raised and seated with Christ
 - His work in the Heavenly tabernacle has accomplished everything we needed
 - It's as good as done
- Christ only offered a single sacrifice in the tabernacle, and yet that one-time sacrifice is sufficient to save many
 - This is very different than the Old Testament sacrifices, which happened over and over again
 - The reason for the difference is Old Testament sacrifices were never acceptable payment for the sins of mankind

- Those sacrifices were only sufficient to forgive the nation of Israel for breaking the terms of the Old Covenant
- They maintained fellowship between the nation of Israel and God under the Old Covenant
- They couldn't reconcile a man to God, nor satisfy God's wrath for sin
- But the sacrifice of the New Covenant does reconcile us to God and satisfies the wrath of God
 - In past weeks, I explained that the New Covenant sacrifice was better in this way, because it was the death of an innocent man in our place
 - While the sacrifices of the Old Covenant merely offered animal blood – and an animal can't substitute for a man
 - And to help explain why, the writer draws our attention to why all men die

Heb. 9:27 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment,

Heb. 9:28 so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

- The opening phrase in v.27 connects this thought to the previous discussion through a comparison
 - The writer taught that Christ's one-time death was enough to cover our sins
 - Christ didn't have to die multiple times, once for each person or each sin
 - Because Christ's death was a payment that the Father accepted on behalf of those Who are in the New Covenant
 - And the explanation for why that works is found in the reason each of us must die in the first place
 - Inasmuch...or in accordance with
 - God has appointed men to die, and then comes judgment
 - He means that the death we experience is a consequence of our sin, which God requires as a judgment for sin
 - As Paul says in Romans, the wages of sin is death
 - So each man dies, because we all have sinned
 - This is the relationship God established, that the sin of a man requires the death of a man
 - It's because of this relationship that Christ could die just once and save many by that sacrifice
 - In v.28, the writer says Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many
 - The word "offer" means someone had to give something to somebody else

- Christ's death was an offering, a sacrifice Christ made of Himself to the Father
- If the Father is pleased with what Christ offered, then that will be sufficient to satisfy the wrath of God, who is the author of the plan
- The Father has said, that for every man who has sin, I expect a death
 - Those who do not accept the opportunity in Christ, will pay for their sin with their own death
 - On the other hand, if they accept Christ, God has determined that He will accept the offering of Christ as payment for their sins
 - As Jesus said in John's Gospel

John 10:14 "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, **John 10:15** even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.

John 10:16 "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.

John 10:17 "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again.

John 10:18 "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."

- Jesus, as our Good Shepherd, came to earth on a mission to rescue His sheep, those the Father has given to Christ, the elect
 - And His plan of rescue depends on the Shepherd laying His life down for His own, both those in the fold of Israel and for Gentiles of another fold
 - And the Father loves the Son because the Son is willing to lay His life down
 - He lays His life down, intending to live again, Jesus says
 - And the Son will also take up His life again
 - And then notice, no one took Christ's life...Jesus put his own life down
 - Jesus made Himself a sacrifice in order to please the Father, according to John 10:17, and this He did, according to the Father's command
 - That means the Father was prepared to accept the Son's death as a suitable payment for the sins of those who are Christ's sheep
 - It makes sense...the Father commanded Christ to lay down His life to save the sheep the Father was giving Him
 - And then Christ did that very thing
 - So naturally, we would expect the Father to be satisfied by that payment for all who are Christ's sheep
 - That's why one death is sufficient to pay for the sins of many

- Because the Father directed that He was willing to accept that payment
- So now that Christ has met the payment requirement that the Father stipulated, He can return, the writer says, without respect to judgment for His sheep
 - We can look forward to the return of Christ without fear of judgment because we know the Father has already been satisfied by Christ's sacrifice
 - The requirement that our sin be followed by judgment has already been met
 - So now Christ's return is a cause of eager anticipation by those who have been saved by His sacrifice
 - We don't fear a God Who is pleased in us
 - Of course, not all men have accepted the atoning work of Christ
 - Some are still in their sins because they have not placed their trust in Christ
 - All those who die in their own sins will not look forward to the day He puts all His enemies under His feet
 - Instead, they are among the enemies who Christ defeats at His appearing at the Great White Throne of judgment
- Now we reach Chapter 10, in which we find the writer offering proofs from the Old Testament that the sacrifices of the Old were never God's desire

Heb. 10:1 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.

Heb. 10:2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?

Heb. 10:3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year.

Heb. 10:4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Heb. 10:5 Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says,

**"SACRIFICE AND OFFERING YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED,
BUT A BODY YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR ME;**

Heb. 10:6 IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND sacrifices FOR SIN YOU HAVE TAKEN NO PLEASURE.

Heb. 10:7 "THEN I SAID, 'BEHOLD, I HAVE COME
(IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME)
TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD.'"

Heb. 10:8 After saying above, " SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS AND WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND sacrifices FOR SIN YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, NOR HAVE YOU TAKEN PLEASURE in them" (which are offered according to the Law),

Heb. 10:9 then He said, " BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL." He takes away the first in order to establish the second.

Heb. 10:10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of

Jesus Christ once for all.

- The Law God gave to Israel was designed to expose its weakness and its purpose as a shadow, or a trailer, of coming attractions
 - First, it required that sacrifices for sins be repeated over and over again
 - That repetitiveness emphasized that the sacrifices weren't solving the problem of sin
 - And that's why the worshippers in Israel never felt their conscience cleansed by those sacrifices
 - They lacked the power to bring men into a right relationship with God
 - Instead, they just reminded men over and over again that sin requires death and the Law isn't solving that problem
 - The problem, as we said earlier, is that the blood of animals isn't sufficient to solve the problem of our sin
 - Because the sin of a man requires the death of a man
 - Yet, we see that God designed the Old Covenant to use animal sacrifices
 - Then obviously, God never intended the Old Covenant sacrifices to address our sin
- And since God never intended to solve our sin through the Old Covenant sacrifices, He told Israel in the scriptures, that the solution was the Messiah
 - In Psa. 40, the Lord says He didn't desire sacrifices to solve the problem of sin
 - Instead, the Lord had prepared a human body for His Son to occupy
 - And in that body, the Son of God would do the will of the Father
 - And in pleasing the Father, by laying down His life, the Son would provide us with the true solution to our sin
 - He could become a sacrifice that can please the Father
 - Then in vs.8-9, the writer concludes with powerful logic
 - If the Lord says He has not taken pleasure in sacrifices offered for sin
 - And then later, the Lord says He is doing the will of God by dying as a sacrifice for men
 - Then logically, we must conclude that any later sacrifice that pleases God must take priority over any earlier sacrifices that God said didn't please Him
- So it is with us now, as believers
 - As v.10 tells us, we have been sanctified – made holy – by the offering of the body of Christ
 - Once and for all, we've been made holy
 - You cannot be more holy than you are in Christ's sacrifice
 - You cannot be more acceptable to God than you are when you accept the death

of Christ in your place

- You cannot add any work or perform any sacrifice to improve on your position
- But if you have not accepted the sacrifice of Christ, then there is nothing you can ever offer God...
 - Not work, no sacrifice, no prayer, no chant
 - Nothing will satisfy God's wrath for your sin, except the death of a man
 - That death can either be your own
 - Or it can be Christ's death in your place

- We're at the end of the heart of the letter
 - This middle section of the letter – Chapters 7-10 – form the writer's central argument
 - And let's be honest, it's a long, challenging section of pure Christian doctrine
 - It's the doctrine of the New Covenant: the sufficiency of Christ in all respects
 - His better Priesthood,
 - And the better tabernacle where He lives to make intercession
 - And a better sacrifice, by which, we are sanctified
 - These are weighty concepts, and there aren't many Christians who are willing to make the trip through so much doctrine and theology
 - Yet, it's the pinnacle of Christian maturity to be able to understand why we can rest in Christ
 - The Bible is very that we are to seek for spiritual maturity – not to be content with being babes in Christ
 - When the enemy is attacking, or false teachers are trying to fool us into forfeiting our hope in Christ, it's our knowledge of doctrine that will preserve our joy and confidence
 - The work to understand doctrine is certainly hard, but to the Christian who sets his mind on the work, the reward will be that much greater

An elderly lady who loved to travel the world visited a remote jungle area with a tour group, when they encountered some natives. She noticed one native gentleman wearing a unique looking necklace, and curious, she questioned him about it.

"What is it made of?" she asked. "Alligator's teeth," he replied.

"Oh, that's interesting," she said. "I suppose alligator teeth are as valuable to you as pearls are to us."

"Oh no," he objected. Anybody can open an oyster."

- Anyone can learn the Sunday school stories of our faith, but the real prize awaits those who can explain the foundational doctrines of our faith
 - Just as this writer is explaining why we need not seek for new sacrifices in our relationship with God
 - The one-time death of Christ on the cross is enough
 - So now, the writer sums up his teaching on the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice
 - And following his summary, we reach the fourth warning of the letter

Heb. 10:10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Heb. 10:11 Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins;

Heb. 10:12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD,

Heb. 10:13 waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET.

Heb. 10:14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

Heb. 10:15 And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying,

Heb. 10:16 “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,

Heb. 10:17 “AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE.”

Heb. 10:18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.

- The summary begins with v.10, which is a powerful refutation against any argument that works of any kind are required for our salvation
 - The writer says that by the perfect obedient will of Christ, we have been sanctified
 - Jesus obeyed the Father’s will perfectly...Jesus never sinned
 - So His perfection earned the right to be saved
 - And then, that perfection was applied to sanctify us
 - The word “sanctify” means to be set apart as holy, made acceptable to God
 - And then, notice that all-important phrase at the end: once for all
 - The sacrifice of a perfect man in our place was done once and suffices for all
 - You can’t improve on perfection
 - You can pay more than 100%
 - Here’s the logic you need to remember
 - If the sacrifice of a sinless man is enough to satisfy the Father’s wrath, then there is no value in additional sacrifices
 - But if we say Christ’s perfection was not enough to satisfy the Father, then we, being imperfect, have no hope to satisfy God whatsoever
 - Therefore, we can have confidence to rest entirely on the sacrifice of Christ for the sake of our sin

- One last time, the writer uses a comparison to the Old Testament Covenant to reinforce his point
 - He says consider the way priests were required to serve God in the earthly tabernacle
 - They stood in the tabernacle, working to make sacrifices all day long
 - They stood, because their work never ceased
 - There were no chairs in the tabernacle, so priests never sat
 - Their work was perpetual, because those sacrifices didn't put an end to sin
 - But by the same token, if the New Testament sacrifice was only made once, then it tells us that the Lord was pleased by that sacrifice for all time
 - When Christ died in our place, He was welcomed back into the Heavenly realm by the Father
 - And the Father permitted His Son to sit at His right hand
 - Sitting down signifies that His work of redemption is complete
 - Again, if the Father wasn't pleased by that one-time sacrifice, He wouldn't have allowed our High Priest to seat Himself
 - But the scriptures testify that Christ is finished in His work and is merely waiting for the Father to put all enemies under His feet
- Take special note of v.14, which is the climax of the writer's point
 - By one offering, the Father has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified
 - Let's read the verse backward
 - "Those who are being sanctified" refers to a group of people across history
 - Being sanctified is a present participle, which means it's a continuous action extending into the future
 - It means being set apart for holiness, being chosen by God to become sinless and perfect like He is
 - So the Father has a group of humanity He is bringing sanctification, holiness
 - It's stated as a present participle, because He's in the process of making this group perfect, even now
 - And that perfection will last for all time
 - It's a permanent, eternal sanctification
 - Finally, it was made possible by one offering, that is Christ
 - There is no other means by which you and I are being brought into perfection
 - Not by our own works, not by another's sacrifice or works
 - Not by our participation in religious ritual
 - But only by the sacrifice of Christ
- And once again, the plan of salvation was something announced in advance, by the

prophets, even as the Old Covenant was still operating in Israel

- The writer is quoting from Jeremiah 31 again in vs.16-17
 - The prophet said a New Covenant would come to Israel, and ultimately, to all the nations
 - And when the Lord gave that promise, He said this New Covenant would not be like the Old Covenant
- How would it be different?
 - It was different because by this Covenant, the Lord would not remember sins
 - He would forget the sins of His people, all those who enter into the Covenant
- And of course, if the New Covenant provides for a permanent forgiveness of sins, then we wouldn't expect to make any more sacrifices
 - As the writer says in v.18
 - The fact that the New Covenant does not specify sacrifices is further evidence that we have been forgiven of our sins
- With that, the writer has ended his teaching on the doctrines of the New Covenant, so now he's ready to bring an exhortation based on that teaching
 - His exhortation comes in the form of three "let us" invitations
 - The first is found in vs.19-22

Heb. 10:19 Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,

Heb. 10:20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,

Heb. 10:21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

Heb. 10:22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

- This first exhortation is to worship Christ in confidence, that this is what pleases God
 - Worshipping Jesus brings you into the Holy of Holies
 - By the blood that Christ carried into that place, you are welcome to approach the Father
 - By Jesus' flesh sacrificed in our place, you have a way to move beyond the veil
 - And with your High Priest seated at the Father's right hand, you have a representative winning favor for you
- So you may be standing in a little building in SW Austin or in another church or in your bedroom...
 - But when you direct your heart toward God in thanks and adoration, you are spiritually entering the Holiest place in all the Creation

- You are literally standing before the Father and He is hearing you
- And He is pleased with you, forgetting your sin and welcoming you into His presence
- Because the sacrifice of Christ has assured you that audience
- Knowing all this, let us draw near to Christ
 - The phrase in Greek was commonly used to call a congregation to worship
 - The writer says that because of all that we see promised in the scriptures, we have every reason to engage in sincere and confident worship of Christ
 - All the prophecy lines up, all the facts are there
 - So let's not have doubts, let's not toy with thoughts of other ways to Heaven
 - Let's not give room for false teaching to confuse our understanding
 - Moreover, in v.22, he says our own experience tells us that these things are the truth
 - We experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit so that our conscience has been made clean
 - Unlike the Old Covenant, which never granted a clean conscience to the worshipper
 - We know the feeling of having been made acceptable to God
 - Finally, we made our profession of faith through a water baptism (the end of v.22)
 - We took a stand with Christ
 - So then, the writer says let's hold fast our confession

Heb. 10:23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;

- Now we reach the concern that led this writer to explain so much doctrine over the last three and a half chapters
 - He is concerned that some in this church are wavering in their confession
 - These are Christians who entered into the covenant by faith, but now they're wavering, doubting whether the New Covenant was truly sufficient to save them
 - As they wavered, some were choosing to return to the Old Covenant and to practicing sacrifices in the temple
 - The cause of their wavering was a lack of understanding of the doctrines of the New Covenant
 - Remember how the writer began the section in Chapter 6?
 - He said this group was not progressing in their knowledge, so they were still babes in Christ
 - They had need again for an explanation of basic doctrines of the faith
 - And now, we see just how serious that lack of understanding had become for their walk

- They were in danger of retreating from a proper worship of Christ altogether
- Don't miss this connection: if we fail to pursue spiritual maturity, we are bound to fall back into one trap or another of the enemy
 - We may fall prey to false worship in one form or another
 - We may become convinced that works are required
 - We may stray so far that we are caught in a false religious system of some kind, as these believers were
 - Knowing doctrine is our defense
- This leads the writer to the final exhortation:

Heb. 10:24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,

Heb. 10:25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

- This fight for the truth and against the schemes of the enemy isn't one we wage alone
 - The writer says we must consider ways to stimulate one another to love and good deeds
 - The power of a strong Christian community is to encourage us when we're hurting and discouraged and at our weakest
 - A healthy community of believers will prompt us to grow and challenge us to set aside our sin
 - And it becomes a reminder that we have found the truth and there is nothing we're missing
- Notice in v.25, the writer says some were forsaking the gathering, or assembling, together
 - He means that some believers in the Diaspora had given up on the Christian gathering altogether
 - More than likely, these had returned to worshipping at the temple under the Old Covenant, as they used to do prior to coming to faith in Christ
- Why did they return to an old system?
 - Because they failed to mature in their understanding of the New Covenant and the sufficiency of Christ
 - Because they fell out of the routine of assembling with other believers
 - And so muscle memory kicked in, and they fell back on what they knew
- The Lord has provided to us the regular assembly of believers as a means of encouraging us to grow and remain strong in our walk of faith
 - So we are expected to take advantage of that opportunity for our own benefit
 - What is the benefit?

- As the writer says, it's because that day is drawing near
 - The day he's talking about is the day when the Lord claims us and brings us to our Heavenly home
- When that day comes, we will receive our eternal judgment and assignment of reward
 - We want every believer to have the best judgment he or she can have
 - And so we stimulate one another to remain confident, engaged and committed so that we might receive the best reward possible
- But, we know not all believers will heed this advice
 - Some believers will be enticed into false worship or simply into abandoning any observance of any kind
 - Either because they become lazy of hearing
 - Or because they become entrapped by a false religion of human works and ritual
 - Or because they're enticed by materialism, careerism, personal wealth or destructive addictions
 - All these dangers risk diminishing our witness and eternal reward
 - Because of that reality, next week, we will study the fourth warning, beginning in v.26
 - If we continue not to draw near, not to remain confident
 - Not to stimulate one another to love and good deeds
 - What will be the consequence?
 - The writer spells that out
 - This should leave us a bit sober, and result in more obedience to the Lord

- The word “patience” is an interesting word
 - It sounds good to our ears, because it describes an act of kindness
 - Patience is the act of letting an offense pass by unnoticed
 - Patience means giving grace by showing consideration to someone who deserves something less
 - But patience also implies a limit, doesn’t it?
 - To call someone “patient”, is to say they could be responding differently than they are
 - It suggests that sooner or later, their patience may run out
 - And so the word is so interesting, because though it sounds good now, it carries the potential for unpleasant things in the future
- The Bible says the Lord is patient and long-suffering in withholding His judgment against sin
 - He is patient not only toward the unbeliever, but also for the rebellious saint
 - But sooner or later, in both cases, His patience runs out
 - For the unbeliever, the Lord’s patience expires at the death of their body
 - As we learned earlier in this study, everyone is appointed to die once, and then comes judgment
 - But, this principle is also true for the believer
 - The Lord is patient in withholding His judgment against us for our disobedience to His Word
 - Clearly, the consequences of our rebellion are very different than those for an unbeliever who lives in rebellion to the Gospel itself
 - Nevertheless, there are consequences
 - And when the Lord’s patience runs thin, we will experience the discipline of the Lord
 - Even more sobering, we may face the prospect of diminished eternal reward at our judgment, especially if our life was one of significant rebellion
 - The Apostle John warns us of this potential, when he says:

2 John 8 Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.

- We may put at risk what we have gained in the past through future rebellion
- So while we rejoice in the grace we’ve received from our patient Heavenly Father, let’s not overlook that His patience has a limit
- This is where we find the writer’s thoughts this morning, in our study of Hebrews
 - He has reached his fourth warning of his letter, where he addresses the

consequences of his readers returning to a life of false worship under the Old Covenant

- In Chapter 10:19-25, which we covered last week, the writer issued three “Let us” exhortations
- These commands directed the believer to stand firm in their new-found faith in the blood of Christ
- To continue in their confession of hope in the resurrection of Christ
- And to continue gathering with the New Testament Church, rather than forsaking this gathering to participate in other, false observances under the Law
- But what might happen to the believer who fails to heed this teaching?
 - What are the consequences for spurning the Lord Who died to save us?
 - How will He respond to the believer once His patience runs out?
 - The writer now issues the fourth warning to address these questions

Heb. 10:26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

Heb. 10:27 but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES.

Heb. 10:28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Heb. 10:29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

Heb. 10:30 For we know Him who said, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY.” And again, “THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.”

Heb. 10:31 It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

- The writer begins by naming a certain group of Christians, specifically those who go on sinning willfully
 - What does it mean to go on sinning willfully?
 - First, notice it’s expressed as a continuing action, one that has begun and doesn’t end
 - The writer is referring to a Christian who runs after something sinful and doesn’t come back
 - Secondly, in this context, the sin he’s worried about must be that of abandoning the New Covenant and returning to life under the Old Covenant worship practices
 - These are Jewish Christians who, because of their immaturity in the knowledge of Christ and Christian doctrine, have wavered in their confidence
 - And at some point, they have returned to seeking God in the comfort and familiarity of the Jewish sacrificial system

- In a word, they have become apostate
- This sin was willful, because they have made a deliberate choice against what they had been taught
 - The writer says they received the knowledge of the truth
 - They knew the apostles' teaching on the New Covenant
 - They knew that Christ was the only sacrifice they needed
 - Yet, as the writer said back in Chapter 5, they weren't able to discern good from evil, because of their spiritual immaturity
 - So they have become apostate, though they remain a child of God by grace
- But, this warning applies equally to other situations today, where Christians are sinning willfully
 - Anytime a believer choose to live in ways that are contrary to their profession of faith, they are also at risk
 - For example, if a Christian abandons his Christian walk for worldly pursuits, they are sinning willfully
 - If he or she stops assembling with other Christians, stops studying the Bible, stops praying, stops living for Christ...
 - Then, such a person is also testing the patience of the Lord
 - Or if a Christian adopts a lifestyle or a pattern of behavior that is contrary to doctrine and teaching and good witness
 - Like a Christian, who chooses to live a homosexual lifestyle or engages in fornication as a regular routine, is sinning willfully
 - Or a Christian who is routinely dishonest, routinely violent, routinely ungodly
 - Or a Christian who lives in slavery to addictions or lusts
 - These are all willful ways to sin, and all risk exhausting the patience of the Lord
- So what do you think becomes of the slave who lives in disobedience to his Master?
 - For such a person, the writer says there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins
 - He's referring to the sacrifices that were performed under the Old Covenant, so he can draw upon a principle found in the Law
 - In the Law, there were certain offenses like murder, adultery, blasphemy and others, that were not covered by a sacrifice
 - The Law of Moses made no provision for the person who intentionally committed one of those sinful acts
 - You couldn't show up at the temple with a certain number of animals to absolve yourself from that sin – the only remedy under the Law for those offenses was death
 - The writer calls this “setting aside the Law of Moses” in v.28
 - He means ignoring what God had instructed in the truth of His Word

- So if a Jew crossed one of those lines, they knew their penalty would be very severe
 - In v.27, the writer said anyone who traded obedience under the Old Covenant for a life of willful disobedience faced a terrifying outcome
 - He mentions a fire that consumes God's adversaries
 - That's a reference to Numbers 16, where a group of men was consumed by fire from Heaven for crossing one of those lines
 - Therefore, the writer asks in v.29, what should we expect if we forsake the New and greater Covenant?
- There are some choices and decisions that may lead us into shipwrecked faith
 - Walking away from our faith community, or bankrupting our personal testimony, is a crisis in our relationship with the Lord
 - The writer says it's like trampling Christ under our feet
 - In the east, the sole of the foot is an offensive and degrading symbol
 - To trample something or someone means to treat them with utter contempt
 - Secondly, when we follow other gods, we regard as unclean the blood of the Covenant
 - To worship in any other context, besides the New Covenant Church, means we believe the blood of Christ is common, without power or significance
 - Instead, we seek the power of God elsewhere
 - Christians who join in pagan rituals, new age practices or other cults, are taking immense risk that a jealous God will continue to withhold judgment in patience
 - Finally, we are insulting the Spirit of grace
 - The Spirit of God continues to live within us, even when we run after false worship or engage in a lifestyle of persistent sin
 - So when we sin in these ways, we drag the Spirit along with us
 - We insult Him by taking the enlightenment and empowerment He has granted us and throwing it away
- When we act in these ways, there is no get-out-jail-free card, no act we can perform (like a sacrifice) that will reset the past
 - Of course, our sins are forgiven by the blood of Christ
 - We will never experience the penalty that sin demands, which is the second death
 - But, there is still a judgment for the believer
 - If the Jews under the Old Covenant – a lesser covenant – faced a severe penalty for failing to obey the truth, what consequence do you think awaits a believer who disobeys the New Covenant?
 - We remember that in v.25, the writer made mention of a “day” drawing near, which we understood to be a reference to the judgment for believers
 - It's that day he's alluding to, as he calls to mind the expectation of judgment for

willful sinning

- This is the Judgment Seat of Christ, and it's a judgment where the Lord assesses our life of service
- As Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 3, the outcome is a test, like passing precious metal through a refiner's fire
 - Those with a good testimony will receive a reward, while those who test God's patience will see a consuming fire – consuming their reward

1 Pet. 4:15 Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler;

1 Pet. 4:16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.

1 Pet. 4:17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

- Just in case there is any doubt, the writer is talking about true believers, not unbelievers who pretended to be Christian
 - First, we see the context of these chapters has clearly been focused on believers
 - Throughout Chapter 10, the writer has been speaking in terms of “we”, which means he’s placing himself among this group
 - And he says they have a “confession” of faith they need to hold onto
 - And they have forsaken assembling together, indicating they are a part of a congregation
 - And the three offenses they committed against God are offenses that can only be committed by believers
 - Trampling Christ is only possible if we have a relationship with Him first
 - When an American soldier becomes a traitor during war, we might say he trampled underfoot the American flag
 - He brought shame to America, because he had a special relationship to the nation
 - Likewise, only a Christian can bring shame to Christ, because of the relationship we have with Him
 - Secondly, regarding the blood of the Covenant as unclean can only be an offense for a Christian
 - To regard as unclean means to act as if the blood is common
 - In other words, the person has been cleaned by that blood, though now they act as if it didn't clean them
 - As the writer says, this is the blood by which he was sanctified (past tense)

- Finally, only a believer can insult the Spirit of grace
 - God places His Spirit inside every believer as a guarantee of their future resurrection and inheritance
 - Only a believer has that kind of relationship with God
 - Unbelievers may ignore the Gospel, certainly, but they can't insult a Spirit they don't know
- So if a believer disobeys the truth they have come to know in the New Covenant, then the writer says remember, your Lord is one to repay in kind
 - In vs.30-31, the writer quotes from the OT to remind his readers that the Lord has a history of repaying and judging even those He saves
 - Notice at the end of v.30, the Lord says He will judge His people
 - Once again, we're talking about a judgment for the believer
 - And this judgment can be severe
 - We don't know how that judgment will go for those who forsake the Lord, but this much we can say
 - It's a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the Living God
 - Does it challenge you to consider that our judgment moment can include terror?
 - Well, what do we find in the Bible?
 - Moses, Isaiah, Elijah, the Apostle Paul, the Apostle John and others all demonstrate unreserved fear and trembling when the Lord appeared before them
 - And those weren't even moments of judgment for those men
 - So imagine what the judgment moment will be like for the one who has entered into the New Covenant, has known the truth of what's expected...
 - And then intentionally lives in apostasy or severe disobedience...
 - One day, that believer must stand before the holy, awesome, Creator God to answer for how he served Him
 - It will be terrifying, because we will be without excuse
 - We will know we didn't heed the Word of God
 - And only then, will we understand what we put at risk because of our willful sinning
 - Our eternal life will be secure, but this isn't a consolation according to Scripture
 - Nor can it become license for us to live in disobedience
- This is a healthy tension that we see throughout the New Testament
 - We have been saved by grace from the penalty of our sins
 - The sacrifice of Christ once for all is sufficient to save us and reconcile us to God
 - And we will live in glory with Christ forever on account of our faith in His life and

death

- But with our faith and salvation, comes an expectation that we serve the Master Who bought us
 - We must not turn back
 - We cannot insult the Spirit of grace, nor trample underfoot the Christ Who saved us
- And if we do shrink back, becomes lazy or seek after false worship, then we should fear the Lord
 - We should fear the consequences
 - Because the Lord Himself said He will repay and He will judge His people
 - Keeping both these perspectives in mind will assure us a joyful life of service to an exacting Master Who stands ready to reward those who please Him
- Like all the warnings in this letter, the writer ends with an encouragement that it's not too late

Heb. 10:32 But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings,

Heb. 10:33 partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.

Heb. 10:34 For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

Heb. 10:35 Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

Heb. 10:36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

Heb. 10:37 FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY.

Heb. 10:38 BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM.

Heb. 10:39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

- The writer hopes his stern words have shocked the conscience of his readers, and if so, then he says it's time to wake up and get back on the straight and narrow path
 - Remember the former days, the early days when everything in our faith was new and we were excited to follow and obey Christ
 - Before the enemy created confusion
 - Before our flesh tempted us through our fear, desires and distractions
 - They lived in their faith and by the Spirit, they did deeds in keeping with their faith

- They suffered persecutions for their faith
- They gave thanks to the Lord, even as they lost their possessions
- The Jewish Christians in the early Church were commonly persecuted by fellow Jews, sometimes cruelly
 - Often they were imprisoned
 - Occasionally, they lost their lives as martyrs
- Why? Because they knew these persecutions were tests from the Lord, and they were passing with flying colors
- And as they endured these trials, they knew they were earning even greater treasure in Heaven
- When we're living in the Spirit, instead of our flesh, we're powerful lights in the darkness
 - We may endure persecutions as all Christians inevitably do, but we will endure them gladly and with our testimony intact?
 - We live with eyes for eternity, rather than focusing on the world
- But these Christians stalled in their spiritual growth, so their gaze began to fall
 - Eventually, they weren't looking Heavenward
 - They began to long for the stability and peace of going with the crowd
 - Of living as a Jew, accepted in their culture, instead of as a Christian, despised and rejected like Christ Himself
- Their apostasy wasn't a matter of religious convictions; it was a matter of convenience, as the writer says
 - They were seeking to avoid persecutions
 - They were more interested in saving their skin and their wealth than honoring the Lord Who died for them
 - As the writer says in v.35, they threw away their confidence
 - It wasn't lost; they gave it up to gain something earthly
- Notice in vs.35-36, the writer reminds his readers that they ought not throw away their confidence in the promises of Christ, because there is a great reward at stake
 - Our endurance, he says, will be rewarded
 - Whatever the will of God may be for each of us, if we accept it and live up to it, then we may expect to receive what has been promised to us
 - We may not know specifically what the Lord has in store for us, but remember Paul's words

1 Cor. 2:9 but just as it is written,

**“THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD,
AND which HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN,**

ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.”

- So, we can be sure that whatever reward awaits those who serve God faithfully, it will be well worth whatever sacrifice the Lord asks of us here
 - Moreover, the writer reminds us that the wait will not be long, when considered from an eternal perspective
 - The Lord is coming in a very little while, the writer reminds us in v.37
 - And the righteous will live by faith without shrinking back
 - For those who dare to shrink back will not please God
- Finally, the writer declares, optimistically, that his readers will not be among those who shrink back and suffer the penalty
 - Instead, they will live like those of faith
 - He’s saying don’t be a believer who lives like an unbeliever
 - For doing so, results in destruction of your witness and reward
 - Instead, be a believer who lives like a believer
 - For in doing so, you are living-out a witness that is in keeping with your faith, which has the power to preserve your soul
 - In other words, your physical life should reflect your spiritual life
 - If you are saved by faith to serve God into eternity, then your life now should reflect that reality
 - Obey and serve Christ now, as you will in the Kingdom
 - And if you do, you will be rewarded in ways beyond your imagination
 - If you don’t, you will lose something far greater than you stand to gain on earth

- As a Bible teacher, there are a few special chapters in the Bible that I find myself returning to time and time again
 - Chapters in the Law
 - Like Genesis 3
 - Leviticus 26
 - Passages in the prophets like
 - Daniel 9 (actually , all of Daniel)
 - Psalm 119
 - Isaiah 11, most of Isaiah
 - Jeremiah 31
 - And in the New Testament,
 - There are numerous key chapters
 - But none are more helpful and inspiring than Hebrews 11
 - We can teach every principle doctrine of the Christian faith from the examples the writer gives us in this chapter
 - In fact, this chapter is like a living museum of those chapter highlights I mentioned
- The writer's purpose for this chapter is to serve as an inspiring contrast to his earlier warning against apostasy
 - If we're caught in apostasy triggered by fears of persecution, then how does God to inspire us to move forward in obedience?
 - He does this in His Word, of course
 - And in particular, through the testimonies of those who've gone before us in faith
 - Stories of ordinary men and women who found themselves in similar positions, or even worse
 - And yet, when faced with fears and doubts, they moved forward in faith
 - And because they moved forward, they pleased God and He gave them the strength to face those trials well
 - Hebrews 11 is that chapter, often called the "Hall of Faith"
 - It explains the form and purpose of faith
 - And it drives its message home with example after example of saints from the OT
 - Men and women who lived-out their faith, despite various earthly barriers or temptations to forsake their trust in the Lord
 - It's no surprise that the key word in this chapter is "faith"
 - It's used 24 times in the chapter

- And twice more in the forms of “faithful” and “believe”
- It’s about becoming imitators of the saints before us, as they exhibited patience so as to inherit the promises
- Because these examples are rooted in OT stories, we will revisit the story of each of these heroes and heroines to fully understand what made their faith remarkable
 - But first, the writer begins with two verses that define the nature, purpose and value of saving faith

Heb. 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Heb. 11:2 For by it the men of old gained approval.

- Notice the opening word, “now”
 - The word “now” connects this chapter to the earlier conversation in the prior 4 chapters
 - If we are to avoid the apostasy and the consequences the author described in Chapter 10, then we must understand expectations of faith
 - If we are to inherit our full reward, then we must live with a full appreciation for what faith is and what it requires
 - And from there, the writer gives us the Biblical definition of faith, including saving faith
 - First, faith is the assurance of things hoped for
 - The Greek word for assurance is *hupostasis*
 - It’s an interesting word that can have two shades of meaning in English
 - It has an objective meaning, as in the reality of something
 - And it has a subjective meaning, as in having a certain viewpoint about an issue
 - And I think both meanings are working together in the writer’s purposes
 - Faith is having a viewpoint that is rooted in the reality of what we know to be true
 - Biblical faith isn’t wishful thinking
 - It’s a perspective that understands the certainty of matters which can’t be proven
 - For example, do you know what would happen if you jumped off the Empire State building?
 - You would answer, “Yes, I know I would fall and hit the ground and die.”
 - How do you know that? You’ve never done it.
 - Yet, you know that gravity is a law of the Universe

- And you know that the distance of that fall would certainly end your life
 - So you have a perspective of certainty, one that is rooted in the reality of what you know to be true
 - And yet, it's still properly called faith
- Why do we still call it faith? Because it concerns future events, which is the writer's second half of the definition
 - Faith is the assurance of things hoped for
- "Things hoped for" refers to future events, things that haven't yet come to pass, but have been promised
- That hope was created because someone or something gave us reason to expect these things to come to pass one day
- That promise inspired our hope, and that hope is kept alive by our faith
- So faith is a perspective on the future – one rooted in reality and truth, not in speculation or fantasy – that trusts that things promised will come to pass
 - Once those things come to pass, then faith is no longer required
 - Instead, the reality is self-evident
 - As Paul says in Romans,

Rom. 8:24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?

- Having defined the *nature* of faith, the writer explains the *purpose* of faith
 - He says it's the conviction of things not seen
 - The Greek word for "conviction" is also an interesting word
 - It's the word *elegchos*, which means "proof"
 - And once again, "unseen" means something of the future
 - So faith is the proof of something that isn't yet reality
 - Our faith makes visible and tangible something that is unseen for now
 - Were it not for our faith, the reality of this future event would be completely absent in our experience
 - For example, your life insurance policy is a testimony to your eventual death
 - Your death is a future, unseen event
 - But your life insurance policy is proof that you don't expect to live forever, at least not in this body
 - And so, if your faith in the promises of Christ are proof of things that have yet to pass
 - Then, our faith and obedience to the Word of God serves a purpose, in showing the world a truth that they could not see otherwise

- It's proof that the Word of God is real and true and filled with the power to transform lives
- Finally, the writer explains the value of saving faith
 - He says that by faith, the men of old gained approval
 - The men of old are the Old Testament saints mentioned in this Hall of Faith
 - Let's note that when the writer uses the term "men", he's using it in the neutral sense to mean men and women
 - We know this, because the examples he cites include both men and women
 - By their faith, these saints gained approval
 - Whose approval? The world's approval?
 - Hardly. As the examples demonstrate, the world hates those of faith
 - No, the approval was from God
 - And we're going to see, the approval the writer is speaking about isn't about going to Heaven
 - Obviously, our faith is the means of salvation
 - But the writer is speaking to an audience that is already Christian, as we saw in last week's lesson
 - He's interested in our walk of faith, whether we mature and grow in the face of trials, or whether we shrink back to destruction
 - So winning the approval of the Lord by faith means living in a faithful manner, seeking the Lord's approval, so as to receive a full reward
- So we understand the nature, purpose and value of saving faith in the life of a Christian, but what does faith look like in action? Can we see some examples?
 - I'm glad you asked...lets' look at the writer's examples of saving faith
 - He proceeds in order of the scriptures, beginning in the Creation account
 - And then, the writer moves through a series of carefully selected examples
 - Each will illustrate how saving faith always involves those three critical elements
 - A confidence in God's Word concerning unseen events
 - A life that gave proof of that confidence
 - With the result for that saint of a great reward in the Kingdom, not on earth
- The first set of examples takes us through Chapters 1-5 of Genesis

Heb. 11:3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

Heb. 11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

- You may never have thought of your view of the Creation account as a matter of faith, but of course it is
 - The Creation of the Universe happened before there were any human witnesses to observe the event
 - Not even the author of Genesis, Moses, saw those events
 - Therefore, any perspective on the origins of the Universe – regardless of the viewpoint you hold – must be a matter of faith
 - And faith in the Word of God leads us to a confidence that the origins of the Universe are exactly as God describes them in Genesis 1 & 2
- So what do we learn from the example of the Creation story?
 - We learn faith is demonstrated first and foremost by a trust in God's Word concerning the beginning of all things
 - We believe that by His Word, God was responsible for bringing the entire physical Universe into existence
 - And notice, the writer says the world was made out of what cannot be seen
 - In other words, not by Evolution
 - If you believe everything that exists today came from something that already existed, then you are living by sight and not by faith
 - When you hold to a Creation view, as taught in Genesis, you give the world proof of the reality of the Word of God
- Next, the writer raises the sons of Adam, Cain and Abel
 - The story of Cain and Abel is well-known, at least in the broad strokes
 - But the details of what happened, and why, are often poorly understood
 - You can gain a full appreciation of what transpired in the relationship between these brothers and its meaning by studying Chapter 4 of Genesis
 - Even so, the writer gives us the key to the proper interpretation here
 - The story centers around the actions of the brothers in worshipping God
 - Abel gave a sacrifice accepted by God
 - While Cain gave an offering that was insufficient to meet God's expectations
 - And the result was that Abel had a better testimony, that he was righteous, while Cain wasn't
 - We can interpret "righteous" as "saved" – Abel was saved, while Cain was not
 - Why did Abel's sacrifice give him a better testimony?
 - First, a testimony is showing evidence of what you hold to be true
 - Abel's sacrifice was a testimony of his faith in God's promise to save Abel from his sin by means of a sacrifice
 - Abel made a blood sacrifice to reflect that confidence
 - His behavior gave proof that he had placed his trust in God's promise to provide

- a future blood atonement in the Messiah
- The writer says Abel's testimony continues on, even today
 - The recounting of Abel's actions witnesses to us through the scriptures, long after he is dead
 - This is the power of faith lived-out in our lives
 - It speaks louder and longer than our words could ever do
- Secondly, Abel was better than Cain, because Cain's offering wasn't a blood sacrifice
 - Cain only brought a grain offering, which was an act of thanks for provision
 - He was content to thank God for blessing him with material comfort
 - But he made no acknowledgement to God that he was a sinner, much less that Cain needed to be saved through an atonement
 - Therefore, Cain's testimony was that he gave no consideration to God's Word concerning sin and the need for a Savior
 - In Genesis 4, the Lord rebukes Cain, telling him that he has the same opportunity to please the Lord if only he would trust in the sacrifice waiting at the doorpost (a veiled reference to the Passover sacrifice)
 - In other words, if Cain would trust in the blood of the Passover applied to the doorpost, then he too would receive God's approval
 - But because he didn't have faith to accept this truth in God's Word, he went away unapproved
 - And this led to jealousy, hatred and murder
 - So what do we learn from their examples?
 - First, that faith in God's promises requires that we honor the One Who gave us opportunity to become part of those promises
 - Faith requires a confession of what we believe, specifically that we accept that the solution to our sin comes from above and not from our own righteousness
 - Furthermore, faith lives on beyond us, as our life testimony has the power to motivate others to obedience
 - And finally, persecution at the hands of unbelievers is the common experience of all believers
 - If the first prophet and our Lord Himself were killed for their testimony, then who are we to expect better?
 - We can't let the discomfort of persecution become an excuse to shrink back from faith
- Next, the writer addresses the mysterious story of Enoch from Genesis 5

Heb. 11:5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.

Heb. 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

- In Genesis 5, we hear a brief mention of a man who pleased God in his life, and as a result, God rewarded him by taking him up
 - The original Hebrew literally says he was here and then he was not here
 - This is a stark departure from Moses' normal genealogy, leading us to conclude that something other than death ended Enoch's time on earth
 - The closest parallel we have is the resurrection of the Church, when those who are alive won't experience death, according to Paul
 - Instead, the believer will pass directly from one body into the next
- It seems the writer included Enoch as a contrast to Abel's end
 - While Abel died a death at the hands of the enemy, Enoch escaped death altogether
 - Some believers will be martyred, while others will be raptured
 - Abel was the first murder victim in Scripture, while Enoch was the first man to escape death
 - Both men had good testimonies; both pleased God
- So what do we learn from Enoch's example of faith?
 - You can please God by faith and be murdered or raptured
 - The way our life ends is not a measure of God's satisfaction with us
 - What counts is what comes in the next life, as we receive our rewards
 - God was pleased in Abel's testimony as a prophet and martyr
 - And He was pleased in Enoch's life of faithfulness
- In fact, the way to please God rests on faith alone, but that faith has two parts
 - First, saving faith understands that God "is"
 - But to believe God "is" doesn't mean to simply believe in His existence
 - For James tells us that simply believing that God exists is without value

James 2:19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

- Even the sinful, rebellious demons know that God exists
- This fact is so obvious, that even those sworn in allegiance with Satan acknowledge this truth
- In fact, they are so convinced of the reality of an all-powerful Judge of all Creation, that James says it causes them to shudder in fear of their own coming judgment
- Nevertheless, this recognition can't save them from their sad fate

- So believing that God “is” means much more; it means accepting what He declares about Himself
 - It means believing He is the One and only Living God
 - It means accepting His representative, the Son of God
 - As Jesus says:

John 8:42 Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me.

- Furthermore, faith requires that we believe God is a rewarder of those who seek Him
 - The writer isn’t defining saving faith, but faith lived-out
 - Saving faith is belief in Christ as Savior
 - But faith lived-out understands the reality of a reward waiting for those who let their faith guide their life
 - And in that way, their faith leads them to please the Father
 - And without that life of faith, it’s impossible to please God
- You are saved by a faith that is not of yourself, it is a gift of God
 - But you are rewarded for a life lived in accordance with that faith
 - And it’s that life of faith that the writer is trying to encourage among his readers
 - We can celebrate the faith that saves, but that faith was given to us while we were yet sinners and enemies of God
 - The scriptures emphasize a life lived in faith, which is the upward call of Christ
 - Do you want to please Christ? Are you structuring your life to meet that goal? Then you’re living by faith
- On the other hand, have you assumed that every Christian is free to live without concern for judgment because of God’s grace?
 - Then you haven’t understood either Bible’s teaching on faith or on judgment of the believer
 - Your faith must be rooted in the promises of God concerning Christ
 - And you must live in expectation that rewards are available for those who serve Him
 - And if you live in that awareness, you are far more likely to please Him
 - You will fight temptations to sin, knowing that rewards are on the line
 - You will resist the enemy, knowing he comes to steal your reward
 - You will sacrifice earthly gain for the prospect of greater rewards in the life to come

- And you will gladly accept persecutions and trials, knowing that these tests give opportunity to receive an even greater reward
- You will live with eyes for eternity

- Today, we return to the Hall of Faith
 - In the first six verses of this chapter, the writer gave us an introduction to the nature and purpose and value of faith in the life of a believer
 - Faith is a perspective on the future – one rooted in reality and truth, not in speculation or fantasy – that trusts that things promised will come to pass
 - By our faith, we give a testimony to the world concerning those future events
 - And by the examples of saints who have gone before us in life, we can learn what faith lived-out looks like
 - We can see their confidence in God's promises reflected in their choices and decisions
 - We can appreciate their testimony
 - And we understand that often, their faith leads to persecution and even martyrdom
 - We learn to accept that possibility, because the hope and confidence of the saints lies in eternal rewards, not earthly ones
- The main feature of this great chapter of Scripture is its list of saints who exemplify faith in action
 - The writer is encouraging wavering believers to stay the course, to live in keeping with faith

When Hudson Taylor went to China, he made the voyage on a sailing vessel. As it neared the channel between the southern Malay Peninsula and the island of Sumatra, the missionary heard an urgent knock on his stateroom door.

He opened it, and there stood the captain of the ship. "Mr. Taylor," he said, "we have no wind. We are drifting toward an island where the people are heathen, and I fear they are cannibals."

"What can I do?" asked Taylor.

"I understand that you believe in God. I want you to pray for wind."

"All right, Captain, I will, but you must set the sail."

"Why that's ridiculous! There's not even the slightest breeze. Besides, the sailors will think I'm crazy." But finally, because of Taylor's insistence, he agreed.

Forty-five minutes later, he returned and found the missionary still on his

knees. "You can stop praying now," said the captain. "We've got more wind than we know what to do with!"

- Taylor was a man who lived-out his confidence in things unseen
 - Let's continue in our study of these inspiring saints, so that we would have good reason not to shrink back to destruction
 - Not to let the threat of persecution, or even death, convince us to abandon our walk with Christ
 - Remembering that faith without works is useless, being by itself
- Our next example, following chronologically, is Noah

Heb. 11:7 By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

- We all remember the story of Noah, of course
 - He was a man who received God's grace and a call to build a giant boat in preparation for a coming flood
 - As God revealed His plan to Noah, he made a promise to Noah concerning future events
 - The promise was that God would destroy the world with water, but if Noah built a boat, that would be sufficient to save him and his household from this coming judgment
- In v.7, the writer says Noah was warned about things unseen
 - What was unseen in Noah's day?
 - The Bible testifies in Genesis 2:5, that the earth did not know rain in those days
 - God's plan to replenish the earth's water supply was to use a mist that settled on the earth every morning, so rain wasn't required
 - But since it had never rained, the world had never experienced a flood either
 - In fact, I imagine that the concept of a flood was literally unimaginable to a man like Noah
- Still, God spoke to Noah promising to bring an event that Noah couldn't fully appreciate or even understand, in response to which, Noah must begin a construction project of unimaginable proportions
 - Noah's response was reverence, the writer says
 - The word "reverence" means a respectful, sober or cautious response
 - In other words, Noah took God's promises seriously
 - He believed that what God said would happen would indeed happen

- How do we know Noah took God's Word seriously?
 - Because he spent 100 years building an enormous boat
 - Noah is arguably the Bible's greatest example of sustained faith in action
 - There is no record that God spoke to Noah again during those 100 years of construction, until the very end when Noah was preparing to bring the animals into the ark
 - Do you wonder if Noah faced moments of doubt or discouragement along the way?
 - If he wondered if he had heard correctly from God or if all the sacrifice was truly worth it?
- Nevertheless, Noah persevered, and no doubt he endured persecution along the way
 - He was building something that no one could have possibly found useful in his day
 - He was building the equivalent of a wooden Titanic in a landlocked location
 - But faith will cause us to live in ways that the world considers crazy
 - It's our testimony to our faith in the promises of God
- And in time, our faith will be rewarded
 - Notice the writer returns again to the concept of an inheritance, an eternal reward
 - He says by Noah's life of works according to faith, he becomes an heir
 - He will receive a great inheritance in the Kingdom
 - I wonder if Noah's inheritance will be on a coast or on a mountain?
- Next, the writer moves forward into the patriarchal period with examples of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
 - But the writer focuses primarily on Abraham and his wife, Sarah

Heb. 11:8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Heb. 11:9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;

Heb. 11:10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

- Abraham's story is probably as well-known as Noah's, at least among Bible students
 - Abraham was originally a pagan, named Abram, living in Mesopotamia
 - He was called by God into a life of faith, living in Canaan

- The promise that God gave Abram was, that if he would leave behind the life he knew in Ur, including his family and livelihood, God would bless him with a great inheritance
 - That inheritance would be the Promised Land of Canaan and beyond
- But as Abram first heard this promise, God didn't reveal the location of that inheritance
 - As the writer reminds us in v.9, God required that Abram follow in faith without even an understanding of where God would take him
 - Abram had to make a choice to follow God's Word, based on a confidence and hope of what God would do in the future
- Imagine you are an unbeliever, with no prior experience in trusting and following the Living God (we were all there once in our life)
 - And then you hear God telling you to leave behind your home (don't sell it, just abandon it)
 - And leave behind your family roots
 - And get in the car and go to the airport
 - And fly to another part of the earth, where you will live forever
 - He promises that if you do these things, you will receive a great inheritance from God
 - This is the test God placed in front of Abram
 - And Abram responded in faith
- But this was merely the beginning of the test
 - When Abram arrived in the Promised Land, the Lord revealed to Abram that the land God promised wouldn't be his in this lifetime
 - Instead, Abram would have an heir, and so his descendants would receive this land
 - Later, Abram himself would receive the promised land in full, but only in the Kingdom, after his resurrection
 - When Abram believed these promises, the Lord renamed Abram to Abraham, in recognition of Abraham's willingness to accept this promise
 - So not only did Abraham sacrifice his comfort and security for faith in God's promises, but he did so without the prospect of reward in this lifetime
 - The writer says in v.9, that Abraham chose to live as an alien and wanderer in the very land God had promised to him
 - Abraham did not grow up a nomad in Ur
 - He lived in a prosperous, major city
 - He had no prior experience living in tents
 - Yet, he adopted this unfamiliar lifestyle for all his days living in Canaan
 - He chose to live as an alien, as if he was in a foreign land, though the Lord had

promised this land to Abraham

- Why did he live this way? Because he believed God when he was told that he would not see his inheritance in this lifetime
 - He looked around Canaan and told himself, this will be mine one day, but not yet
- Notice in v.10, the writer says Abraham was looking for a different city
 - The Greek word for “looking” is *ekdechomai*, which means to expect to receive in the future
 - Abraham was expecting to receive a city which has foundations built by God
 - Abraham could see many cities around him in Canaan
 - Cities like Sodom, Gomorrah, Zoar, Shechem, *etc.*
 - These were cities built by ungodly pagans
 - These were not what God had promised to give Abraham
 - So Abraham, continued living as a nomad, because to do otherwise would have been to forsake the promises of God
 - He would have been trading what God offered for what the world offered
 - And even though they looked very similar, they were not the same thing
 - Abraham knew that the city he would receive wasn’t found on earth
 - It will arrive in the future, so for now, it’s an unseen hope
- Abraham’s example of faith is so powerful because it was so absolute, so encompassing and so sacrificial
- If we can say that Noah’s example of faith was one of sustained obedience, then we can also say Abraham’s example of faith was a dramatic, life-changing decision
 - Abraham became an entirely new person, with a new name, new home, new lifestyle and new outlook
 - He came to that place based on the Word of God, on the promises of God
 - And he lived forever more in keeping with his faith
- But all the while, the world was pressing in on Abraham from all sides, seeking to pull him back from the walk of faith
 - Sometimes Abraham stumbled
 - But he never retreated from trusting in God’s promises
 - Why? Because he knew a greater reward awaited him in the Kingdom than anything he might obtain for himself on earth
 - And so, his life was a testimony to the promises of God
- And his example of faith is matched by his wife, Sarah

Heb. 11:11 By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond

the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.

Heb. 11:12 Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants **AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE.**

- Sarah is cited by the writer as a fellow heir with Abraham, because she too demonstrated faith in God
 - But her example confuses Bible students, who see her behavior as less trusting in God's promises
 - The writer refers to her confidence in God's promise to bring a child to her and Abraham, even though she was well past childbearing years
 - In Genesis 18, Sarah is listening inside the tent to the conversation between the Lord and Abraham, as the Lord delivers the news that a child will be born within the year

Gen. 18:9 Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "There, in the tent."

Gen. 18:10 He said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him.

Gen. 18:11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing.

Gen. 18:12 Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"

Gen. 18:13 And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?'"

Gen. 18:14 "Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son."

Gen. 18:15 Sarah denied it however, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh."

- Notice that Abraham's visitors (the Lord and two angels) inquired of his wife Sarah
 - The point of raising Sarah was to emphasize which of Abraham's two wives would be the one to bear the promised child
 - The promised decedents of Abraham were not going to arrive by Hagar, but by Abraham's wife, Sarah
 - God's provision would be supernatural and according to faith, not by the works of the flesh
 - There was probably a second reason the Lord mentioned Sarah by name as He talked with Abraham
 - He knew that mentioning Sarah's name would catch her attention, leading her

- to listen more closely to what followed next in the conversation
 - And listen she did, as we're told in Genesis 18:10
- As Sarah hears the promise of a coming child, she laughs to herself in the tent
 - And the reason she laughs is found in v.11
 - She realizes she is past childbearing years, and to this point, she has been denied the very thing she most wanted, which was a child
 - And now at this point in her life, she learns that she will indeed bear a child
 - And so she laughs in response
- And from her laugh and her thoughts and the Lord's response, we see clearly she is in disbelief of what she hears
 - She asks incredulously shall she bear a child while so old?
 - Obviously, she's expressing doubt at the prospect
 - And the Lord even issues her a mild rebuke for that doubt
 - So how can the writer of Hebrews now say she is an example of faith?
- Well, let's look more closely at the writer's statement in v.11
 - He says, by faith she received the ability to conceive
 - In Greek, the writer literally says, by faith Sarah gained the power to receive or collect
 - In other words, she was granted the ability to hold or receive Abraham's seed
 - We could say then, that Sarah's ability to conceive awaited her faith in God's promise
 - She is clearly lacking confidence in His Word at the time of the meeting at the tent
 - But based on the writer's words, we must conclude that within a few months, Sarah had reached the point where she trusted in the Word of God
 - And by her faith, she considered Him faithful who had promised
- Sarah's example is an encouraging one for any believer who has struggled from time to time in accepting the truth of God's promises and adopting a lifestyle of faith
 - Remember, Sarah had traveled with her husband when he received his call to go to Canaan
 - So she had already made huge sacrifices
 - She had no doubt heard her husband explaining his reasoning for their dramatic shift in lifestyle
 - Yet on the day the Lord visited the tent, she was still struggling with faith in His Word
 - Nevertheless, in the end, she believed and she was rewarded
 - Her example reminds us that we too can expect the Lord's patience, as we strive to believe and live in our faith

- Remember the disciples, when they were confronted with promises too difficult to accept in the moment?

Luke 17:3 “Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

Luke 17:4 “And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”

Luke 17:5 The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”

Luke 17:6 And the Lord said, “If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and be planted in the sea’; and it would obey you.

- The apostles found it unbelievable to forgive others in the way Jesus prescribed
- And so they asked the Lord to increase their faith
- Jesus’ response is unexpected
 - He tells them that faith is not measured in quantity, but in quality
 - Even the smallest amount of faith is sufficient to please God
 - What’s important is how it directs our life
 - Christ is the Author and Perfecter of our faith, and therefore, He gives everyone a measure of faith – the same measure
 - And like Sarah, He is patient to bring us along in our walk
 - But what distinguishes one believer from another is the willingness to act on our faith
 - The one who has faith in God’s plan to move a mountain into the sea can speak of these future events with absolutely certainty
 - It takes just a mustard seed worth of confidence to be aligned with God’s plan
 - And then the power to move that mountain is certainty of God’s promises
 - What God intends to do will come to pass, and if we place our trust in that future and live according to it, we will never be wrong
 - And we will provide a powerful testimony of faith lived-out
 - Noah, Abraham and Sarah were all people who heard the Word of God, faced a decision of what to believe, and ultimately conformed their lives to those promises
 - Noah heard in a moment, and then toiled diligently for a century to demonstrate his faith in a promise
 - Abraham received God’s promises over many years, then was called to demonstrate his faith in critical moments
 - Finally, Sarah heard God’s Word in a moment, but took time to accept its reality, ultimately leading her to faith and obedience
- Whether you are a Noah, or an Abraham or even a Sarah, recognize that God is the One

revealed in Scripture, and He is a rewarder of those who seek Him

- Next week, we continue with the patriarchs in the Hall of Faith

- Let's continue our tour through the Hall of Faith
 - The writer of Hebrews is our tour guide
 - And his focus is on helping us draw lessons of application from the examples of Old Testament saints
 - Men and women who allowed their faith to inform their choices and decisions in life
 - And in every case, we find a familiar pattern
 - These saints lived according to a hope in God's promises concerning future events
 - And that hope caused them to live in ways that were vastly different than the world around them
 - They adopted these contrary lives to serve as testimony to what they believed
 - Just as we avoid stepping off of tall buildings because we believe in the Law of Gravity
 - So did they live under convictions concerning things yet to be seen
- We ended last week in the middle of an example drawn from the lives of the patriarchs of Israel, beginning with Abraham and Sarah
 - This couple was able to bear children long after the natural time, because they trusted in a promise of God to bring forth a child
 - In Abraham's case, his faith was evidenced by moments of decision that few of us could imagine making ourselves
 - Including a decision to leave his entire life behind to start something new, merely on the basis of a promise that God would provide something better
 - Abraham's wife, Sarah, took a different route to faith, but demonstrated it in the end nonetheless
 - She scoffed at the notion that her body would produce a child
 - But in time the Lord convinced her heart of the trustworthiness of His Word
 - And in faith she conceived, having considered Him faithful Who promised
- Now the writer summarizes how the story of Abraham and Sarah turned out, with a surprising outcome

Heb. 11:13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

Heb. 11:14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.

Heb. 11:15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.

Heb. 11:16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.

Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

- The writer describes “all these” in referring to Abraham and Sarah
 - But in reality, what he’s about to teach applies equally to everyone in this chapter in one way or another
 - All those who died in faith in the Old Testament, died without having received the fullness of God’s promises
 - In fact, all saints who have come and gone to this point have yet to receive the fullness of the promises of God
 - In the case of Abraham and Sarah, they died without having received the promise of the land or having seen the world filled with their descendants
 - They certainly received a small measure of God’s promises in their lifetimes
 - They received a son, Isaac
 - And they were given a life of sojourning in the land
 - But they never received all that God promised to them...not even close
 - The promises of God included a land mass that stretched from the Mediterranean Sea to present-day Iraq
 - And Abraham was promised a permanent inheritance in that land, not a temporary sojourning
 - In the end of v.13, the writer confirms that they welcomed the promises from a distance, meaning from a distance in time
 - They trusted these things would be brought about for their sake, just as God promised
 - But they also recognized that the fulfillment would not happen in their lifetimes
- So while Abraham and Sarah lived long enough to see the beginning of the promises fulfilled, still they died without receiving what was promised
 - What does this say about God’s faithfulness?
 - Did God promise something and then fail to deliver?
 - The key to answering that question is to be clear on what God promised
 - Did God promise that Abraham would receive all of these things in his first earthly lifetime?
 - Or did God have a different timeline in mind?
 - The writer says that Abraham and Sarah lived in as strangers and exiles on the earth precisely because they understood God’s promise of land would not be fulfilled in their earthly lifetime
 - This can mean only one thing
 - They expected to receive these things in another life, in the resurrected life

- The writer points in vs.14-15, that their willingness to remain wanderers in a land that wasn't their own was proof that they knew their reward couldn't be found on earth
 - If there had been some part of the earth, some "country", that was to be their inheritance during their lives, then they could have simply journeyed to that place and claimed it
 - Instead, they were willing to wait for a better country, the one God had promised
 - A country that descends from Heaven in a future day
 - The Kingdom of the Messiah, which will be inaugurated at the coming of our Lord
- Abraham and Sarah were expecting to be resurrected into new bodies to live in a Heavenly Kingdom
 - And in that future day and place, they would receive the inheritance they were promised
 - They knew they would die first
 - And they understood they must wait for the Kingdom to appear in its appointed day
 - And they recognized they would receive a new physical body before the Kingdom arrives, as Daniel 12 reveals
 - And only then would they receive the promises of God
 - Jesus refers to reality of resurrection as evidence of God's faithfulness in an exchange with the Sadducees
 - The Sadducees rejected the concept that a person is raised into a new body after death
 - They believed that the soul continued on into eternity without a body
 - So at one point, they try to trick Christ by asking Him a question about a woman who had been widowed seven times
 - And Jesus explained the reality of resurrection this way

Luke 20:37 "But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB.

Luke 20:38 "Now He is not the God of the dead but of the living; for all live to Him."

- Jesus points to the Lord's description of Himself spoken to Moses
 - God called Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
 - That phrase refers to the Abrahamic Covenant, which was spoken personally to each of these three men

- It was that Covenant that promised the land in Canaan as an inheritance
- And yet as we mentioned, these three men never received the promises in their lifetime
- So Jesus points to these men and to the Covenant given to them as proof of resurrection
 - For the only way the Lord could be counted faithful to these three men, is if they return to live on earth again
 - They must inhabit physical bodies, because only by living physically on earth, can they have the things promised to them
- So consider the faithfulness of these examples, who forfeited an entire life of ease and comfort, in order to demonstrate their confidence in Heavenly rewards
 - They knew they wouldn't see a return on their investment of faith until after they died and received their resurrected bodies
 - That's the example the writer holds out to us
 - Can we live like that? Sacrificing a lifetime of earthly rewards, if need be, to demonstrate our trust in God's promises?
 - We see it every day around us
 - Families that sacrifice a life of soccer games, country clubs, vacation homes and the like to live as missionaries in difficult circumstances
 - Or even individuals who forsake marriage altogether to serve Christ
 - Believers slandered, persecuted and martyred around the world for standing firm in their faith
 - All these are welcoming the promises of God from a distance
- Remember, the definition of faith is always trusting in something unseen by living with a confidence that a promise of God will come to pass in the future
 - And now we understand that our waiting will extend beyond our lifetime
 - This isn't just trusting in God to fulfill His promises in a few days or weeks or even years
 - It's living your entire earthly life knowing that the things in God's promises that you and I await aren't coming until after we receive new bodies
 - Such was the faith of the patriarchs
 - Now we see all the more clearly the heresy in teaching that God desires to grant us blessings here and now
 - The Bible declares that true faith looks for reward after the resurrection
 - In fact, the more we look at examples in the Bible, the more we come to realize that a mindfulness of the resurrection is essential to living in faith
 - The writer continues to emphasize the resurrection, looking at the Patriarchs

Heb. 11:17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son;

Heb. 11:18 it was he to whom it was said, “ **IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED.**”

Heb. 11:19 He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.

Heb. 11:20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come.

Heb. 11:21 By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.

- Perhaps Abraham’s greatest moment of faith in action was his obedience in offering his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God
 - He made this offering by faith, but it was faith in something very specific
 - The writer says Abraham had been told by God that he would have many decedents through the offspring of Isaac
 - And yet, here was God telling Abraham that he must kill his son to please God
 - How could Abraham sacrifice the son through whom he was to receive the blessings God promised?
 - And how could God remain faithful to His promises while also seeking Isaac’s life?
 - The writer says the answer was resurrection
 - Remember, we already established that Abraham lived his life knowing that he wouldn’t receive his blessings until after his own resurrection
 - So clearly, Abraham was a man who lived with an understanding and confidence in God’s ability to raise dead men into new living bodies
 - Because of his confidence in resurrection, Abraham saw nothing contradictory in taking the life of the son who would also produce Abraham’s grandchildren
 - The writer says that Abraham considered (or trusted) in the Lord’s ability to raise men from the dead
 - As Abraham raised the knife, he wasn’t worried that Isaac’s death would be the end of him
 - He expected to see him again
- Of course, the Lord never intended to see Isaac killed, though he did expect Isaac to die one day
 - Nevertheless, the Lord orchestrated this event to test Abraham’s faith and to create a powerful example of Christ
 - Abraham’s test was whether he truly lived with an understanding of God’s power to keep His promises, even past the point of death
 - We know he demonstrated faith in resurrection in how he lived as a wanderer in the land
 - But Genesis also records moments in Abraham’s life when he lived contrary to faith

- As when he wandered down to Egypt to find food during times of famine
 - Lied about his wife being his sister
 - And took Hagar as his concubine, making his own way for a child
- Given those episodes, one might argue that Abraham wasn't a man of faith after all
- So, the Lord constructed this test to remove any possibility of doubt
 - Once Abraham raised that knife over Isaac, it became clear Whom Abraham trusted
 - As the writer says, Abraham trusted the Lord to raise Isaac from the dead
 - And because of his belief in God's power to resurrect, Abraham had no reason to hold back his son
- In the process, Abraham was used by God to produce a picture of the Messiah
 - The writer says that Abraham received his son Isaac "back as a type"
 - What the writer means is that Abraham took Isaac to the mountain with the expectation to kill him at the Lord's request
 - And Isaac, who was a grown man at the time, willingly submitted to his father's plan, even though it required his own death
 - Isaac willingly placed himself on the wood (like a cross)
 - All the while, Abraham expected to leave the mountain with his son, because he anticipated that the Lord would resurrect Isaac
 - In the end, though Isaac didn't die, it can be said Abraham received his son back, because the Lord issued a reprieve
 - Abraham and his son combine in that moment to create a type, or picture, of God the Father and His Son, Christ
 - The Bible says it was the Father's desire to put His Son to death for the sins of the world

Is. 53:10 But the LORD was pleased

**To crush Him, putting Him to grief;
 If He would render Himself as a guilt offering,
 He will see His offspring,
 He will prolong His days,
 And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.**

- This one verse says everything about the type
 - The Lord the Father was pleased to crush Him, just as Abraham was pleased to kill his son because the Lord asked him to do it
 - And it was the Son who willingly endured the cross for the sake of His sheep, just as Isaac willingly laid himself on the wood

John 10:17 “For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again.

John 10:18 “No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”

- And of course, we know that after He died, Jesus rose from the grave, the First Fruits of the Resurrection
- So Abraham’s journey up the mountain to sacrifice his son was like God the Father sending His Son to die on Calvary
 - And the Son’s death and resurrection was pictured by Abraham expecting to see his son die and return
 - We can say that Abraham’s faith and obedience resulted in a beautiful testimony to Christ
- That’s the power of a life of faith
 - When we live according to our trust in God’s promises, we are inevitably going to produce a testimony to the Lord and His work in us
 - But if we are going to fulfill that mission, we first must allow our faith to inform our choices and decisions
 - Imagine if Abraham had refused to sacrifice Isaac?
 - At the very least, he would have forfeited the opportunity to testify to the coming Messiah
 - Who knows what else he would have placed at risk in eternity?
 - That’s why we’re called to live by faith as well
 - We have a mission to represent the Living God to a lost and dying world
 - We know that means telling people about Jesus at every opportunity
 - But there is no better way to preach the Gospel than by how we live our lives in faith
- And when I say live by faith, I mean faith in the way it’s defined in this chapter
 - Live with an expectation that the Lord “is”
 - Live knowing He is alive and active in the world
 - Show people that you talk to Him in your prayer life
 - And that you hear from Him in your study of Scripture
- Finally, live with an expectation that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him
 - Don’t set your focus on world and its rewards – let your faith set your priorities
 - Invest in the Kingdom
 - Live with the expectation that the Lord’s promises await our resurrection and don’t get caught up trying to gain them for yourself now

- Look at the promises from a distance, with eyes for eternity
- Live with an expectation that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him
 - Don't set your focus on reward in this world
 - Let your faith set your priorities
 - Set aside the rewards the world offers for investing in it
 - And choose instead to invest in the Kingdom
- Most of all, live with an expectation that the Lord's promises await our resurrection
 - Don't see death as an end but a beginning
 - It's not a tragedy to be mourned, at least not among those who have placed their trust in Christ
 - It's a victory to be celebrated
 - And look forward to the inheritance you have waiting for obedience and service to the Lord
- When we live in these ways, we are imitating those enshrined in the Hall of Faith
 - We are setting our eyes on the eternal
 - And we're giving evidence of the faith that lives in our hearts
 - And God will not be ashamed to be called our God

The Louvre museum in Paris contains over 380,000 objects and displays 35,000 works of art. It is said that if one were to walk through the Louvre and spend only 4 seconds gazing at each object, it would take you three months night and day to get through the whole museum.

- Our tour through the Hall of Faith has considerably fewer exhibits
 - But our tour probably seems like it's going to take just as long
 - And how can we NOT linger over this magnificent collection of examples of faith in action
 - We can talk about living-out our faith all day long, but as the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words
 - And each person captured in the Hall is a picture of faith driving both the thinking and decisions of ordinary people called by God to witness to Him
- We're finishing up the patriarchs this morning, followed by examples from Moses and the Exodus
 - Last week, I read through v.21, but I promised we would return to vs.20-21 and the examples of Isaac and Jacob
 - But when I introduced these guys, I mentioned that the writer's emphasis for all the patriarchs was on their faith in resurrection
 - And in a reward that awaited in the life after this world
- Let's reread those two verses

Heb. 11:20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come.

Heb. 11:21 By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.

- Isaac's blessing of Jacob and Esau regarding things to come is our first exhibit this morning
 - This is another well-known story from Genesis
 - Jacob and Rebekah were worried that Isaac was going to extend the blessing of the seed promise and inheritance upon Esau
 - So, they conspired to trick Isaac to ensure the blessing fell on the right son
 - In the end, the blessing went to Jacob, as it should, and bypassed Esau
 - When Isaac bestowed his blessing upon Jacob, thinking it was Esau, he said:

**Gen. 27:28 Now may God give you of the dew of heaven,
And of the fatness of the earth,
And an abundance of grain and new wine;**

Gen. 27:29 May peoples serve you,

**And nations bow down to you;
Be master of your brothers,
And may your mother's sons bow down to you.
Cursed be those who curse you,
And blessed be those who bless you."**

- Isaac spoke of blessings God would grant to the son who inherits the Covenant promise
- The fatness of the earth and the abundance of the harvest
- Of becoming the chief nation on the earth
- And of becoming master over the family of God
- Later, when Isaac and Esau realized they had been tricked, Isaac spoke of a different future for Esau

**Gen. 27:39 Then Isaac his father answered and said to him,
"Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling,
And away from the dew of heaven from above.**

**Gen. 27:40 "By your sword you shall live,
And your brother you shall serve;
But it shall come about when you become restless,
That you will break his yoke from your neck."**

- To Esau, Isaac acknowledged the reality of what lay in the future for this lesser son
- He would be denied the blessings of Heaven
- He would be a violent man with a violent family
- In the end, his people would live only to serve Israel, though not without rebellion
- In both the cases of Jacob and Esau, these pronouncements reflect a life of faith, as the writer indicates
 - Isaac speaks of future events that are the direct result of God's promises
 - Isaac was so convinced that what God promised would come to pass, that he spoke of these future things as predestined and unavoidable outcomes in the lives of his sons
 - To the son the Lord favored, Isaac spoke of the promises of the Covenant
 - To the un-favored son, Isaac spoke of the consequences of sin
 - In both cases, he delivered promises that were built on top of promises he received from God
 - Only if Isaac believed in these promises, would he have reason to speak of them to his sons
 - And more than that, notice that Isaac understood that he couldn't reverse what he had spoken, even after he discovered the deception

- He was so certain that the promises of the Covenant could only be given to one son according to God's decree, that he could not offer Esau a solution
 - Once the promises had been granted to Jacob, they were out of Esau's reach forever
- Though Isaac's intentions were not in league with God's plans, nevertheless, he was acting out of faith in God's promises
 - Isaac blesses Jacob with promises that referred to the Kingdom to come
 - And therefore, Isaac was looking ahead to a resurrected life with his son
 - We know Isaac had the wrong son in mind, but nevertheless he was acting with faith in resurrection and future reward
- Speaking of Jacob, he had his own moment of living in faith in Gen 47, as he considered his own death
 - The writer says in v.21, that Jacob blessed his sons and worshipped at the head of his bed
 - This is a good example of how the New Testament writers commonly make use of Old Testament references
 - The point the writer is making is bigger than the short phrase he captured in Hebrews 11:21
 - He's using that reference to call to mind the larger scene that takes place at the end of Genesis
 - In particular, the writer is thinking of the moment Jacob began to issue instructions and blessings to his family as his death approached
 - Here's how the scene began

Gen. 47:29 When the time for Israel to die drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "Please, if I have found favor in your sight, place now your hand under my thigh and deal with me in kindness and faithfulness. Please do not bury me in Egypt,

Gen. 47:30 but when I lie down with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." And he said, "I will do as you have said."

Gen. 47:31 He said, "Swear to me." So he swore to him. Then Israel bowed in worship at the head of the bed.

- Notice what was on Jacob's mind as he lay on his death bed
- He calls Joseph to his side and asks Joseph to swear an oath that Jacob would not be buried in Egypt
- Instead, he wants Joseph to carry his dead body back to Canaan and bury him there
- Once Jacob received that promise, he bowed and worshipped in thankfulness to the Lord that his body would rest in the Promised Land
- Why did Jacob care about where his dead body was buried?

- He cared for the same reason that his grandfather and father had cared to remain nomads their entire lives
 - He wanted his earthly life, including the way he died, to be a testimony to what he believed concerning God's promises
 - He believed that one day his body would be resurrected
 - And in that day, he would be granted all the promises God had spoken concerning the blessings of the Promised Land
- We know – and I think Jacob knew also – that it doesn't matter to God or the certainty of His promises where our dead body lies on earth
 - But he wanted Joseph to make this promise, because he wanted his burial to be a testimony
 - Because he believed and looked forward to resurrection and life again on earth, he wanted his body buried in such a way that it testified to his confidence
- Daniel speaks of the moment the Old Testament saints are resurrected to enter the Kingdom at the conclusion of the Tribulation

Dan. 12:1 “Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.

Dan. 12:2 “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.

Dan. 12:3 “Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

- We don't know how much of these details God revealed to Jacob
- But we do know that Jacob expected these things to come to pass
- And he wanted his body as close to the place of his future home as possible
- Notice again, how confidence in the resurrection is the key to Jacob's understanding?
 - Each time in the lives of the patriarchs, it was their belief that God's promises will await a new life in a new body that sustained them and informed their life choices
 - That's the writer's point for us as well
 - As believers, we don't just give lip service to our faith in Christ and what lies ahead
 - We must be prepared to live our faith in tangible ways
 - Ways that reflect our confidence that what has been promised will come to pass
- Now the writer transitions to Moses, who receives the most mentions of faith in the Hall
 - While examples of the patriarchs centered on their expectation of resurrection, the examples of Moses emphasize faith's response to persecution

Heb. 11:23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

Heb. 11:24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,

Heb. 11:25 choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,

Heb. 11:26 considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.

Heb. 11:27 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.

Heb. 11:28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them.

Heb. 11:29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned.

- The first example of Moses isn't really an example of Moses' faith at all, but of his mother's faith
- We're told in Exodus 2:2 that Moses' mother hid Moses for three months, because she saw he was beautiful
- The Pharaoh was killing all the newborn sons of Israel, so she tried to protect her son
- We know every mother thinks her own child to be beautiful, so it can't simply be his appearance that led her to hide her son
 - In fact, we can assume other Jewish mothers all saw their sons as beautiful
 - The particular Hebrew word translated as "beautiful" is *toṽ*, which means "good" or "beautiful" or "favorable"
 - But it can also mean "worthy" or "pleasing", as in pleasing in the sight of the Lord
- Now, the writer of Hebrews explains that her actions were the result of a faith that the Lord's promises for Israel would be accomplished through her son, Moses
 - She knew that Moses had been selected for this purpose
 - So she had the confidence not only to hide him, but also to deliver him to the Egyptian court
 - In fact, Josephus wrote that Moses' father had been given a revelation from God that Moses would humble the Egyptians
- Next, Moses exhibited faith when he was a grown man by refusing to be considered part of the Egyptian court
 - Instead, he chose to align himself with the Jewish people
 - When he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave, Moses came to the aid of the Jew
 - In doing so, Moses set his life on a new, far less comfortable course

- As the writer explains in v.25, Moses' decision to renounce the Egyptian court meant he was hunted, exiled and later wandering with the people of God
- We might ask why would Moses voluntarily forsake the comforts of Egypt and turn to live an austere and persecuted life?
 - You already know the answer: faith
 - Moses' faith in the eternal promises granted to God's people gave him the strength to pass up the momentary pleasures of sin
 - In place of that temporary, fleshly reward, Moses chose instead the eternal, spiritual rewards God holds out for the children who obey Him
- As the writer says in v.26, Moses understood his relationship with the Living God brought with it a new identity
 - That new identity was that of a Jew, one of God's people
 - And that meant living under the same persecution that God's people always know
 - Notice in v.27, the writer says Moses left Egypt, not because he feared the king, but because he felt the Lord calling him to endure this new life as a Jew
 - Christ Himself told us that since we are not of this world, Satan's home field, then we should expect the enemy to attack us
 - The moment Moses aligned himself with the Jews, he came under attack
 - And to the extent we live-out our faith, we put ourselves in Satan's crosshairs
 - We stand to lose our wealth, our security, comfort and earthly peace, because the enemy wants to take those things from us
 - But here's the key to remember: those are the only things the enemy can take from us
 - He doesn't have the power to impact our eternal future or inheritance
 - His power stops at the doorway into eternity
 - So he can torment us here and now, but once we die and enter eternity and receive our new bodies, his power is gone forever
 - Knowing that, a man or woman of faith can endure the persecutions of this life because we have faith that in the age to come, we triumph over the enemy's schemes
 - And we will be rewarded for that sacrifice and endurance
 - Just as Moses understood that whatever he lost on earth was nothing, compared to the riches of Christ awaiting for him in eternity
 - Notice here again, how an expectation of eternal reward for our obedience and sacrifice is an elementary part of living in faith
 - Moses lived at the center of the richest nation on earth
 - But he walked away from all that, without looking back
 - And he did so, because it was a means to pleasing God

- Which has as its reward, the riches of Heaven
- As the Exodus began, Moses exhibited faith in God's Word as he performed the Passover meal, just as the Lord prescribed
 - Moses took God's Word as a reality when the Lord promised to spare the sons of Israel if they applied blood on the doorpost
 - The promise of God was that judgment was coming
 - But those who accepted the sacrificial blood applied in faith would escape that judgment
 - Moses complied and instructed the people of Israel to do the same
 - And in so doing, Moses acted in confidence that God's Word was true, even before the events came to pass
 - And he did so, convinced that his obedience would be rewarded with the sparing of the lives of Israel's sons
 - And of course, in the process, he creates the most powerful Old Testament picture of the atonement of the Messiah
 - Further proof that when God's people obey in faith, we become part of telling the story of God's mercy and grace to the world
- And then finally, Moses led the people across the Red Sea, perhaps Moses' greatest moment of faith
 - He led Israel into a dead-end in the desert, because he followed the Lord as the fire and cloud
 - And as Moses and the people stood on the brink of destruction, as Pharaoh's army closed in, Moses spoke these words

Ex. 14:13 But Moses said to the people, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever."

- Moses knew the Lord's promise to bring Israel out of slavery and into the Land
- So though the situation appeared bleak and hopeless, faith is never without hope
- Not a hope in speculation or wishful thinking
- But a hope rooted in the truth of God's promises and the reality of God's faithfulness
- So Moses declared that God was about to do a miracle, even before it happened
 - Then, as Moses lifted his staff, the waters parted
 - So the Israelites went through on dry land
 - But the enemy was swallowed up in the waters
 - Because the promises didn't apply to them
- Moses must have been afraid as he stood there with the lives of 2 million people in his

hands and the enemy bearing down

- He must have entertained moments of doubt
 - But when the time came to take a stand, he stood in faith with the promises of God
 - He trusted that God would rescue the people from the Angel of Death
 - And he trusted that God would rescue them from the power of the Egyptian army
 - And in both cases, God was true to His Word
- As Moses did these things, he created a picture of confidence in resurrection and expectation of reward
 - In the Passover, the picture is of surviving the judgment of God and escaping the slavery of sin
 - And in the Red Sea, the picture is of passing into a new life, leaving the old behind
 - That doorway into eternity is one opened by faith in Christ
 - And those who pass through are rewarded in eternity
- The Lord may decide to grant us a life like the patriarchs, one of peaceful existence in the world with plentiful supply until we die
 - And if that's us, then the test of faith for us is whether we will live as strangers and wanderers
 - Will we let peace and prosperity rule our lives?
 - Or will we rest by faith in the promises of God?
 - Will we place an emphasis on enjoying the rewards of this life?
 - Or will we remember that our inheritance can't be found on earth?
 - That will be our test
- Or the Lord may test us, as He tested Moses, driving us away from comfort and peace into a life of trial and want, where service comes at the expense of great self-sacrifice
 - And if that's our course in life, then the test of faith will be one of endurance and patience
 - Can we endure the persecution, the deprivation, the scorn?
 - Knowing that the Lord Who has promised is faithful?
 - Knowing that the enemy can't touch what awaits us in eternity
 - Whichever path God assigned to our life, our faith will be tested
 - And our call is to allow our faith in God's promises to inform our choices and decisions
 - So that our life is a testimony to what we know to be true
 - So that we might please the Master Who bought us

- Today, our tour through the Hall of Faith comes to an end
 - We've spent over a month wandering the halls, studying example after example of saints who lived according to a faith in God's promises
 - Our tour started by understanding the definition of faith
 - Then it progressed through the corridors of time
 - We've looked at Abel, Enoch, and Noah, who acted in confidence that God would do as He promised
 - We studied the patriarchs, who lived their earthly lives in expectation that they would only see God's rewards after resurrection
 - We studied Moses's example of trading the easy life of the world for the hardships of serving God among His people
 - And today, we end with mention of a few more saints, followed by a flurry of named and nameless examples to reinforce his point
 - And that point is, that those of faith will orchestrate their lives in keeping with what they believe
 - They will take action consistent with an expectation that God will fulfill His promises

A guy named Joe finds himself in dire trouble. His business has gone bust and he's in serious financial trouble. He's so desperate that he decides to ask God for help.

He begins to pray... "God, please help me. I've lost my business and if I don't get some money, I'm going to lose my house as well. Please let me win the lotto."

Lotto night comes and somebody else wins it.

Joe again prays... "God, please let me win the lotto! I've lost my business, my house and I'm going to lose my car as well".

Lotto night comes and Joe still has no luck.

Once again, he prays... "My God, why have you forsaken me? I've lost my business, my house, and my car. My wife and children are starving. I don't often ask you for help and I have always been a good servant to you. PLEASE just let me win the lotto this one time, so I can get my life back in order."

Suddenly, there is a blinding flash of light as the heavens open and Joe is confronted by a voice from Heaven: "Joe, meet Me halfway on this one...buy a ticket."

- Likewise, these saints took steps of faith in confidence that God was true to His Word
 - And as we'll continue to see today, their faith revolves around the expectation of resurrection and eternal reward
 - Consider our first example this morning

Heb. 11:30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.

- Last week, in v.29, the writer mentioned Israel's passing through the Red Sea as an example of faith
 - It was an act of faith for Moses to rebuke the nation for their fear
 - He knew the Lord had promised to bring the nation out of Egypt
 - And though the situation looked hopeless, Moses maintained hope, knowing the Lord was faithful to His promises
 - It was also an act of faith that Israel itself walked through the waters
 - They must have had fear of the walls of water on either side
 - Still, they ventured forward, confident the Lord would hold back the water
 - Because they trusted in the Lord, they were saved in a physical sense
 - There were many other supernatural displays of God along the journey, but the Red Sea marks the beginning of Israel's departure from Egypt
- Now the writer moves to the other bookend in the Exodus journey: Jericho
 - Israel's encounter with Jericho serves as the official end of their wanderings and their entrance into the Promised Land
 - Just as the beginning of their journey was marked by an act of faith, so was the conclusion
 - The story of Jericho begins with Joshua leading the people of Israel into the land
 - He has circumcised all the nation, celebrated the Passover for the first time in 40 years, and began eating off the land, as the manna ceased
 - Then the Lord appeared to Joshua and told him that the walled, fortified city of Jericho had been delivered into his hands
 - All that Joshua and the army had to do was to march around the city for seven days, carrying the Ark and blowing horns
 - At the end of the process, on the seventh day, the walls of the city will crumble
 - The Lord gave very specific instructions, and Joshua relayed them with equal precision
 - And the people followed them carefully
 - And the walls fell flat

- Faith in God's Word may require we do some crazy, outlandish things from time to time, depending on what the Lord may ask of us
 - In this example, the Lord gave instructions that ensured that when the walls fell, there could be little doubt in Israel and in Canaan that God knocked the walls down
 - Israel's laughable display of walking and blowing horns looked like a children's game
 - It was intended to look ridiculous to the unbelieving world
 - So that all glory for the outcome rested on the Lord
 - Remember what the Lord said to Israel before they entered Canaan

Deut. 9:1 “Hear, O Israel! You are crossing over the Jordan today to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you, great cities fortified to heaven,

- The people were told they would face Jericho's strength in the land
- But the Lord also told them:

Deut. 7:7 “The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples,
Deut. 7:8 but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

- Israel wasn't going to be victorious because they were inherently powerful
- They would overcome because the Lord would be their strength
- And just to make sure the world knew where to assign credit, the Lord devised plans that center on our faith in Him
 - Rather than our faith in our own strength
- The compliment to this lesson is found in the example of Rahab

Heb. 11:31 By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.

- Rahab is one of two Gentile women listed in the genealogy of Christ
 - She was a resident of Jericho and, more than that, she was a prostitute in the city
 - She occupied the lowest rung on the societal ladder
 - And being a Gentile, she carried even less stature among the people of Israel
- And yet, when the spies of Israel entered the city to assess the strength of their enemy, it

was Rahab who secretly protected the spies from her king

- Why would Rahab risk her own neck for foreign spies?
- She explains it this way

Josh. 2:9 and said to the men, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you.

Josh. 2:10 “For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.

Josh. 2:11 “When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.

Josh. 2:12 “Now therefore, please swear to me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father’s household, and give me a pledge of truth,

Josh. 2:13 and spare my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters, with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.”

- Rahab says all the people in the city knew of the exploits of Israel in Egypt and in the land
 - They understood the miraculous things that God had done
 - They knew that the people of Israel were being led by a God more powerful than all the so-called gods of Egypt
 - And the news of this God’s power caused the people of the land to faint in fear of Israel
 - As Rahab says, the people knew that the Lord Who led Israel was the God of Heaven and earth below
- You might think that if an entire city knew this truth, they might seek to reconcile with a God of such strength, but they didn’t
 - When the king learned that the spies had entered the city, they came to Rahab’s home to capture and kill the spies
 - But Rahab responded to the knowledge of God in a different way
 - She exhibited faith, knowing that these men were agents of the Living God
 - So she sided with God against her own people
- She acted in faith, knowing that if she sided with Israel, then the Lord would protect her from the judgment that was soon to come against her city
 - She took a chance that she would be killed either by her own people or by Israel
 - But she acted with confidence that the Lord Who led Israel would show mercy

- to the one who acknowledged Him and served Him
 - And certainly, God honored her faith by rescuing her from Israel's army
 - When the walls fell and Israel entered the city, Joshua gave instructions that no one in the city was to be spared, except Rahab's family
- Notice, the writer says she welcomed the spies in peace, in contrast to the way the rest of the city welcomed them
 - She didn't have more information or better reason to accept them
 - She simply believed the reports, while the rest of the city rejected them
 - And so she was saved
- Taking these two examples together, we see complimentary messages about living in faith
 - Jericho was an example of faith resting in the strength of the Lord
 - We serve Him, knowing that He uses weak things to shame the strong
 - And when we triumph over the enemies of God, faith says it was all God
 - Rahab is an example of faith trusting in the mercy of a righteous God to rescue us from coming judgment
 - Rahab threw herself on the mercy of an all-powerful God Who was preparing to destroy her and her home
 - Rahab knew she wasn't worthy of anyone's respect
 - And she certainly couldn't appeal to God on the basis of her own righteousness
 - But she trusted by faith that the Lord would show mercy on her because she loved Him and His people
- And in both cases, faith required a step of action to acknowledge and reflect that faith
 - The people of Israel had to walk around the city and blow the horns before the walls fell
 - Their walking and horn-blowing didn't knock down the walls
 - God knocked down the walls
 - But would the walls have fallen had Israel ignored the Lord's instructions?
 - The Lord gave them a ritual to ensure that observers throughout history could look back and see that God was working through Israel
 - Their pitiful actions were important in only one way
 - They were a testimony to faith which served to glorify the Lord
 - And Rahab's step of faith was to hide the spies of Israel
 - Rahab's faith was present even before the spies showed their faces at her threshold
 - Still, it was her decision to hide them that led to her rescue
 - The Lord brings faith into our hearts for a purpose, and that purpose goes far

beyond ourselves

- While we certainly celebrate faith as a means to our own celebration, don't forget that you weren't saved for your own sake
- You were saved to glorify the Lord
- And your mission of bringing Him glorify requires a life lived as a reflection of faith
- One that does crazy things, one that goes against the current, so that we can bring attention to the work and power of the Lord
- At this point, the writer has barely entered into the period of Joshua, and yet, the examples of the Old Testament continue on unabated
 - I assume that if he had continued to relate all the significant examples of OT saints, we would need another book of Scripture just to summarize them
 - So does he, which is why he moves to a summary of his own at this point

Heb. 11:32 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,

Heb. 11:33 who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,

Heb. 11:34 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.

Heb. 11:35 Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection;

Heb. 11:36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment.

Heb. 11:37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated

Heb. 11:38 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

- What more could he say? Too much, he agrees, so he acknowledges that time would fail him if he tried to list them all
 - He then mentions a series of names, each of which we could spend considerable time examining
 - But since the writer chose to gloss over the details, so will we
 - It's enough to note that the names are arranged in a pattern
 - The first four names are judges
 - The next two names are kings

- The last one is a prophet, and he mentions the other prophets in passing, as well
- All of these men faced various trials, fought battles while greatly outnumbered, took steps that seemed crazy, until the Lord showed up and vindicated them
 - They conquered kingdoms like Gideon, shut the mouths of lions like Samson and Daniel
 - They quenched fire, like Elijah and Daniel's friends
 - Some escaped death on some occasions, like Elijah
 - Others endured terrible deaths for their faith, like Isaiah
 - Women saw their children raised from the dead because they exhibited faith in God's Word
 - While other saints suffered greatly at the hands of God's enemies
- Interestingly, the writer ends his list focused on the suffering of those who live by faith
 - Saints who died not for any other reason except for the fact they loved the Lord and desired to live according to their faith
 - And because of their faith, they were stoned, sawn in two, tempted to dishonor the Lord
 - Suffering various indignities, sharing in the Lord's reproach among those not worthy of Him
 - Living like rats in holes, on the run and without any of the comforts of this world
 - Look at the contrasts in this list
 - For some saints, living in faith brought rejoicing and relief
 - While for other saints, living in faith brought deprivation, suffering and death
 - Clearly, living in faith doesn't lead to prosperity or easy living, not automatically
 - In fact, that's never the point of walking in faith
- So what does it bring?

Heb. 11:39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised,

Heb. 11:40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

- First, the saint gain the approval of God through living in faith
 - Living according to faith pleases the Father and meets the purposes for why we have been ushered into the family of God by His grace
 - We are like children who do as their father requires
 - And in so doing, the father is pleased by his child and seeks to reflect that pleasure in rewards

- Secondly, we please Him even though we do not receive what was promised
 - These saints in the Hall of Faith were willing to endure suffering and even death because it mattered not to them
 - Their faith focused them on the eternal realm and all that it offered
 - They knew they would see the Lord's pleasure reflected there
 - And that was enough
- Thirdly, they knew that what awaited them in the Heavenly realm was far greater than anything they could earn for themselves in this world
 - They were willing to sacrifice earthly comfort, wealth, security, family and even their lives to obtain what awaited in Heaven
 - A person would only do such a thing if they were confident that the things in Heaven are of far greater glory than what we can obtain here
 - They knew it was a good trade
- Finally, the writer says that these saints were required to wait past their earthly lives, because the Lord had something good in store for us also
 - He's referring to the plan of salvation to include the Gentile nations of the earth
 - While it was possible for the Lord to bring the Kingdom to these people earlier and end their waiting, He didn't for our sake
 - He made them wait a lifetime and longer to receive the promises
 - Because that waiting has as its purpose the accumulation of Gentile saints, who will join these earlier examples
 - Notice the writer says that these heroes in the Hall of Faith will not be made perfect without us
 - Being made perfect refers to the resurrection prior to the beginning of the Kingdom at Christ's Second Coming
 - These saints will not receive their new bodies and enter the Kingdom and receive their bodies until the very last Gentile appointed to believe has been found
 - Only at the conclusion of this age will the Lord bring all things to conclusion and our reward will appear in the Kingdom
 - So in a very real sense, these earlier saints were called to wait and even to suffer for our sakes, so that we might be given the opportunity to join them in the Kingdom
 - Knowing this, how can we not also follow their lead and live according to faith?
 - Are we not obligated by history and example to honor their sacrifices by serving the Lord as well as they did?
- That's the call of the Hall of Faith
 - It's not a dusty museum of relics we're supposed to visit once in a while for inspiration or encouragement
 - It's the price that has been paid to bring us into the family of God

- It's the record of God's faithfulness to His promises
- And it's our call to live according to our testimony, a testimony these heroes shared for our sake
- Consider their examples the next time you feel your faith wavering
 - More importantly, consider the inevitability of your death
 - The inescapable judgment moment that follows
 - A righteous and demanding Lord Who will require we give an account
 - And the unimaginable rewards that await every servant who lives according to faith

- The writer has concluded his tour through the Hall of Faith
 - We've examined the lives of many Old Testament saints, learning from their examples of what faith lived-out looks like
 - The writer began this tour following his fourth warning to the church
 - That warning explained the consequences of shrinking back
 - Specifically, he was concerned about Christians who step back from living with eyes for eternity in a vain attempt to preserve something about their earthly lives
 - In his day, the Church suffered great persecution
 - So the temptation was likely to return to Judaism, which was a relatively safe practice in the Roman Empire
 - But in doing so, they were repudiating the Lord Who bought them
 - They were sacrificing eternal, Heavenly reward for the sake of a passing, earthly gain
- So to inspire his audience to live-out their witness, even in the face of trials and persecutions, the writer presented example after example of OT saints who willingly accepted trials and deprivation and persecution for the opportunity to please the Lord
 - He ended with a conclusion that summed up his entire argument

Heb. 11:39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised,

Heb. 11:40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

- The writer says all these saints gained God's approval by living-out their faith
- And they lived in this way, despite never seeing the full measure of their reward on earth
- For it was not God's intention to reward His people in this fallen, passing world
- That is our inspiration to do the same
 - Notice in v.40, the writer turns to his audience and adds that God had another reason in delaying their rewards
 - He says that God had something better for us
- God's plan is to provide the inheritance to the saints all at once
 - All saints throughout history will enter in the glory of the Kingdom together
 - And together, we will all receive our respective share of Christ's inheritance
 - How glorious it will be to see all the saints marching in together into the Kingdom, as the song celebrates
- So God's delay in rewarding the saints is part of a plan, one intended to bring all God's children together on an appointed day
 - Therefore, all His children are called to testify through a life of patient, expectant

faith

- We await our rewards in Heaven
- We don't grow faint or weary in the meantime
- This is where the writer picks up as he moves into Chapter 12, with his exhortation

Heb. 12:1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Heb. 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

- Referring back to Chapter 11, the writer says first, since we have such a great legacy of examples, we should look to these examples
 - He calls them a cloud of witnesses, which is a phrase that reminds us they still exist in spirit form only
 - These witnesses have not yet received their new physical bodies
 - Like us, they await the resurrection
 - Once again, the writer is emphasizing that apart from us, these saints will not see the fulfillment of God's promises
- Furthermore, the word "witnesses" doesn't refer to an observer, but rather to one with a testimony
 - In other words, the writer isn't saying these saints are watching us – they're not
 - He means we should be watching them, as in taking note of their examples
 - And if we're taking note of them, then we should do as they did
- Secondly, the writer instructs us to lay aside every encumbrance and sin so that we may run the race set before us
 - There are several important elements to this exhortation, beginning with the notion of laying aside sin
 - The Greek word translated "encumbrance" is used only here in the New Testament
 - It's a word commonly used in relationship to running a race
 - We might use the word "drag" or "resistance"
 - Anything that negatively impacts a runner's ability to gain full speed
 - Obviously, in a foot race, we want to eliminate anything that holds us back and slows us down
 - When you race, you are trying to win the race to obtain the prize

- You can't achieve that goal as long as you run encumbered by resistance or drag
 - Swimmers wear skull caps, or even shave their bodies of all hair, to reduce drag
 - It's that important to ensuring they can win the race...they want every advantage they can get
- Likewise, we want every advantage we can get, for our race is far more important
 - We are running a race against ourselves
 - As Paul writes in Romans 7, when he talks about the duality of the saved man living in an old body, shackled by sin
 - We are running to win an eternal prize
 - Not our salvation, for that a free gift of God, obtained by faith alone
 - We are running, so to speak, to please the Master Who bought us so that we might please Him and receive a greater share of His inheritance
 - Remember Paul's own words on how he understood his race

1 Cor. 9:25 Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

1 Cor. 9:26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;

1 Cor. 9:27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

- Notice Paul echoes the writer's line of thought
- He says that he must exercise self-control in the race of life to ensure a good outcome
- So that even after he has helped others live a life that pleases the Lord, he himself must not be disqualified from winning his own prize
- That prize being a great imperishable reward
- So if we want to follow the lead of the OT saints like Abraham, Moses, and the prophets, we must begin by setting aside the sin that is holding us back from obedience
 - Those sins are numerous for all of us
 - Search your heart, and you will know what you must do
 - Lay aside the sin, put it away, walk away from it
 - Don't play around the edges of the problem
 - And in doing so, you are freeing yourself from a drag-weight that is literally preventing you from winning your race
 - If you do so, you can expect that the prize that lies ahead of you will far surpass the temporary pleasures of what you can provide yourself today
 - We must all recognize that though we have been saved from the penalty of sin by the grace of God, we are still called to wrestle with it

- And as we struggle and persevere, we are not furthering our salvation, for the Lord won that battle on our behalf
 - Rather, we are ensuring that we will not be disqualified from receiving our prize
- Finally, notice how the writer describes the race of our life of faith: it is a race “set before us”
 - The Lord, in His sovereign will, has prepared a race for each of us
 - Put simply, the Lord has designed us to experience a certain life
 - Some of us will have strong health, some of us will not
 - Some of us will have great wealth, some of us will have little
 - Some of us will know joyful family life, some of us will experience great tragedy
 - Some of us will live peaceful lives of faith, while others will be persecuted and martyred
 - The Lord has set these races before us
 - We didn’t choose them; He did
 - He didn’t ask us to approve of His choices
 - But He does ask us to run well the race He set before us
 - Run with endurance, the writer says
 - “Endurance” implies difficulty – don’t give up
 - Like a runner rounding the final bend and staring at the finish line in the distance, don’t stop running until you reach the tape
 - What a shame it would be to run a good race of faith, sacrificing for the Lord and husbanding your witness...only to give up in the final lap
 - To succumb to sin and to indulge our fears and weaknesses
- We all have struggles in our walk of faith
 - In fact, the Lord has ensured that all of us face tests in our walk of faith
 - These tests are God’s way of qualifying us for the reward
 - You can’t win if you don’t run, so to speak, which is why James opens his letter with such counterintuitive advice

James 1:2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,

James 1:3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

James 1:4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- We are to consider trials in our life as joy
 - Because the existence of a trial is evidence the Lord is at work, offering us an opportunity to demonstrate endurance

- Endurance to walk with trust in the Lord's promises
- Endurance to make the sacrifices of time and treasure required to move the Kingdom forward
- Endurance not to shrink back from the trials to seek comfort in the world
- Comfort in materialism, ego, lust, drugs, career, whatever
- And that endurance will bring a result of ensuring we lack none of the rewards the Lord offers to us for obedience
- And of course, as usual, our ultimate example is found in the work of Christ
 - In v.2, the writer says, fix your eyes on Jesus's example
 - He is the author and perfecter of our faith
 - The Greek word for "author" can also mean "pioneer" or "originator"
 - Jesus authored our faith, in the sense that He went before us to establish a way into salvation
 - Furthermore, as Paul says in Ephesians 2, He then brought saving faith to each of us as the starting point of our relationship with God

Eph. 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

Eph. 2:9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

- More than authoring our faith, Christ is also the perfecter of our faith
 - The Greek word for "perfecter" means "to carry through to completion"
 - Jesus doesn't just start us down the road to salvation, He ensures we complete that journey
 - He brings us into a state of glory by His power, not by our own
- But between the beginning and the end, lies a course with many turns and detours
 - We have a part to play in mapping out that journey
 - Some choices pay greater rewards than others
 - The key to taking the right road is to have a clear view of the destination
- So the writer says, fix your eyes on Jesus and what He did in His earthly life's journey
 - He had an immense trial set before Him by the Father
 - The course of obedience given to Christ was greater than anything we have faced
 - He was tempted to seek refuge in the world and to avoid the cross
 - Obedience required Jesus to set aside everything, including life and His power as God, so He could endure the cross
 - He was willing to endure these trials because of the great joy set before Him

- The joy of pleasing the Father
- The joy of receiving a great inheritance and a people called by faith
- He is our North Star, the target we set our sights on so that as we run our race, we have a reminder of how it should be run

Heb. 12:3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

- Let's consider Jesus in this way, as One Who shows us how to live a life of faith in the face of trials
 - Jesus endured harsh treatment at the hands of sinners
 - Just as you will endure harsh treatment at the hands of sinners
 - And when you consider how He pressed forward anyway, you and I can find reason not to grow weary and lose heart
- You might say, "Well, Steve you don't know what I have endured"
 - You might have a testimony of great suffering and abuse
 - You may have endured a life of tragedy and tremendous loss
 - I'm sure many of us have endured many things in life that could become reason to shrink back and seek compensation in some kind of sinful pursuit
- But if we compare our trials to those Jesus faced, we come up short every time
 - As the writer says in v.4

Heb. 12:4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

Heb. 12:5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM;

Heb. 12:6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES."

- In the trials you've endured, have you sacrificed your life for the sins of the world?
 - Have you worked so hard to set aside sin and endure trials that it required you give your life?
 - Obviously, the answer is no, which is why the writer poses this question rhetorically
- We can't say that our trials have been so hard that our encumbrance in sin is necessary and understandable
 - We still have more we can do to endure and run the race
 - In fact, Jesus says the servant is not greater than the Master

- If the Father was willing to demand our Master die to please Him, is it too much to say that He might ask us to die to please Him?
- And if our trials bring us to the end of ourselves, as it did Christ, then so be it
- Our reward in Heaven will be great
- In fact, this church had sought to escape their trials by sinfully retreating to spiritual life as an unbelieving Jew, a life that testified that the Messiah had not yet come
 - This sin was their escape from trials, which the Lord delivered to perfect them through endurance
 - So to those who see trials as reason to indulge sinful options, the writer rebukes his audience, saying you have forgotten the whole reason God brings trials
 - Trials are sent as discipline measures by God
 - The writer quotes from Psalm 3
 - The psalmist says, don't regard lightly (or reject) the discipline of the Lord
 - We reject the Lord's discipline when we do not take advantage of the trials He sends us to grow and learn endurance
 - To use them to become a better witness of love and faith and joy in the Lord
 - To learn our weakness and crucify the flesh
 - Imagine if you your father grounded you for a week as discipline for something you did wrong
 - And then imagine that instead of obeying that restriction, that you would sneak out of the house every night anyway
 - You would be rejecting the discipline of your father
 - And rather than feeling regret and learning a lesson that would pay dividends in the future, you would have missed the whole point of the discipline
 - And you would very likely repeat the same mistake in the future, possibly with even greater consequences the next time
 - As the writer says

Heb. 12:7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

Heb. 12:8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

Heb. 12:9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?

Heb. 12:10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.

Heb. 12:11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

- When we confront a trial of any kind – whether emotional, marital, physical, financial, or whatever – we are encountering a course the Lord has set before us
 - It is a form of discipline the Lord is using to grow us spiritually
 - And we only gain that benefit if we endure it, accepting it as a loving act of a Father who is disciplining us for our own good
- The Lord works in a similar way with His children
 - Because He loves us, He doesn't want us to continue in sin and suffer the loss of rewards as a result
 - So He brings us discipline in the form of trials
 - These trials move us over time away from sin and our fleshly behaviors and into a closer spiritual walk with Him
 - But they only have this effect if we accept them as discipline...as something good for us
- Perhaps we might say that it's unkind for the Lord to bring these things upon us
 - As the saying goes, what kind of loving God allows tragedies to befall His children?
 - The Bible says it is proof of His love that these things come, because they have good eternal outcomes
 - When we ask the Lord to give us an easy life, absent trials and disappointments and tragedy, here's what we're really asking Him to do
 - We're asking Him to not discipline us
 - To allow us to remain as fleshly and sinful as when He found us
 - We're asking Him to refrain from growing us spiritually so that we can please Him through our endurance and gain eternal reward
 - Would a loving Father accept those terms? If your child asked you to forgo discipline so he or she could grow up spoiled and immature, would you agree to that arrangement?
 - As the writer says, no loving father would make that bargain
 - So why do we think our loving Father in Heaven would do such a thing?
 - In fact, if the Father in Heaven neglected to bring us trials for the sake of discipline, it would mean we weren't His children at all
 - Can you discipline the child of another family, like a stranger's child in a supermarket?
 - No, because you have no relationship with that child
 - Likewise, if you could live a life free of God's discipline, it would only be possible if you didn't have a relationship with Him
 - That is, if you weren't saved by His grace
- So the writer says, if we accept the discipline of our earthly fathers with understanding, then we should be able to accept the discipline of our Heavenly Father with understanding

- We should welcome His discipline
 - The discipline of our earthly fathers taught lessons that lasted a lifetime
 - But God teaches us lessons that last an eternity
 - We are grown spiritually, so that we can carry that maturity into our next life
 - And that maturity will bring us a far greater, lasting reward
- That's why in v.11, the writer says all discipline, whether from our earthly father or our Heavenly father, is not something we value in the moment
 - Yet in the long run, with the benefit of hindsight, we come to appreciate why it was necessary and worthwhile
 - God's discipline produces righteousness
 - It brings a peaceful fruit that leaves us better prepared for the next trial
 - And in eternity, at our judgment before the Lord, we will see just how much we profited from our trials and the spiritual maturity they produced
- But of course, we only gain these benefits if we endure the trials
 - With each challenge we face in life, we are at a crossroad orchestrated by God Himself
 - It's the course He has set before us
 - Consider these great trials to be evidence that we have a lot of spiritual growing to do
 - And the Lord has counted us worthy to receive His attention in this way
 - And the question is, will we receive His discipline and learn the lesson and endure the trial and receive the reward?
 - Or will we reject His discipline, miss the lesson, shrink back from the trial, indulge our sin and forfeit eternal reward?
 - You have not endured to the point of shedding blood like Christ...so fix your eyes on His example and repeat it
 - Run the race He set before you
 - Do so with endurance, so that you will not be disqualified from the prize that awaits



Hebrews (2014) - Lesson 12B

Chapter 12:12-17

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- Last week, we learned that all God’s children should expect His discipline
 - In the writer’s day, he was concerned about Jewish Christians who retreated from their witness and walk as Christians
 - In the writer’s words, they had shrunk back from their new life in Christ
 - We know from history that this church was under growing persecution
 - And it’s likely the persecution was responsible for driving these immature Christians away from the church during times of trial
 - So the writer gave the church a sermon on what faith requires and how it looks when lived-out to the fullest
 - The result was the Hall of Faith
 - Each example showed how men and women of faith respond to adversity
 - God brought them all tests and trials so that the world could see their faith and trust in God’s promises
 - They set aside the world’s priorities and were content to wait for the eternal rewards that awaited
 - And now in Chapter 12, the writer offers specific advice for all believers
 - How are we to react to trials and persecution?
 - Do we run back to our old lives?
 - No. We understand that trials are the Lord’s discipline
 - And that discipline is intended to teach us perseverance and holiness
 - The Lord loves His children, which is why He won’t leave us without the discipline we need
 - And by that discipline, we may please Him and enjoy the fruit of obedience
- The Lord’s love for His children doesn’t stop there, of course
 - Not only does He bring us trials as discipline, but He also provides us with brothers and sisters in the faith to support us in the fight
 - As the writer explains next

Heb. 12:12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble,

Heb. 12:13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

Heb. 12:14 Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

- As I’ve said in the past, Christianity is a team sport
 - The Lord has designed the body of Christ so that we must work and fellowship together if we’re going to excel in our walk
 - We might try to go it alone
 - We can choose to forsake the gathering on Sundays

- We can choose to withhold transparency from others, hiding our sorrows and struggles
- We can put on a smile and struggle silently against our flesh and the enemy and the trials the Lord brings
- But when we do these things, we forfeit one of the greatest weapons in our battle against sin: the encouragement of other believers
 - The writer asks the Body of Christ to work as one in staying the course that faith demands
 - He begins with “therefore,” meaning “because we will all face trials...”
 - Therefore, we must work as a team
 - He says strengthen hands that are weak and knees that are feeble
 - You remember how Paul used the analogy of a human body in 1 Corinthians to refer to members of the Body of Christ
 - This writer does the same thing here
 - He compares weak individuals in danger of falling back to weak hands and feeble knees
 - We work to strengthen those among us who are facing trials and contemplating shrinking back, giving up on the race
 - In the case of this church, the trials included various kinds of persecution
 - Being ostracized by Jewish family and friends
 - Losing employment or businesses
 - Physical threats
 - Seeing your family enduring similar mistreatment because of your confession
 - These were trials and tests that the Lord allowed His children to experience for their spiritual good, just as He did those in the Hall of Faith
 - We face our own versions of the same
 - The world and the enemy are always looking for new ways to make living as a Christian difficult
 - And sooner or later they will find your weak spot
 - That’s when your hands get weak and your knees are feeble, so to speak
- For those moments, the Body of Christ must come alongside us and make straight paths for our feet
 - The idea of a straight path is that it makes our walk easier and more direct to the goal
 - We aren’t wandering, wasting energy
 - And we aren’t in danger of going in the wrong direction
 - Moreover, when we have a weak limb, a straight walk is always the best
 - The writer extends the analogy by explaining that when we straighten these paths, the hurting limbs will heal
 - What specifically is the writer asking us to do for one another?

- First, in the Bible, the idea of walking a straight path is commonly used to describe living in the truth of God's Word
- John the Baptist brought the truth that the Messiah was coming, which Isaiah called making straight the crooked paths in the desert
- So this writer is emphasizing again the importance of knowing God's Word
- When we teach those who are weak and faltering on the importance of remaining on course, they will be strengthened
- But teaching is just one piece of the work, albeit the most important piece
 - Praying for one another, which leads to God changing the circumstances for the better
 - Meeting the physical needs of one another
 - Giving comfort, companionship, encouragement, and other support
 - These are all part of how the Body of Christ comes to the aid of those hurting in the Body
- Most importantly, pursue peace with all men and sanctification
 - The word for "pursue" in Greek means "chase down"
 - It's not passive, it's active
 - And the same verb refers to the second noun, "sanctification" (holiness)
 - The writer links these two ideas, because one follows naturally from the other
 - We will see the Lord face-to-face one day, because we will be fully sanctified
 - By the Lord's power to resurrect us, we will be glorified and fully sanctified
 - And without that positional sanctification, the kind that comes only by faith, we will not see the Lord
 - But it is because we have the assurance of sanctification by faith that we must spend our days now chasing down every opportunity to live in holy ways
 - Pursuing peace among men means pursuing the process of living in a more holy way
 - Pursue harmony in the Body of Christ
 - Pursue the goal of bringing God's peace in Christ to the world
 - Most of all, pursue peace with God through obedience to His commands
 - Chase down every opportunity to grow more holy in your life
 - Pursue that like you're chasing a school bus as it leaves without you
 - So why does he say, "without which we won't see the Lord"?
 - It falls to us now to pursue it, chase after it, because we desire to see that day
 - And because we know we gain eternal benefits from the pursuit
- With that, the writer has made his best argument for perseverance and faithfulness
 - He's explained why it's important, given us examples to emulate and called us to assist one another in the face of God's discipline
 - But what happens when someone among us fails at this walk?

- As a community, there comes a point where we must act to protect the flock, even at the expense of the individual
- And this leads us into the writer's fifth and final warning

Heb. 12:15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

Heb. 12:16 that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.

Heb. 12:17 For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

- Before we dive into the specifics of this warning, let's look carefully at whom the writer is speaking to and who he's speaking about
 - First, notice whom he's speaking to
 - The writer addresses the church leadership
 - The writer begins with the word "see to it"
 - In Greek this word is *episkopeo*, from which we get the word "episcopal"
 - It means to watch over, referring to the oversight of someone in a position of authority
 - He's speaking of the responsibility of the church elders and other leaders to act in the best interests of the body
 - In that sense, the writer says, "see to it that the following does not happen in the church"
 - Secondly, notice he's speaking about a representative third person in the church
 - Do not allow someone to come short of the grace of God
 - From the Greek, we could also say, "watch diligently over the Body to ensure no one lacks the grace of God"
 - At first, "coming short of the grace of God" sounds like someone who simply missed the Gospel altogether
 - Someone who hasn't accepted it or believed it
 - But the phrase coming short in Greek could also be translated to be "failing in the grace of God"
 - In other words, it's someone who is neglecting the grace of God, neglecting their salvation and all that comes from it
 - Imagine a Christian walking away from their Lord, from the Church, and from their eternal rewards
 - They just declare they give up, they're going back to their life before Christ
 - They're falling short of the grace given them in Christ
- When someone in the Body makes this decision, he doesn't just damage his own walk...he also has the potential to bring others with him

- That's why the writer says this individual is a root of bitterness
 - When life is tough, and the trials comes upon us like one wave after another, we're likely to feel like giving up
 - It seems an easier and better option to retreat, to find an escape and to take it
 - In the writer's day, the Jewish believers were returning to Judaism, rather than facing the struggles and persecution that came with being Christian
- In our day, the struggles and temptations are different, but the outcome is still the same: bitterness
 - We grow bitter at our circumstances
 - We succumb to self-pity and despair
 - We make excuses and rationalize our behavior
- And in the process, we become a root of bitterness in the Church Body
 - Perhaps we only cause trouble among our close friends or family
 - Or perhaps our fall is more public and the circle of collateral damage is much wider
 - Either way, such a person is a root of bitterness, in the sense that they are just the start of something that grows if left unchecked
- It holds the potential to defile many
 - The word "defile" means "to stain", "to contaminate"
 - It means to cause others to make the same mistake
 - The eternal consequences of our mistakes are magnified when we cause others to stumble as well
- We're talking about believers who fail to take the writer's advice in how they face trials and tests that the Lord brings our way, in whatever way
 - Brothers and sisters who know the grace of God, but they are neglecting it
 - They are hurting, fearful, tired, and wavering
 - They need our help, not our condemnation
 - They may not be asking for help, though they should
 - They may be ready to give up, or they may have already quit
 - This is the group we must strengthen
 - Doing nothing is not an option
 - Not only because we love them
 - But because they are a potential root of bitterness in our families and church and we need them to be strong so we can be strong
 - And vice versa
 - Left unchecked, they become like Esau, in the sense that they are immoral and godless
 - These terms are harsh
 - And to some, they suggest that the writer is speaking about unbelievers within

the Church

- But notice that the writer’s entire argument going back to Chapter 10 has been focused on believers retreating from their walk of faith
- There’s been no time in these chapters when the writer has moved to concerns over unbelievers
- And yet, the example of Esau seems misplaced, since Esau was clearly an unbeliever in Scripture
- So how do we apply this example to the case of a disobedient, wavering believer?
 - Well, the writer isn’t drawing a comparison to Esau’s nature, but to his behavior and to the consequences of his behavior
 - First, Esau traded something very valuable for something very trivial
 - By convention as the firstborn, Esau was first in line for the birthright of Isaac
 - This was an incredibly valuable right, guaranteeing Esau would receive the eternal inheritance God promised to Isaac
 - But, Esau was willing to trade away this incredibly valuable eternal reward for something temporary and earthly: a bowl of soup
 - Could anyone make a worse bargain?
 - Well, yes...any Christian who would trade their eternal reward for the sake of some temporary, earthly pleasure
 - Whether that be escape from persecution, or relief from financial pressure or scorn from family or friends or classmates
 - Or some other escape...anything that allows us to circumvent the trials and test of the Lord, which have the potential to qualify us for eternal reward
 - Such a Christian is immoral and godless
 - The word “immoral” is *pornos* , from which we get the word “pornography”
 - It means someone who engages in illegitimate sexual activity
 - They are immoral, in the sense that the person is living a lie when they depart from their faithful dependence on the Lord
 - And when we devise our own means of stepping out from under the Lord’s trials, we are living a lie
 - We are despising the discipline of the Lord, like the grounded child sneaking out the window at night
 - Our relationship with the Lord is illegitimate in that sense
 - Furthermore, we’re godless in the sense that we are living apart from God
 - The Greek word for “godless” can be translated “worldly” or “unsanctified”
 - We’re living as if we don’t know the Lord, because we’re not living under His authority or counsel
 - Every unbeliever is godless by nature, but even a Christian can live in a godless manner
 - And that’s who we become when we give up in face of trials and tests
- Finally, notice the lesson of Esau at the end of it all

- At some point, Esau realized that he had made a bad bargain
 - He had despised something very valuable
 - And once he realized his mistake, he sought to undo it
 - He was so determined to regain what he had lost, he cried tears of sorrow
- But, the writer says it was too late for that
 - No matter how hard Esau sought to regain the birthright he previously despised, he couldn't get it back
 - Sometimes, the things we toss aside are gone forever
 - And if by our disobedience we decide to forfeit the eternal inheritance the Lord makes available to His children, then in our day of judgment we'll discover the foolish bargain we made
 - We'll realize that those earthly comforts we sought were nothing compared to what we lost
 - And in that day, it will be too late to regain it
- That's why we're called to steel ourselves in the face of trials and tests, while strengthening others when it's their turn to face these things
 - We serve a God Who loves us, saved us and desires to show us wonderful things
 - For a short time, He asks us to serve Him by enduring many trials in a fallen and sinful world
 - This world is set against God, and so it's set against us
 - It wants to suppress the truth and tempt us away from obedience
 - It will persecute us, just as it did Christ
 - And the enemy is so crafty in all his schemes
 - He has countless ways to bring us into a decision moment where our faith is tested
 - And the Lord uses those moments as opportunities to please Him and earn reward
 - Let's strengthen each other as we face these moments in turn
 - Everyone faces them eventually...but together, we can persevere and pass the tests with flying colors
 - But if we pretend they don't happen to us or if we try to face them alone, we're going to fail
 - Sooner or later, we'll crumble and let our flesh or the enemy win the day
 - We'll shrink back, become a root of bitterness and bring others with us
 - Or we can reach out in the Body of Christ
 - Ask the Lord to send us friends, brothers and sisters who will remind us of the things in God's Word that tell us the fight is worth it
 - Send us prayer warriors to win the battle on our behalf
 - Send us encouragers and counselors and helping hands to strengthen us
 - Send us support in whatever form, so we can meet the test with faithfulness

and please the Lord

- Let's make sure no one comes up short of the grace God has given them

- Last week, we began the fifth and final warning that punctuate the letter to the Hebrews
 - For this writer's readers, the message was stark and unavoidable
 - If they sought relief from persecution by returning to Judaism, they were risking something far greater than what they gained
 - They might be cut off from the blessings of eternity that are available for faithful servants of Christ
 - Like Esau, they would suffer loss and experience great regret
 - But that recognition wouldn't be theirs until the time to repent was long past
 - We need to take this "what if" to heart as well
 - Our flesh, the enemy and the world all conspire to tempt us in a myriad of ways to abandon our walk
 - To shrink back, to seek the world's approval, the world's treasure, the world's pleasures is pure folly
 - We set ourselves on a collision course with the Lord
 - And our eternal rewards are on the line
 - So when some among us do stumble, it's urgent that we come alongside them in support, encouragement, prayer, teaching and admonishment, if required
 - Let's ensure no one falls for this deception
 - That was the beginning of the writer's warning last week
 - Today, we look at the heart of the warning
- Before the writer unfolds the main point of his warning, he prefaces it with another contrast between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant
 - In this case, the contrast is between how these two Covenants beckoned their respective participants to enter

Heb. 12:18 For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind,

Heb. 12:19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them.

Heb. 12:20 For they could not bear the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED."

Heb. 12:21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling."

Heb. 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,

Heb. 12:23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,

Heb. 12:24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled

blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

- Beginning with the moment of inauguration of the Old Covenant in Exodus, the writer recounts the scene at the base of the mountain
 - There was a mountain that God inhabited with great terror for the people
 - It was blazing with fire and smoke
 - It was shaking with thunder and earthquakes
 - When God spoke, it sounded like a trumpet
 - And the sound was so fierce, no one in the crowd could bear to hear it
 - They begged Moses to make it stop
 - Furthermore, God forbade that anyone come near to or touch the mountain
 - Not even animals could approach the base of the mountain, or else they would be destroyed
 - Even Moses was so terrified by what he saw, that he declared that he was full of fear
 - Such was the experience for the people of God as they were beckoned by God to enter into a relationship
- The writer is drawing a comparison between the circumstances under which that Covenant was offered, to the nature of the relationship it established
 - The Old Covenant was a covenant that exposed sin and required death, the Bible says
 - In 2 Cor. 3:7, Paul calls the Covenant of Law a “ministry of death” because the Law reveals sin and the necessity of death
 - By the Law, all men stand condemned
 - And as our sin is revealed before a holy and just God, it generates terror, knowing that judgment awaits
 - Therefore, the climate surrounding the inauguration of the Old Covenant mirrored the spiritual impact of that Covenant
 - This was the way the people of Israel knew the Lord under the Old Covenant
 - But notice throughout these verses, the writer is careful to point out that the New Testament believer did not enter into the New Covenant under such circumstances
 - We didn’t see God appear on a mountain in terror, shaking and in dread
 - We haven’t known God as a source of condemnation and jeopardy
 - We don’t risk being stoned should we dare to approach the Lord
 - And we aren’t trembling at the thought of Christ’s Second Coming
- By contrast, in vs.22-24, the writer reminds us of how the Lord reveals Himself to His children in the New Covenant
 - The New Covenant believer comes to Mt. Zion, referring to the Heavenly mountain

on which stands the Heavenly tabernacle

- In that place, is the Father with His myriad of angels
- As well, there stands the great assembly of all Church saints
- And there is Christ our Judge and all the Old Testament saints made perfect by faith
- It's a welcoming, corporate gathering
- Unlike Mt. Sinai, everyone can approach and dwell with the Lord
- All this harmony and joy and fellowship is made possible by the better blood of Christ
 - Abel's blood was an unwilling sacrifice that cried out for justice and retribution
 - But Christ's spilled blood was a willing sacrifice to reconcile men to God
 - The New Covenant welcomes its participants to approach in peace and without fear of condemnation

Eph. 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Eph. 2:14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,

Eph. 2:15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,

Eph. 2:16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

- We can see the writer's point from these examples
 - Before the New Covenant was revealed to men, experience with God necessarily included a sense of condemnation and fear and distance
 - Through the Law, men knew that sin was a barrier to fellowship with God
 - And everything in the Law served to reinforce that truth
 - Men were separated from the glory of God by barriers erected in the form of the tabernacle
 - And every encounter required blood sacrifice
 - And every appeal or approach required a priest to work on their behalf
 - And every appearance of God produced fear and trembling
 - But now by Christ's sacrifice, our relationship God has been turned upside down
 - Rather than fear, the Lord speaks peace to us, leading us not to fear Him, but to love Him
 - Rather than enemies, He calls us friends and comes to make His home within us

by His Spirit

- Rather than condemnation, He declares there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus
- And He invites us to serve Him in joy and without burden
- Finally, He has assembled a great family of brothers and sisters with us, who share in Christ's eternal inheritance
- Faced with these two alternatives, which one would you prefer?
- Would you voluntarily leave the New Covenant and take up again the Old?
 - Who would prefer to do such a thing?
 - Notice that the writer says plainly that his audience has already come to the New Covenant
 - And at the same time, he says they have not come to the Lord through the Old Covenant
- His point is, that if they return to Judaism, they can only do so by turning their backs on a relationship of grace
 - And if they do, they are returning to a relationship marked by condemnation and judgment
 - They are placing themselves back in a state where they have only an expectation of God's wrath
 - And once again, there are consequences for disobedience to the Living God

Heb. 12:25 See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven.

Heb. 12:26 And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN."

Heb. 12:27 This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

Heb. 12:28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;

Heb. 12:29 for our God is a consuming fire.

- The problem with these believers is neatly summed up at the beginning of v.25
 - God is always speaking to His children
 - He is never silent
 - While He may not be talking about the topics we have on our mind, He is always

speaking

- He speaks first and foremost through His Word
 - No believer can ever say “I haven’t heard from God lately”
 - Or “...the Lord isn’t speaking to me right now.”
 - Not as long as you are spending time in His Word
 - Every time you open the pages of Scripture, you will hear from the Lord
- The question is, will you hear Him and respond to His counsel?
 - Notice, the writer says they were refusing the Lord
 - “Refuse” implies that they heard
 - The Greek word for “refuse” is the same word translated “begged”, in v.19, speaking of the Jews who couldn’t bear to hear the voice of the Lord on the mountain
 - The writer is saying don’t plug your ears to God’s voice, the way the Israelites did at the mountain
- The believers in the writer’s day had heard the Lord speaking, in the sense that they had become believers in the New Covenant
 - They knew the truth of the Gospel and the truth of Christ
 - They heard the Lord in His Word and in the Spirit
 - But now, they were walking away from living their faith
 - They were refusing to listen and follow the Lord
 - Why? Because they didn’t have an eternal perspective
- Can you imagine refusing the Living God? Standing in His presence with your fingers stuck in your ears like a child?
 - Can any of us conceive of such a situation?
 - I’m sure we cannot
 - And yet, when we refuse the counsel of God’s Word
 - Or when we disobey the Spirit’s leading
 - Or even when we disregard the wise, godly counsel of church family and leaders
 - We are refusing the Lord
 - So this leads the writer to make one more comparison between the Old and New Covenants
 - He asks his readers to consider what becomes of those who fail to heed the instructions of the Lord
 - Those in Israel who failed to hear and follow the Lord in the desert fell dead, as the stories of Exodus and Numbers show
 - They were in the presence of God’s *Shechinah* glory on earth, so when they refused, the Lord’s wrath burned against them

- Knowing this, imagine what happens to those who hear God speaking directly from the Heavenly throne room and then refuse to listen?
 - The writer says in v.26, that the voice of God shook an earthly mountain in the day of Moses
 - But there will be another final “shaking” of both Heavens and earth
 - The writer quotes from Haggai, in speaking about that future day

Hag. 2:5 ‘As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!’

Hag. 2:6 “For thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land.

Hag. 2:7 ‘I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD of hosts.

Hag. 2:8 ‘The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,’ declares the LORD of hosts.

Hag. 2:9 ‘The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘and in this place I will give peace,’ declares the LORD of hosts.”

- Notice that the Lord makes a comparison between the moment at Mt. Sinai and His Second Coming
 - In that future moment, the Lord will assemble His people, just as He assembled Israel at Mt. Sinai
 - In that future day, He will assemble all the nations around the holy mountain where He will dwell in the Kingdom
 - And all the wealth of the nations will be present, speaking of the inheritance given to the saints
 - And from that wealth, the people will give to the Lord’s house in that Kingdom
 - Leading to a house of even greater glory than any before it
 - And the Lord says that day will be accompanied by a great shaking of all things in earth and Heaven
 - He’s speaking of the judgment that comes at the moment the Kingdom is stood up
 - It’s a time of accounting, a time of reckoning
 - Notice, the writer says in .27, that this shaking is like a sieve that separates
 - The earth and sea and heavens will be moved and shaken
 - And then what remains will be the works and rewards that enter the Kingdom
 - The writer is referring to the same principle Paul describes in 1 Cor. 3, of a believer passing through fire at the judgment seat of Christ
 - The point is, that God will expose all Creation to His scrutiny
 - And even those who have entered into the New Covenant will know His

- judgment, though without condemnation
 - The shaking won't disturb our place in the Kingdom, as the writer says in v.27
 - But the Lord's consuming fire is still a reality, as he says in v.29
- Knowing these truths, what should be our only reasonable response?
 - The writer makes that conclusion in v.28
 - Therefore, he says
 - Meaning, because of what we know about the Lord and our Covenant...
 - Because we have received this Kingdom on faith
 - And because it cannot be shaken by anything in this world...
 - Let's live up to that blessing, in gratitude for what we've been given
 - Don't let the world press in and disturb your confidence
 - First and foremost, in our salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone – that's not changing, it's a gift from God
 - But don't let deprivation, peer pressure, discomfort, lusts, desires and ambitions lead you to forget your Heavenly riches
 - Don't let persecution or threats against us lead us to fear those who cannot enter the Kingdom in which we will live forever
 - Don't let illness and relationship disappointments and loneliness drive us to forget that the Lord lives for us and in us, ready to greet us in the near future
 - And don't let the enemy's lies drown out the Lord Who is always speaking to you about these truths
 - Give to God your acceptable service, and do so in gratitude with awe and reverence
 - Live in gratitude for what will be yours in eternity, an experience that is barely around the corner of your life
 - Live in gratitude for the faith you've been given, for what Christ did on the cross, for the things that are certain and eternal
 - Take Christ's attitude with you everywhere
 - That though Christ had everything, He gave it up so that He could serve the Father in obedience
 - And because He obeyed, the Father raised Him up, exalted Him and gave Him everything
- That's the Lord we serve, and after He's done everything necessary to reconcile us with God, He only asks that we serve Him to our last breath
 - Nothing illustrates this better than the story of Scottish evangelist John Harper

Harper was born into a Christian family May 29, 1872. He became a Christian 13 years later and had already started preaching by age 17. He received training at the Baptist Pioneer Mission in London, and in 1896 he founded a church, now

known as the Harper Memorial Church, which began with 25 worshipers but had grown to 500 members by the time he left 13 years later. When asked about his doctrine, he stated it was simply "the Word of God."

While his spiritual growth followed a fairly direct uphill path, his personal life wasn't so smooth. When he was only two and a half, he fell into a well and almost drowned. At 26, he was nearly swept out to sea, and at 32, he found himself on a leaky ship in the middle of the Mediterranean. Most tragically, his wife died after only a brief marriage, leaving him alone with their daughter, Nana.

In 1912, Harper, the newly called pastor of Moody Church in Chicago, was traveling on the Titanic with his 6-year-old daughter. After the ship struck an iceberg and began to sink, he got Nana into a lifeboat but apparently made no effort to follow her. Instead, he ran through the ship yelling, "Women, children, and unsaved into the lifeboats!" Survivors report that he then began witnessing to anyone who would listen. He continued preaching, even after he had jumped into the water and was clinging to a piece of wreckage (he'd already given his lifejacket to another man).

Harper's final moments were recounted four years later at a meeting in Hamilton, Ontario, by a man who said: "I am a survivor of the Titanic. When I was drifting alone on a spar that awful night, the tide brought Mr. Harper, of Glasgow, also on a piece of wreck, near me. 'Man,' he said, 'are you saved?' 'No,' I said, 'I am not.' He replied, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.'

"The waves bore him away, but, strange to say, brought him back a little later, and he said, 'Are you saved now?' 'No,' I said, 'I cannot honestly say that I am.' He said again, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,' and shortly after he went down; and there, alone in the night, and with two miles of water under me, I believed. I am John Harper's last convert." He was also one of only six people picked out the water by the lifeboats; the other 1,522, including Harper, were left to die.

- Serve in awe and reverence, serve in gratitude, caring nothing for this world

- We're approaching the end of this important letter
 - The final chapter is before us, where the writer issues a series of exhortations
 - These exhortations are examples of how the church is to fulfill the writer's instructions from Chapter 12:28-29

Heb. 12:28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;

Heb. 12:29 for our God is a consuming fire.

- As we saw in Chapter 10, the writer adds another "let us" command
- He asks that we render a life of service to God, as a show of gratitude for His love shown to us
- This exhortation sounds very similar to Paul's instructions in Romans 12

Rom. 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

- Throughout Scripture, Christians are commanded to establish our life's priorities based upon a recognition that we owe God everything
- That's why the New Testament authors' favorite Greek word to describe a Christian's relationship to the Lord is *doulos* (slave)
- Christ is our Master, and He commands our lives
- And if we choose to live in obedience to Him, we will soon discover that His burden is light and our service to Him will be one of joy
- But there's no doubt that our relationship with Christ, in faith, brings certain obligations and expectations
 - These expectations set the standard by which the Lord will judge His people
 - Naturally, as those to be judged, we want to understand what those expectations are
 - Which is one of the reasons we have the Word of God, and in particular, the New Testament letters
 - Chapters like Hebrews 13 are important places to spend our time
 - Passages we must ponder and prayerfully reflect upon, so we will have incentive to live in a way that is pleasing to the Lord
 - So let's first direct our full attention on the writer's exhortations, beginning in v.1

Heb. 13:1 Let love of the brethren continue.

Heb. 13:2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

- As my introduction suggested, this chapter reads as a list of instructions
 - They are all loosely related to one another, in the sense that they are all self-sacrificial acts of Christian love, intended to show God gratitude for His sacrifice on our behalf
 - And v.1 serves as the topical sentence for the entire chapter
 - The love of the brethren is the overriding theme and goal of the writer's instructions
 - We are called as a Body to love one another
 - The Greek word used is *philadelphia*, which means “brotherly love”
 - And not merely in the sense of showing affection or friendship to one another
 - But in the full sense of *agape* love: making sacrifices for one another as a means of serving Christ
 - When we serve a brother or sister in the Church Body, from God's point of view, we are serving Him
 - So we must make our motive in all we do to love another believer
 - Let that love continue, the writer says
 - He uses the word “continue”, because this was the way of the Church in its beginning, and so it should always be
 - Our church body may not accomplish all the programs we desire
 - Not everything we attempt will be successful, at least not from our perspective
 - We may not grow as much as we like, or extend our influence as far as we hope
 - But those things are not the primary goal of our church
 - Our primary goal is to show the love of Christ, first to one another, and secondly, to the world
 - By this standard we will be measured
- So what does showing love look like?
 - The writer offers examples
 - First, the writer says don't neglect to show hospitality to strangers
 - In Greek, the writer's instructions are even more specific
 - He uses the Greek word *philoxenia*, which literally means “showing love to a stranger”
 - So in v.1, the writer emphasized love for brothers, while in v.2, he emphasizes love for strangers
 - In that day and culture, showing love to a stranger was synonymous with offering a traveling stranger shelter in your home

- That was a cultural expectation
- It was considered an honor to host someone in your home
- But as we learned earlier in this letter, persecution was increasingly common in the Church, especially among the Jewish believers
 - So as enemies increased, the Church began to withdraw from the culture
 - Where before, the Church would show love to strangers, opening their homes to anyone, now they were suspicious of strangers
 - They worried that strangers might be Jewish spies, who would report Christians to the authorities
 - Their fear of persecution led them to withhold their witness from strangers
- The writer's concerns here are not merely a matter of hospitality or kindness
 - The very mission of the Church lies in the balance
 - If we are so fearful or mistrusting of unbelievers that we withdraw from them, then we have abdicated our responsibilities as witnesses
 - Now, we better understand why the writer emphasized the need to fear God more than men
 - Persecution is a reality, and it always will be, in various forms
 - So we accept it as part of the deal we received with our salvation
 - We don't invite it, but neither do we run from it, at least not when it requires we compromise our witness and service to God
 - For these believers, this meant opening their doors in love for strangers and taking the risk that this act of love could lead to persecution
 - If that happens, so be it, for it can only happen if the Lord permits it anyway
 - And He says in Scripture to rejoice, for your reward in Heaven is great when you are persecuted for His Name's sake
- Today, our culture is growing increasingly hostile to Christian teaching and Christian values
 - So as we open ourselves up to the unbelieving world, to strangers, we have a growing sense that their response will not be positive
 - Increasingly, we will be rejected and slandered
 - We will be misjudged (even as they accuse us of intolerance)
 - We will be persecuted
 - But we can't let that lead us to withdraw from these "strangers"
 - We can't let that become an excuse to hide away in compounds, huddled together and away from scrutiny
 - We aren't supposed to wall ourselves off from the world, as Jesus said

John 17:14 "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because

they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

John 17:15 “I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.

- By showing love for strangers, even in the face of persecution, we follow in Jesus’ footsteps
 - We place our trust in God to accomplish great things through our sacrifice
 - The writer cites the example of Abraham entertaining angels
 - This is a reference to Genesis 18-19, when the Lord and two angels appeared as traveling strangers at Abraham’s tent
 - Abraham willingly received the “men”, and as a result, he experienced a special encounter with God
 - The writer’s isn’t necessarily saying we should expect to entertain angels, as Abraham did, though this might be possible
 - His point is, that by showing love to strangers, we have opportunity to see God working in miraculous ways
 - We may influence a heart to change
 - We may witness miracles of one kind or another
 - Who knows how much God might be prepared to accomplish through us...if only we open our door to strangers?

Heb. 13:3 Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.

- Next, the writer asks the church to remember the prisoners and those who are mistreated
 - In both cases, he’s referring to believers who are enduring trials as a consequence of their faith and witness
 - When a member of the Body of Christ is suffering for their faith, the entire Body is to see itself as caught up in that suffering
 - As Paul said in 1 Corinthians

1 Cor. 12:26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

- We don’t sympathize from a distance, saying to ourselves how unfortunate it is that our brother or sister is being persecuted
- We say to ourselves, “we” are being persecuted
- So therefore, we minister to them

- We pray for and with them
- We visit them in their distress and comfort them
- We assure them they are not alone
- And when it's our turn to endure, they will do the same for us
- And in this way, we give them strength to persevere in the face of these trials, so that their witness is made sure and the reward is complete
- Next, the writer says our proper service to God requires living in sexual purity

Heb. 13:4 Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

- The writer says Christians are to hold the institution of marriage in high honor
 - The Greek word for “honor” is *timios*, which means “precious” or “very costly”
 - Imagine the most valuable, most precious thing you possess
 - How would you treat that thing?
 - You would protect it, cherish it, honor it
 - To God, the institution of marriage is just such a thing, and therefore, if you want to serve your Lord well, you must cherish what He cherishes
 - And this requirement to cherish the institution of marriage must be cherished by all, the writer says
 - Not merely by those who are already enjoying the institution as God created it
 - But also by those who are not yet married
 - A married Christian couple is under obligation to God to honor marriage until death do you part
 - An unmarried Christian is under obligation to keep pure until the day he or she enters into a Christian marriage
 - And all Christians are to respect and honor the marriages of others, not violating that marriage by defiling the marriage bed
- Notice, the writer calls out two different types of sins at the end of v.4
 - First, he says fornicators will be judged
 - Fornication is a concept largely lost in our society today
 - The Bible says any form of sexual activity conducted outside of marriage is a sin called “fornication”
 - Of course, our culture has become so accepting of sex apart from marriage, that it has become not only acceptable, but commonplace
 - In fact, the idea that sexual activity is dependent upon marriage is an absurd idea to most people today
 - But the Word of God has not changed, nor will it change, to suit our flesh's sinful

desires

- So let's be clear what "fornication" means in the context of honoring the institution of marriage
- It mean taking something you do not have rights to take, according to God
- It is never appropriate for a Christian to engage in sexual activity, which means any form of sexual arousal, outside of marriage
- Christians may not live together prior to marriage
- Christians may not view pornography, before or even after marriage, for this is defiling the marriage bed
- And of course, this would cover any form of sexual activity, including homosexual activity, which is always sinful in any case
- In a world that is increasingly holding marriage in contempt, and wishes to repurpose the institution to suit their sinful desires, it becomes all the more important for the Church to witness to the truth
 - This does not necessarily require that we become politically active on this issue
 - But it does require that our own lives reflect the truth of marriage
 - How hypocritical is it for Christians to cry against homosexual relationships, only to return home to have sex with their live-in boyfriend or girlfriend?
 - The writer says God will judge us for these things
- Secondly, the writer says we must not participate in adultery
 - Adultery is the sin of violating the sanctity of another's marriage vows
 - Of course, the obvious example is when a person engages in sexual activity with a married person who is not their spouse
 - This is always wrong, and it does grave damage to the witness of the Church
 - How many hearts have been broken in the Church when a marriage is violated in this way?
 - It's even worse when this situation plays out publicly, as when a Church leader falls to this kind of sexual sin
 - But don't forget that marriage vows last until death, so this command to respect the marriage bed continues, even after a legal divorce
 - As Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians, we must respect another's marriage, even to the point of refusing to marry a divorced person
 - Once again, our culture reacts very negatively to the idea that "second chances" aren't possible when it comes to marriage
 - But the Bible's teaching is consistent and clear: only upon the death of a spouse are we released to marry again
- Finally, the writer makes perhaps his most challenging demand of the church

Heb. 13:5 Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being

content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,”

Heb. 13:6 so that we confidently say,

**“THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID.
WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?”**

- In the Greek language, v.5 begins “Without covetousness behavior...”
 - Christians are not to tolerate, much less indulge in, covetousness
 - Coveting is not merely jealousy over someone else’s possession
 - The concept is broader than that
 - It means any sinful wanting
 - We can sinfully want for things, just in the way our desire for the world’s offerings consumes our attention and drives our passions
 - That’s why the opposite of coveting is contentment
 - Being content with what you have already
 - It’s the difference between “more” and “enough”
 - So often, we have enough, yet we tell ourselves we need more
 - And it’s in the pursuit of more, when we have enough, that we run the risk of compromising our character
- Notice at the end of v.5, the writer quotes Deut. 31:6, where the Lord promises to Israel that He will never desert, nor forsake, His people
 - The writer is alluding to the sovereignty of God in assigning to each of us what we have
 - Since we know that the Lord will not forsake our needs, and will always care for His people, then we must think carefully about our station in life
 - God assigns to each of His children a provision adequate to our needs
 - That provision is a sign of His faithfulness to never forsake us
 - And our proper response to the Lord is contentment
 - As Paul writes:

1 Tim. 6:6 But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment.

1 Tim. 6:7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either.

1 Tim. 6:8 If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.

1 Tim. 6:9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.

1 Tim. 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing

for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

1 Tim. 6:11 But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.

- Good Christian character recognizes that God's provision is enough, so we should not devote inordinate time and effort to improving our financial or material status
 - For in doing so, we are potentially redirecting our energies away from more important and lasting pursuits
 - Like pursuing righteousness, godliness, faith, love and so on
 - It's not that having wealth excludes such things
 - It's about the opportunity cost
 - For example, a man looking at his week ahead could elect to spend more time at the job to earn more income, or spend more time in Bible study to deepen his relationship with Christ
 - There is only so much time in a day, so he can't do more of both
 - One pursuit is based in a love of money
 - The other pursuit is based in a love for the Lord
 - One is driven by desires for more
 - One is reflective of contentment
 - One choice potentially leads to covetousness
 - The other leads to godliness
 - These same choices exists for mothers, children, students, single people, *etc.*
 - Obviously, the writer isn't asking for Christians to forgo earning a living or supporting their families
 - He simply asks that we not strive to gain more than is essential, for in moving beyond the necessary, we distract ourselves from the true mission of the Church
 - And in the worst cases, our desire for more will lead us to compromising our character
 - Perhaps our love for money, or the comforts it brings, leads us to neglect our responsibilities to family or church
 - Perhaps we assume debts we can't repay
 - Perhaps we break laws, cheat clients, betray the trust of those we love
 - We may be prone to doing these things, because we aren't content to rely upon the Lord's judgment for how much is best for us
 - And because we aren't willing to patiently wait to receive our wealth in eternity
- In v.6, the writer reminds us from the Psalms that the Lord is my helper, so we have nothing to fear from the world

- If you feel insecure, and that insecurity drives you to hold off retirement one more year, or to put in just a few more hours at the job, ask yourself why do you hold such concern?
 - Will the Lord neglect your needs?
 - Will He forget you?
- Hasn't He promised you that He will meet those needs?

Matt. 6:31 “Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’

Matt. 6:32 “For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

Matt. 6:33 “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

- I wonder how often Christians miss the blessing of seeing the Lord “show up” in the way He promised, because we’ve robbed Him of that opportunity?
- I’ve known men and women living on the mission field, who have learned to live in this promise on a daily basis
- It’s amazing to hear their stories of how they encounter a need they couldn’t meet, but then God showed up in an unexpected way
- Our service of gratitude to the Lord brings with it an expectation that we set aside our desire to pursue earthly wealth and the status and comfort it brings
 - We still work hard and provide for our needs, so that we will not be a burden on others
 - But we make our goal pursuing righteousness
 - Trust the Lord to determine our compensation, so to speak
 - And remain content in His provision
- Test your heart...are you content? Or just convicted?
 - Or have you made the pursuit of the world too great a goal?
 - Is your character at risk?
 - Is the opportunity cost for your way of life so great that you are sacrificing eternal gain for earthly gain?
 - Let’s all consider these things carefully in the days to come

- We return to the final chapter of Hebrews
 - As you remember, the writer's final chapter consists of a list of exhortations
 - These are requests calling for the church to live-out their faith boldly, obediently
 - Each point the writer makes in Chapter 13 is rooted in the writer's call to offer God an acceptable sacrifice of service
 - He's calling the church to live in gratitude for what the Lord accomplished on the cross
 - And we show God our gratitude by living according to His commands
 - Last week, we studied the first three exhortations, all dealing with the witness of the church
 - First, the writer said, remain open to receiving strangers by showing hospitality, even though persecution was a risk
 - Secondly, honor the marriage bed according to God's Word, especially in a culture where sexual impurity is common and accepted
 - Finally, live free from the love of money by being content in a world that only seeks for more and more
 - Imagine the power of a group of believers where these things were routinely practiced?
 - How different would the Church look from the world?
 - From a selfish world lacking hospitality, marital faithfulness, and contentment?
 - How compelling might a loving, faithful, content group of people appear to such a world?
 - Then you can understand why the writer is emphasizing that believers make these behaviors a priority
- And now, we move forward in the chapter to consider an obligation which lies at the heart of our witness and message

Heb. 13:7 Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

Heb. 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Heb. 13:9 Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited.

- The writer asks the church to remember those who led you
 - The Greek word for "remember" means literally "observe carefully"
 - The writer is asking us to look at the examples set by certain men

- And then to imitate their faith, that is, the way they lived-out their faith
- We can see that the writer is speaking about a specific group of leaders: apostles
 - First, he says these led the Church in the past
 - In the very beginning, the Church was led only by the twelve apostles
 - In time, those men would lay hands on other leaders, who joined them in ruling over the Church
 - But in the beginning, it was just the apostles
- Secondly, the writer says these men “spoke” the Word of God to the Church
 - Only apostles were gifted to bring forth the Word of God
 - As we’ve discussed before, the apostles were the prophets of the New Testament
 - And they spoke (and wrote) the Word of God to the early Church
 - The writer doesn’t say these men “wrote” the Word of God, but rather, they “spoke” because many of the New Testament letters were yet to be written
 - The truth was still circulated largely by word of mouth
- Finally, the writer says, consider the result of their conduct
 - The result of the apostles’ conduct was the rapid and strong growth of the Church
 - As the book of Acts records, their faithful, sacrificial life of faith produced much fruit in the early Church
 - The apostles’ ministry was responsible for a multitude of converts from among Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles throughout the known world
 - There can be no better pattern to follow than the one set for us by these men
 - Obviously, we never saw the conduct of the apostles, nor did we hear them speak, but we do have the writings they left behind in the New Testament
 - So for the Church today, the command becomes to observe carefully the New Testament scriptures
 - Consider how the apostles lived and served the Church in the book of Acts
 - Give careful consideration to the teaching they left us in their letters
 - And imitate their sacrifices
- In the centuries since these men lived and ruled the Church, it’s become popular to claim the apostles operated from culturally-biased perspective
 - Bible critics assert that these men were products of first century Palestine
 - Patriarchal
 - Misogynistic
 - Overbearing
 - Authoritative
 - And so, they say, as we consult their teaching in the New Testament, we must filter

what we read, interpreting it in a culturally relevant way

- Critics will tell you that Paul's instructions regarding the roles of men and women are culturally dependent and no longer relevant
- The apostles' instructions on sexuality or Church leadership or family life or money, or even Heaven and Hell, are antiquated
- Therefore, we are free to reinterpret these issues based on modern values
- So though Hebrews says consider carefully the men who led and taught the early Church, the biblical re-constructionists say, take their example with a grain of salt
- I believe the Lord knew His Word, delivered through the apostles, would come under assault in this way
 - So He inspired the writer to testify that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever in v.8
 - The Word of God, spoken through the apostles, had its origins in Christ Jesus
 - While the apostles were human beings with certain biases and a certain cultural perspective, when they spoke the Word of God, they weren't speaking according to their own wisdom
 - They were speaking under inspiration of the Spirit, delivering a timeless message authored by God Himself
 - God's Word never changes, because truth never needs to change
 - Jesus is always culturally relevant
 - And yet, He's never subject to the whims of culture
 - God delivered to the apostles a set of instructions that were prepared before the foundations of the earth
 - And those instructions will outlast these heavens and earth
 - Ironically, long after all earthly culture is gone, these Words will remain in effect
- Which is why the writer says in v.9, that we are not to be carried away by other teaching
 - "Varied and strange teaching" refers to the assortment of confusing and false teaching the enemy offers to lead people away from the truth
 - The enemy's program is not to promote a certain false teaching, but to oppose a certain truthful teaching
 - The enemy doesn't care which false teaching a person chases after
 - He really is completely ecumenical when it comes to what false teaching you would prefer
 - Just so long as they don't follow after the truth found in God's Word
 - So Satan is always at work to create new, varied and strange teaching to draw people's interest away from the scriptures
 - But we believers can't allow ourselves to be caught up in these things
 - Instead, we must be strengthened in our heart by God's grace

- To be strengthened by grace means to be reinforced in our Christian liberty, resting in Christ's work alone
- Not becoming slaves to works of one kind or another
- If you understand that you rest in a work done by Christ, not depending on your own works to be acceptable to God
 - Then you will be empowered to serve God in tremendous ways
- But as long as you think you have to do something to please God, that your relationship is dependent on works
 - You'll be hampered by that notion, focusing on those things you think you must do to keep God happy, rather than being free to follow wherever He sends you
- As Paul says in Colossians

Col. 2:20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,

Col. 2:21 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"

Col. 2:22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with use) — in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?

Col. 2:23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

- Paul says by Christ's death, we have been set free from the principles of the world, which refers to works of flesh that try to earn God's pleasure
 - Having become partakers of God's grace, we need not concern ourselves with rules that demand we keep laws or rules intended to keep us clean
 - Paul mentions examples of do not handle, taste and touch, which are references to the laws of Israel, intended to keep a man ritually clean
 - These things have the appearance of wisdom, but they merely deal with treatment of the body
 - But once your soul has been made clean by the grace of God in Christ, these rules are without purpose in our lives
- Notice at the end of v.9, the writer mentions food also, adding that foods aren't the source of a Christians' strengthening spiritually
 - The Jewish believers in the Church of the writer's day were being tempted by false teachers to resubmit to the dietary restrictions of the Levitical system
 - They were being told to only eat certain foods and to abstain from non-kosher foods
 - These varied and strange teachings claimed that by abstaining from certain foods, these believers were making themselves more pleasing to God

- They were becoming more holy, more spiritually clean
- But this writer says, that these teachings were not capable of producing the spiritual benefit their proponents claimed
 - Only resting in God's grace holds any potential to grow us spiritually
 - And since Jesus never changes, we need not depart from His Word in seeking for additional advantages or secret solutions to godliness
- Some today are making the same mistakes again, returning to practicing selective parts of the Levitical laws, in the misguided expectation that these behaviors please God or increase holiness
 - Today, some believers have been convinced by various Jewish or "messianic" movements within the Church to submit to the dietary restrictions of the Mosaic Law
 - Some practice these things merely for personal health reasons or simply as a means of honoring Christ
 - In these cases, the Christian has liberty to live this way
 - Nevertheless, they must be careful to ensure their witness doesn't confuse other Christians about why they do what they do
 - On the other hand, if they practice such things thinking they are obligated to do it, or believing they are making themselves more holy or pleasing to the Lord, then the practice is wrong
 - It is a testimony to their spiritual immaturity and ignorance of Scripture
 - And this testimony is both false and potentially harmful within the Church
 - It has the potential to lead others to doubt in the sufficiency of God's grace
 - Ironically, those who claim the dietary restrictions of the Law are appropriate for Christians, often cite Hebrews 13:8 in support
 - They say that Jesus never changes His instructions to the believer
 - So if following the Law was necessary for Israel in the past, then it must still be appropriate for the believer today
 - Because, as they say, the Lord never changes
- But those who say such things are misinterpreting Heb. 13:8, misunderstanding the purpose of the Law and conveniently ignoring much of the New Testament
 - Heb. 13:8 isn't saying that Jesus' *instructions* never change
 - It says Jesus *Himself* never changes
 - But we see God's program changing across the pages of the Bible
 - For example, in the Garden, Man ate only plants
 - Then, after the flood, men were told to eat anything
 - Later, Israel was told to restrict it's diet in various ways
 - And now, the Church is permitted to eat anything

- Each of these changes was part of God's eternal, unchanging purpose
- We only come to understand this truth by consulting the entire counsel of God's Word
 - As a New Covenant believer, we are under grace, free from preoccupation with foods and such
 - Don't let physical, passing things become substitutes for resting in God's grace, found by giving careful attention to His Word
- Unfortunately, the strange teachings of that day went well beyond merely enticing Christians to limit their diets

Heb. 13:10 We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.

Heb. 13:11 For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp.

Heb. 13:12 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate.

Heb. 13:13 So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.

Heb. 13:14 For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.

Heb. 13:15 Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.

Heb. 13:16 And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

- While the writer doesn't come out and name the false teaching he is working against, we can tell what's bothering him
 - In a word, it's about sacrifice
 - The essential act of service to God has always been sacrifice
 - Sacrifice is the necessary payment for sin
 - Sacrifice appeases the wrath of God
 - Sacrifice restores fellowship
 - From Abel to Noah to Abraham to Moses and all Israel, and even to the Church today, sacrifice is at the heart of worship
 - Under the New Covenant, our sacrifice is found in the body and blood of Christ, sacrificed in our place
 - And then Paul teaches in Romans 12 that we, in turn, should make our lives a living sacrifice to God, in thanks for His mercy
 - He died for us, so we live our life for Him
 - We sacrifice our desires to suit His desires

- We sacrifice our priorities to accomplish His priorities
 - That's the proper New Covenant sacrifice, upon which our fellowship with God is made possible
- But Judaizers in the Church were teaching Jewish believers that they were still required to perform animal sacrifices on the altar at the Jewish temple
 - Like the dietary laws, this was one of those strange teachings that draw believers away from grace and back into bondage to Law
 - This teaching was even worse, because it had the potential to erode a believer's confidence in the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice
 - Because if it were true that animal sacrifice were required to remain in God's favor, what would that say about the meaning and power of Christ's death?
 - The writer's concerned that the people were being taught they still had to add to what Christ did – which negates what Christ did!
- The writer counters that temple sacrifices are useless, and he proves his point by highlighting the role of the priests
 - In the temple, the priest officiated for you in that sacrifice of the animal you delivered – *you worked with the priest* to get that done
 - The role of every priest, as we learned earlier in this letter, is to represent God before men and men before God
 - But the writer points out that the priests officiating in the temple sacrifices couldn't qualify to eat from the Christian's altar
 - Eating at the Christian's altar is a reference to participating in the Christian communion meal, which pictures our Lord crucified as our sacrifice
 - The Jewish priests in the temple were not believers, since they had not accepted Christ as Messiah
 - So they were not qualified to participate in the Christian communion meal
 - And yet, Christians felt it necessary to turn to these men as intercessors who could advance their relationship with the Lord?
 - So how sadly ironic, that a Christian might seek the services of a priest who himself did not know our Lord and Intercessor!
 - Certainly, no Christian should seek the services of such a meaningless ritual
- In vs.11-12, the writer reminds his readers that the animals sacrificed in the Levitical system were never more than pictures of the one, true sacrifice God makes available in His Son
 - The bodies of the bloodied animals were taken out of the temple and burned outside the camp of Israel, as required by the Law
 - Even in this detail, the writer points out that the Law pictured Christ
- For in the same way, our Lord's body was crucified outside the city walls, in fulfillment of this picture
 - And that sacrifice resulted in the sanctification of Christ's people, all those who trust

in His sacrifice

- The writer is reminding his readers that the Lord's sacrifice was entirely sufficient to atone for sin and sanctify us
- Those earlier animal sacrifices merely pointed to a future atonement with the power to address all sin for all time
- Because this church was willing to succumb to strange and false teaching about the Law and sacrifices, they were in danger of undermining their witness
 - Think about what they told the world every time they went back to the temple and cut up another animal
 - Instead of remembering the teaching of the apostles and holding to that teaching, they were drifting away, setting aside their witness
 - They were telling the world that Christ is not sufficient, that you need something more
 - When in fact, what you need is what you already have!
 - And by their willingness to chase after such things, they set aside their sacrificial service to God
 - They were living a lie, instead of living in the truth
 - This is an ever-present danger for the Church
 - The specific kind of strange teaching may change
 - Back then, it was participation under the Law
 - Perhaps today, it will be some strange teaching about spiritual gifts, prosperity, healing, or the like
 - Whatever captivates the Church and distracts us from Christ, leaves the same potential for danger and disruption
 - Instead of preaching Christ and Him crucified, we begin witnessing to something false, temporary and meaningless
- Usually, this transition from the true Gospel to something less, is a result of misplaced affections or a desire to fit into the culture
 - In the writer's day, the motivation was avoiding persecution
 - Notice in v.13, the writer calls upon his audience to be willing to suffer reproach with Christ
 - That was the issue driving their willingness to return to the temple service
 - If they returned, they would placate the Jewish community living around them
 - And every time a Christian did that, the Jewish world saw it as a victory against Christianity
 - They saw it as showing the Faith to be weak and hollow
 - As a result, the witness of those individuals was lost
 - From the point of view of the Jewish community, though these Christians persisted in following their discredited rabbi, Jesus, at least they kept the

required temple services

- But the writer calls the Church not to be afraid of suffering persecution for Christ
 - Christ suffered for us
 - So we may be called upon to suffer for His Name's sake
 - And if we try too hard to avoid persecution, we may be tempted to engage in some very unbiblical and unhealthy practices
 - Just as these believers were tempted to return to the temple service
- Interestingly, the writer says in v.14, that the Jewish believers did not have a lasting city, referring to the city of Jerusalem of that day
 - As I covered in my first lesson, this letter was probably written in the years right before the temple and city were destroyed by the Romans
 - The writer seems to have known that the destruction of the city was coming soon
 - He says it's not going to last
 - In other words, it was futile for believers to continue showing an interest in things that were destined to pass away
 - Things including the earthly temple and even the city of Jerusalem
 - Symbols of unbelieving Israel
 - Instead, the writer says the believer must maintain a focus on the eternal city, the Heavenly Jerusalem, which is our future home
 - As I like to say, living with eyes for eternity, which means considering all our actions from an eternal point of view
 - When you live this way, you will come to different conclusions about so many things in life
 - If you're living with eyes for eternity and are faced with a choice between suffering persecution or forsaking our witness, you'll make the right choice
- With the right perspective, you'll understand what kind of sacrifice God desires, as the writer says in v.15
 - He says if you desire to make sacrifice to God, then let's do it in the way God receives it
 - Continually, we are to offer up sacrifice of praise
 - He explains that means the fruit of our lips
 - Testifying with our mouths to the truth of the Gospel
 - Naming Christ as Lord, in other words
 - Testifying publicly about God's grace and giving thanks for His mercy
 - That's the acceptable form of praise we are to offer God
 - How is this a sacrifice?
 - Because sometimes that testimony will result in persecution, hatred and

rejection

- That's the sacrifice Christ receives
- Moreover, the writer says don't neglect to do good and share with others in what you have, and these things are sufficient sacrifice
 - We don't need to return to old means of sacrifice
 - We don't need to return to the Law
 - We don't need ritual
 - Nor do we need to invent our own rituals
 - We don't need new forms of legalism
 - Let's set aside various forms of strange and false teaching
 - All we need is to live sacrificially for the Christ Who saves us
 - Knowing and following His Word
 - Follow the example of the apostles
 - Make our lives a living sacrifice
 - Live with eyes for eternity

- Our study of Hebrews is at the end
 - We reach the end of the letter with still a few exhortations remaining to consider
 - But as we come to this point, it's appropriate we take a few moments to review the main points this writer has made in his letter
 - And naturally, the main points center around the five, distinct warnings the writer issued along the way
 - The letter began in Chapters 1 & 2, with proofs from the Old Testament on the pre-eminence of the Son of God
 - He was the fulfillment of all OT prophecy
 - All OT prophecy spoke of a Messiah Who was more than merely prophet or king
 - The Messiah has always been described in Scripture as God Himself
 - God taking the form of man to live and die in our place because we couldn't save ourselves
 - From there, the writer launched into his first warning, which is the danger of drifting by this truth
 - Like a person floating by a dock without latching on to it, there were some who had an outsider's curiosity of the faith
 - They saw Christ at a distance, but never seriously considered Him to be God, much less did they worship Him
- Next, the writer moves closer into the gathering, focusing on those who have associated themselves with the gathering, yet without belief
 - The writer used the example of the generation of Israel in the desert, who saw the wonders of God, yet never experienced faith in the heart
 - They were an unbelieving generation
 - And from their experience, the writer issued the second warning
 - For those who fail to believe, will be barred from entering into God's rest
 - We must accept the truth of the Gospel in its full form if we are to be saved
 - We are sinners, and if we die in our sin, we will live eternity in torment as exile from God
 - But this does not need to be our future, not if we accept Jesus' death on the cross in our place
 - The Father has poured out the wrath we deserve upon His Son on the cross instead
 - If we believe that Jesus is God, dying in our place and that the Father resurrected Him from the grave, we will be saved
 - And we enter into His rest
- The three remaining warnings moved closer and closer to the heart of God's people, to the issues facing believers
 - In Chapter 6, the writer warned the church of the dangers of not pressing on to

maturity through study of God's Word

- Without maturity, we will not have the capacity to please the Lord
- And if we don't please Him, then we will not see our full reward
- In Chapter 10, the writer turned to warning the church over willfully sinning
 - When we knowingly and repeatedly choose sin over obedience, we risk a hardened heart
 - We also risk bringing the judgment of God upon ourselves
 - For the Lord has said He will judge His people
 - Even though we are saved from the penalty of our sin, we remain accountable to the Lord for our actions
- Then, in Chapter 11, we studied the incomparable chapter known as the Hall of Faith, where the writer used example after example of OT saints to illustrate faith
 - The common feature for every example was living with an expectation that the rewards of faith await in the Kingdom
 - We can't rush the plan of God
 - We can't take our rewards early
 - We must be prepared to suffer at times, while we await the glory that we have been promised
- This led to the final warning in Chapter 12, that we not shrink back from our walk of faith, even in the face of trials
 - We must anticipate and accept the discipline of the Lord
 - And as we encounter His discipline, we must endure in our faith
 - We can't allow any one of us to fall, to grow bitter and weak
 - To retreat from their walk of faith
 - For in the end, if we pass up the opportunity to serve God in the midst of trials, then we also pass up the potential to receive a full inheritance
 - Like the proverbial Esau, who complained bitterly when he realized what he had lost
 - But by then, it was too late to change the past
 - Let's not allow any one of us to reach that same point
- And then, we came to Chapter 13, to the exhortations for how to live-out our witness successfully
 - We've studied how to love the brethren and strangers
 - How to identify with those who are persecuted and ill-treated
 - Not to let the fear of persecution silence our witness of Christ's love
 - To live free of love of money and with respect for the sanctity of marriage
 - To respect the teaching of the apostles and the authority of Scripture

- To rest in the once and forever sacrifice of Christ, not returning to a life of dead works
- As we prepare to finish the letter, consider once more the power of a Christian life lived according to these principles
 - Ask yourself how brightly will my light shine in this dark world if I lived this way?
 - If I was known as someone who held Scripture as the authority in my life?
 - If I loved both those inside and outside the Body of Christ with equal sacrifice and devotion?
 - If I was faithful both before and after marriage?
 - If I lived in contentment with all I have been given by God?
 - If I rested in the grace of God?
- Who could ignore a witness like that? And how greatly might the Lord reward a saint who lived in those ways, obedient to His commands?
 - That's what's at stake in this letter
 - Godliness in serving God and pleasing Him
 - A witness He can use for great purposes
- So with that review, we come to the final exhortations for the church

Heb. 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

- I've been looking forward to this verse for the entire book (joke)
 - The writer says, the Body of believers must obey and submit to their leaders
 - Let's begin by acknowledging an obvious, but important truth
 - The Lord did not organize His Church as a commune or democracy
 - Christ rules His Church
 - And He has appointed human leaders to administer over the affairs of the Body
 - According to Scripture, Church leaders come in two forms
 - First, we have men called "elders" or "overseers"
 - These two titles are used interchangeably in the New Testament
 - In Titus 1, Paul uses these two terms interchangeably to describe those who rule over the Church
 - Elders rule over all matters in the Church
 - The second form of leader is called "deacon"
 - Deacons are men or women who come under the authority of elders or overseers, who are always men

- They lead through service to the Body, assuming responsibility for organizing and executing the work within the Body
- Interestingly, the New Testament never names a pastor as a leader of the Church
 - Paul only uses the term “pastor” once in all his letters
 - And that mention in Ephesians occurs in the context of a list of service gifts to the Body
 - So pastoring is a gift of service to the Body, according to Paul, not a position of leadership
 - They serve through shepherding the flock, by feeding them the Word of God, counseling, encouraging, exhorting
 - Obviously, a pastor can also be an elder or even a deacon
 - But they don’t necessarily have to hold a position of authority
 - If a pastor is not an elder, then they submit to the authority of the elders, like the rest of the congregation
- Therefore, a church should be led by elders and served by deacons, and these positions are filled by those who can meet the qualifications given in Scripture
 - We can find those qualifications in 1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1, and I invite you to look over them in your own time, later
 - We can summarize them in two statements
 - Elders must be men who know the Word of God well enough to teach it to others
 - And both elders and deacons must possess personal testimonies that reflect the Word of God lived-out
 - We are told to seek leaders with these qualifications, because we want those who lead us to model what following Christ looks like
 - To inspire us to do the same
 - And a healthy church should have both elders and deacons working together to serve and lead the Body
 - As we see in the first church in Acts 6

Acts 6:1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.

Acts 6:2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.

Acts 6:3 “Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.

Acts 6:4 “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

Acts 6:5 The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.

Acts 6:6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

- The twelve apostles were effectively the first elders of the church
 - They served the church primarily through the teaching of God's Word and praying for the needs of the Body
 - Their teaching was essential to the development of the Church
 - They were building up the Body in the commandments of Christ, according to the great commission
 - Remember, Christ said these men were to teach the Church to obey all that Christ commanded
 - And they prayed for the Church, which refers to more than simply personal prayer
 - These men prayed over others
 - Praying for healing, praying for guidance and equipping
 - In certain cases, their prayers were essential to the work of the Spirit in coming upon new believers
 - So by teaching and prayer, these men ministered to the most essential and important needs of Christ's Body
 - But there were other needs, and when it came time to meet those other needs, the leaders didn't substitute other duties for their primary responsibilities
 - They couldn't neglect the duties of elders, because if they neglected those duties, who would fulfill them?
 - So they turned to other men of good character and appointed them to serve the needs of the Body
 - These men were the first deacons of the Church
 - This should be our pattern, as well
 - We have leaders, called elders, who oversee the church
 - These men, along with pastors and teachers, build up the Body in the Word and in prayer
 - And around them, we find others serving the Body
 - Sometimes, we will give these servants the title "deacon", or we may not
 - But the role of deacon is essential to the Church, if the elders are to be free to teach and pray and lead
- So back to Hebrews, what does the writer mean when he directs us to obey our leaders?
 - Most certainly, he is speaking of the elders of the Church

- Those who direct and lead us are to be respected as men the Lord has appointed to that purpose
 - The writer says we are to submit to their authority
- Obedience is a heart attitude, while submission is the behavioral evidence of obedience
 - We might claim to be under authority, to be in obedience to authority
 - But until we submit to that authority, we have not demonstrated obedience
- The requirement to submit is true both corporately and individually
 - As our elders make decisions for the Body, we are obligated to submit to those decisions as a Body
 - We work in good faith to carry-out those requirements
 - We see these leaders as an extension of Christ's authority
- Only in the case where their decisions come into conflict with the Word of God, would be have a cause to contend with their authority
 - And even in such cases, the Scripture still prescribes a process for challenging an elder's authority (1 Tim. 5:19)
 - We are to hold elders in high esteem and give them the benefit of every doubt
- But the requirement to submit is also an individual requirement
 - When elders give us personal counsel, exhortation or rebuke, we are commanded by Scripture to listen to them and heed their direction
 - This is never more true than when we receive correction for personal sin
 - Should an elder or elders confront us over sin, we are commanded by Scripture to obey these concerns
 - Pride and personal opinion have no place in obedience and submission
 - And to be clear, we're not suggesting that elders are always right in their judgments
 - The command to submit and obey is never conditioned on a personal assessment of the correctness of the authority
 - Slaves don't submit to masters only when they are right
 - Children don't submit to parents only when the parent is asking for the right thing
 - Wives aren't called to submit to husbands only after carefully examining the husband's logic and reasoning
 - Submission isn't truly submission until we're asked to do something we don't want to do
- Notice, the writer explains that submission to our leaders is in our own best interest
 - He says leaders keep watch over our souls, as those who will give an account
 - The leadership of the Church exists to guard your soul, in the sense of guarding you against yourself

- We all need help from time to time
- We need the advice, counsel and even correction of others to help us move away from sin and toward sanctification
- The Lord loves us so much, He's seen fit to appoint shepherds over His flock
 - And so, we only hurt ourselves when we elect not to listen to their counsel and direction
 - It's unprofitable for us to object to their wisdom and leadership
 - The "profit" the writer is speaking about is the eternal profit for those who please Christ in their service
 - If your leaders give godly counsel, and if you listen and obey, then you stand to profit greatly from their positive influence
 - In the same way that a child will profit from the good advice and counsel of godly parents, so will we profit from listening to our elders
- Finally, notice this is a two-way street
 - The writer says the leadership of every church will be called to account for those they led
 - This is a sobering reminder to leaders that we must be prepared to face our judgment over how we led the Church of God
 - Were we diligent, selfless, sacrificial and honorable in our leadership?
 - Did we speak the truth, or hold back the Word of God?
 - Did we live it out, or perform our responsibilities in hypocrisy?
 - Let's agree we will always seek leaders who exemplify the high standards of Scripture, while also committing to following their lead
 - Let's not make their job any more difficult than it already is
 - Let's submit to their leadership and counsel
 - Let's be mature enough to appreciate that failure to submit will only hurt us in the long run
- Part of that responsibility extends to praying for these leaders to be successful

Heb. 13:18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things.

Heb. 13:19 And I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner.

- The writer asks his readers to pray for them to have a good conscience
 - A good conscience means having a testimony that is guilt-free, without cause for condemnation
 - If we are to respect and follow our leaders under all circumstances, then clearly, we want godly leaders to follow

- Who wants to be submitted to a scoundrel?
- And yet, sadly, in many places today, that's exactly the situation believers are facing
 - Their leaders are dishonest, unqualified men
 - And so the writer asks the church to pray for its leaders continually
 - Pray that leaders will remain godly, honest, sincere, dedicated and of godly character
- Understand that the enemy loves nothing better than to disgrace and disqualify leaders in the Church
 - And these moments are harmful for all of us
 - Our hearts must be directed in support of our leaders, even if we're not particularly pleased with their decisions or preaching
 - We need them to conduct themselves honorably, for their sake and for the sake of the entire Church
 - Pray for that outcome
- This writer also asked for prayer so that he might be restored to the church sooner than later
 - The words in Greek are a subtle reference to captivity
 - In other words, this writer was writing from prison, it would seem
 - How much more remarkable is this man's letter to the church, when we realize he has been writing it from the center of persecution?
 - He is one of those witnesses suffering for the faith
 - And while he's in that position, his concern is for the rest of the Church to live-out an acceptable witness as well
 - This is the kind of self-sacrificial witness we want to see from those who lead us
 - Men and women who assume positions of leadership for personal gain or ego will be seen for who they are sooner or later
 - The Lord has a tendency of testing His under-shepherds so as to expose their motives
 - Men who serve for decades without compensation and selflessly giving their time to the Body of Christ are the exception
 - And yet, they are the exactly the kind of leader we want to emulate
- To close his letter, the writer reminds us that our earthly leaders are merely temporary substitutes for the True Shepherd, and it is that Shepherd we seek to serve

Heb. 13:20 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord,

Heb. 13:21 equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and

ever. Amen.

- This is the writer's benediction, which is a blessing at the end of a religious teaching
 - He ends, reminding us of Who we serve and why we serve Him
 - Christ is our Great Shepherd Who has saved us by His blood
 - How must service and devotion and obedience do you owe the one who spilled His blood for you?
 - The answer is, everything
 - And yet, His love for us doesn't stop at our salvation
 - He continues to bless His children by equipping us to works of service, according to His will
 - We work to please Him, and He has prescribed both the means and the ends of that process
 - He gives us the spiritual power to complete works that glorify Him
 - And He's created the opportunities in which we accomplish that service
 - All of it done to the glory of Christ
- Friends, that's the reason we sit here this morning
 - We're here because we've been saved, not in order to be saved
 - And we serve Christ, because He died for us first
 - We serve in His power, power He gives us by His spirit
 - Wisdom, energy, and a heart to love others
 - Things we could never find in our own power
 - And we seek to please Him, not ourselves, because we have died to self
 - If only we decide to live our lives for Him
 - If only we take advantage of the opportunity
- Finally, the writer ends the letter

Heb. 13:22 But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.

Heb. 13:23 Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you.

Heb. 13:24 Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.

Heb. 13:25 Grace be with you all.

- In v.22, the writer asks that we might bear with this word of exhortation and a footnote about Timothy's release and a personal greeting end the letter
 - The writer asks us to give careful consideration to these words and to hear, or obey,

what's been written

- He says these things must be considered carefully because he's written briefly
- The letter isn't very long, not in comparison to all that could be said on these matters
- So all the more important not to overlook what's here
- The writer has given us a recipe for great joy and great reward
 - He's explained the sufficiency of grace in Christ
 - He's woken us up to serious threats
 - And to great examples of faithfulness
 - Let's not study without application
- Any Scripture you read but don't apply stands as witness against you, rather than as a tool to bring you closer to Him
 - Let's not just be hearers of the Word – let's become doers