

1 – “God’s Final Word,”

Hebrews 1:1–5 // HEBREWS: *Christ is Better*

Intro:

- New series. Hebrews.
- Quiet Time: 45 minutes.
 - Make fun of QT
 - 15/15/15 (Equip blog)
 - Can’t do 45? Do 20

Theme: *Christ is better.*

The letter, and that’s it is, a letter to a church, is birthed in a concern: the writer wants to urge these people to go all the way with Jesus.

They had had this initial conversion, but then things got tough.

- Some of them facing severe persecution.
- Loved ones were suffering.
- Friends were departing the faith.
- Of course, there’s were the normal temptations
- And then, there was this whole set of things they found hard to believe? The Bible teaches that? Nobody believes that.
- They were like, “Wait a minute. This was supposed to be easier. And they were starting to lag behind.

Some of you know what that is like, don’t you? If you are honest, you are struggling with faith. You thought you’d accept Jesus and everything would become peace, love and groovy vibes. If you’re a single girl, Mr. Right was supposed to come swooping in... the

perfect blend of tough and tender, kind of like ultimate-fighting-Jesus... then you’d get married.

You’re supposed to wake up every morning strumming Chris Tomlin tunes on the harp you keep beside your bed, with visions of rapture now bursting on your sight

- But that’s not happening. Your marriage partner does not seem to be getting any better; if anything, they seem dead set against frustrating you spiritually.
- Temptations are getting more tempting, not less.
- You’re finding it harder to walk with God.
- Or you’re in pain... And it’s hard to feel spiritual in pain.

And so you feel your faith is lagging...

The writer of Hebrews has one basic message: “Don’t give up! Christ is better. Go all the way with Him!” Faith dominates this book. **Faith is acting in a way now that you’ll know later you be glad you did.**

Now, one word of warning we dive in. This is a very difficult book:

- William Barclay (a scholar I refer to a lot) calls it the most difficult book in the entire New Testament. William Lane agrees, but says if you’ll press into it, it is one of the most rewarding books in the whole Bible.
- We’re not really sure who even wrote it: Barnabas; Apollos; Paul; Luke. We just don’t know. The church father Origen in the 3rd century said simply, “We have no idea who wrote it.” If he didn’t know then, we probably won’t know now.
- What we know is that it came out of the Apostolic community, and was regarded as authoritative in the church from the very beginning.

Hebrews 1:1

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,

- Think about all the ways God spoke in the Old Testament: He revealed Himself through visions and dreams; He delivered

messages through angels; He spoke in audible voices or whispered out of whirlwinds; He wrote on walls; He appeared in burning bushes; inspired worship songs; put messages in the mouths of donkeys; He even inspired gave a book of erotic poetry.

[2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son,

- Literally “in Son.” (Not a great English translation, but literally what it says.)
 - Not just “by” His Son but “in” Son. The previous prophets had given the word of God; Jesus was the word of God. He was the perfect embodiment of the Father.
- “In these last days.” Think of God’s work in the world in 3 primary “acts”: Creation and Fall; Israel; Jesus
 - This is going to be helpful when a Muslim or Mormon... Jesus was great, but the real message come from Joseph Smith or Mohammad. No, the last revelation period was Jesus—in these last days: the final act.
 - What about Apostles, didn’t they write after Jesus? “Witnesses,” not prophets. Not writing anything new, just reporting and clarifying Jesus.

[2] whom he appointed the heir of all things,

- Now the writer starts to show you how Jesus is superior to all the prophets.
- Jesus is the heir. Heir means “the one it’s all coming to.” Think of a father trying to prepare an estate for a son.
- Everything that God created; everything that God did on earth; it was *for* Jesus.
- The prophets were pointing to something; Jesus was the thing they were pointing to. He was the point.

...through whom also he created the world... and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

- Jesus created all things and upholds it all by His power. None of the other prophets did that. Think of the sheer magnitude of this.
- He created all things:

- The other day I was reading that our solar system has a diameter of approximately 7.5 billion miles. If you got in a car and started driving at 65 mph, to get across our solar system would take you 13,172 years, or 338 of my lifetimes. Just our solar system. Astronomers say there are over 100 billion solar systems in the Milky Way galaxy *alone*; and over 50 billion galaxies in the universe.¹
- Jesus created all that and holds it all in His hand. Any other prophet come close to that? Anybody here come close to that? Some of you are proud that you constructed your own back deck, or you built your own company. Jesus’ creation is on a slightly different plane than yours.

[3] He is the radiance of the glory of God

- Think of when you look at the sun. You see radiance. Watched a special last Sunday on one of the nerd channels I frequent... The core of the sun is this high pressure environment where these atoms collide together and fuse and emit this light and heat... That’s what Jesus is. The brightness of God’s glory.

and the exact imprint of his nature,

- **Signet ring.** In Jesus, you see exactly what God is like.
- Everything that God was Jesus was.

This is giving you great insight into the Trinity.

- Best analogy of Trinity: **word (Timothy 1 to Caliph)**
- All these are saying the same thing: radiance; exact imprint.

The whole point: Jesus was a fundamentally different type of message from God. *Other prophets gave the word of God; Jesus is the word of God.*

¹ MacDonald, James. *Vertical Church*. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2012, 30. (To be released)

⁴So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. [5] For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"?

- Now, that's a quote from the Old Testament. In this case, 2 Samuel 7.
- Now, here's the thing. Sometimes quotations like these throw people off because they go back and read this passage and the writer is clearly talking about someone else. In this case, the writer is talking about David's son, Solomon.
- Here's the story: David decides he wants to build a temple for God. God says "no," you can't, David, you have too much blood on your hands. Your son will build me the temple. That's what the verse the writer of Hebrews is quoting is talking about.
- So people would say, "Why would you apply that to Jesus? If you read the rest of 2 Sam 7:14, it says, [14] *I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men.*"
 - Whoa, wait a minute. Jesus will commit iniquity? How is this about Jesus.
- Great question. Let me teach you something about how the NT writers understood the Old Testament.
 - Luke 24, says that Jesus, after His resurrection, walked His disciples through the whole Old Testament and showed them how all of it—every story, was ultimately about Him.
 - Now there were direct prophecies about the Messiah.
 - Micah 5:2
 - Isaiah 53
 - But then there were all these stories shadow and substance that Jesus would fulfill.
 - Solomon was like that. David's son Solomon was a man of world-renown wisdom who would build a beautiful temple where the glory of God would dwell. But he would also be foolish, marry 700 women, and his

temple would be end up being robbed, plundered and torn down.

- David's ultimate Son, however, Jesus, would be the real temple of God where God would dwell among us permanently. Even when it was torn down would be raised back to life so that God dwell in us forever.
 - Solomon gave a dim picture; Jesus gave the fullness.
- So the author sees in this, and in every Old Testament story, sketches and pictures and shadows that Jesus would embody in fullness.

So Jesus is superior to all prophets and angels because while they were only messengers; He was the message. They *gave* the word of God; He was the word of God. They were the servants; he was the heir; they told us what the Creator wanted; He was the Creator Himself.

But there's more:

[4] *After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,*

- Now comes the really amazing thing. Not only was Jesus of a fundamentally different nature; the kind of ministry He had was of a fundamentally different kind.
- Other prophets gave instructions about what we must do to be reconciled to God. Jesus, on the other hand, did a work on our behalf. He did for us what we couldn't do for ourselves (made purification for sins), and then, it says, He sat down. You sit down when there is nothing left to do.
- The Jewish people had a sacrifice system to cover over their sins. It was a great picture of what Jesus would do, but it was never complete. Sacrifices were offered daily. Each family had to participate at least yearly. The priest was always standing by the altar. Imagine what the altar looked like, with the blood of hundreds of thousands of animals offered daily for hundreds of years.
- Jesus offered Himself once for all as the perfect sacrifice for sins and then He sat down. There was nothing left to do. It was finished.

So this first chapter basically has one point: Christ is superior to all prophets, angels, and any other spiritual authority. For two reasons (If you're taking notes, write it down this way):

1. ***Prophets and angels gave the word of God; Jesus was the word of God. That to which the prophets pointed faultily, Jesus embodied perfectly.***
- It's always been about Him!
 - Every story in the Bible is about Him. Tim Keller says:

*"Jesus is the truer and better **Adam**, who passed the test in the garden and whose obedience is now imputed to us.*

*Jesus was the truer and better **Isaac**, who was not just offered up by his father on the mount, but was actually sacrificed for us.*

*Jesus is the truer and better **Jacob**, who wrestled and took the blow of justice we deserved, so that we, like Jacob, only receive the wounds of grace to wake us up and discipline us.*

*Jesus is the truer and better **Joseph** who sits at the right hand of the King and forgives those who betrayed Him and uses His new power to save them.*

*Jesus is the truer and better **Moses** who stands in the gap between the people and the Lord and who mediates a new covenant.*

*Jesus is the truer and better **Job**, the truly innocent sufferer, who intercedes for his stupid friends;*

*Jesus is the truer and better **David**, whose victory became ours, even though we never lifted a stone to help Him.*

*He is the truer and better **Samson**, crushed under the weight of the wicked world to conquer our enemies and save us.*

*He is the truer and better **Jonah** who was cast out into the storm so that we could be brought in.*

*He's the real **Passover lamb**; innocent, perfect, helpless; slain so that the Angel of Death can pass over us;*

*He's the true **temple**; the true **Prophet**; the true **Priest**; the true **King**; the true **sacrifice**; the true **Lamb**; the true **light**; the true **bread**;*

In the end, the Bible's really not all about you, it's all about Him."²

- That affects how we read the Bible. I've told you before that we often read the Old Testament incorrectly.
 - We read the Bible as if it's a collection of hero stories to give us these people we should try to emulate. "Follow God like Abraham." "Defeat your giants like David!" "Lead your people like Nehemiah." "Dare to be a Daniel."
 - And that's all well and good to an extent, but there were a lot of things about them you don't want to emulate.
 - Moses had an out of control temper.
 - Abraham had a habit of lying in tough situations.

² Adapted from Tim Keller, sermon at Resurgence Conference 2007.

- David committed adultery; then lied about it and murdered someone to cover it up.
- At the end of his life, Nehemiah lost control and went Jack Bauer on everybody. (It says he got so mad he took the leaders of Israel and pulled out their beards and ripped their clothes off.)
- So there are a lot of things about these guys you do not want to emulate.
- That's because the prophets weren't given to us primarily as examples to emulate; but to point us to a Savior to adore.

Second reason Jesus is better:

2. **Jesus offers a totally different kind of salvation**

- As I explained a moment ago, most religious prophets give you instructions about what you should do to find peace with God.
- Jesus' message was about what He had done to give you peace with God. He didn't stand up and say, "go and do;" He sat down and said, "It is done."
- **Me on plane with guy:** I left church because they focused on the differences rather than the similarities. Love other people.
 - Have you ever read Bible? All religious prophets teach: obey→acceptance. Jesus taught: acceptance→obey.
 - Produces a whole different disposition before God. If it's what you do that earns your acceptance before God, then your heart is filled with fear (haven't done enough); guilt; or self-righteousness & pride; violence.
 - If our acceptance is a gift of God based on what He's done, that produces assurance; humility; generosity. On the surface it may all look the same. We're obeying God's laws. But underneath that thin veneer of obedience is an eternity of difference in motivation. If we think we have to obey to be saved,

we obey out of fear, pride and self-interest. If we start to obey because we have been saved by grace, we begin to be motivated by gratitude and love.

- 500 years ago Martin Luther started to preach that Christ had done it all and we needed merely to rest in it. RCC of the time said, "You can't go around telling people that Jesus has paid their sin debt entirely forever. If you take away their fear of hell, they'll just do whatever they want." And Luther said, "No, if they see that Christ has removed all fear of hell by absorbing it into Himself, they'll start to do whatever He wants."
- Luther started to decry what he called, "*the damnable doctrine of doubt*" which was the idea that only by being threatened with hell will you behave. He said, yes, being afraid of judgment will produce obedience on the surface, but beneath that obedience is a river of fear, pride, and self-interest. The only way to develop real love for God is to have fear removed; He said, *the real fruits of righteousness grow in the soil of assurance.*
- Metal bar
- Resting in the love of God for you is what produces love for God in you. The fire to do in the Christian life comes from being soaked in the fuel of what He has done.
- Christ is God; He is the Savior; He accomplished salvation for you and He sat down.

So the writer uses that truth to urge 2 things, which is how he closes his introduction, in chapter 2:1. And these serve as the intro for the rest of the book:

Hebrews 2:1-4, *Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. [2] For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, [3] how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?*

1. Don't neglect God's final word in Christ (2:3)

- God didn't come to you threatening judgment; He came overflowing with love and absorbed your judgment in your place. *If you won't listen to that; if you spurn that, what hope is there for you?*
- I tell you what parable I thought of... the one where Jesus talks about a landlord that owned a field and sent a servant to check on the workers. The workers beat the servants... killing the Son? If I'm the Son, and you won't listen to me, what else can God do?
- I think we can one-up Jesus in His parable. The Son came. They killed Him. Then He resurrected. It's one thing to knock Him off and shut Him up. But when He gets back from the dead, and you still ignore Him, that goes from stubbornness to insanity.
- There is a group of people here that believe that Jesus was God, you're just not paying that much attention to Him. You don't hate Jesus; you're just like, "Not now. Not a great time. I've got a lot of other things going on in my life now."
- **What are you waiting on?** What else could God do? God became man and died for you! I can understand if you don't believe that... but if you do believe it, just to ignore it? What will it be like for you if you spurn the Son of God?
- Others of you—let me ask this: does your reaction to Jesus match the weight of His glory? A lot of you treat Him like a religious leader you pay attention to sometimes; ignore other times. Like He's the spiritual weather man...
 - **Elisabeth Elliot:** "Think about this, if the distance between the earth and the sun (92 million miles) was the thickness of one sheet of paper, then the distance from the earth to the nearest star would be a stack of paper 70 feet high. And the diameter of our galaxy would be a stack of paper 310 miles high. Our galaxy is only a speck of dust in the universe, and if there is a person who holds all that together

by the word of his power... is this the kind of person you ask into your life to be your personal assistant?

- **N.T. Wright:** "*How can you live with a terrifying thought that the hurricane has become human, that the fire has become flesh, that Life itself has walked into our midst? Christianity either means **that** or it means nothing. It is the most devastating disclosure of the deepest reality of the world; or it is a sham, a total nonsense. Most people, unable to cope with either of those two things, are condemned to live in the shallow world in between.*"
- That's where most of you are: the shallow inbetween. He's either a sham; or He's real. You've got to make a decision! He either is who He claimed to be; or else He is a depraved, wicked, lunatic...³ You either need to fall at His feet in absolute adoration or join in His crucifixion.

The last thing I'll point out, just by way of introduction to the book, is what the writer is trying to say to the people who are struggling or lagging behind. In vs. 1:

2. Don't drift away! (2:1)

- He knows these people are prone to drift. And He can't promise them that everything is always going to go right. But what he can tell them is that Christ is better than anything else they can obtain on earth.
 - Tyler Zeller this past week... it's easy to celebrate Christ as the guy who helped you score a big contract.
 - Matt and Emily Bennett: our heart is broken, but Christ is better.
- Hebrews 11... the author talks about two kinds of people who experience different things on earth.

³ Quotes from Elliot and Wright with reflection are from Tim Keller sermon on Hebrews 1.

Group 1:

Hebrews 11:32 *And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—[33] who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, [34] quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. [35] Women received back their dead by resurrection.*

That's a great group. But then he says:

Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. [36] Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. [37] They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—

- Now, I know what you're saying, "Jesus, please put me in group #1." And I want Him to. For you and me. I'm not one of these people who feels like God delights in ruining your life or that you should delight in suffering. God is good; He's working salvation on the earth and I see that goodness manifested in my family.
- But all that I'm promised for the future is Christ, and you have to determine whether He is enough. You need to decide if there's anything you have to have in addition to Him; if there's anything you'd forsake Him to obtain.
 - A mentor once told me that I needed to determine right now if there were ever any circumstance in which I would be unfaithful to Veronica. Make that decision. If the answer was no, I needed to start live that way and just not go down paths that would put me in situations I'd be tempted in.
 - You need to decide if there is anything you'd leave Christ for. *Is He worth following? Is He worth forsaking all for?*

- Here's why you've got to determine that: For the rest of your life, God and Satan will test that. God will give you rich times of blessing, yes; but also times of deprivation, to see **if He** is your soul's true delight.
- The author says, "Don't drift! Anchor yourself to Jesus!"
- So, are you anchored to Jesus? Is He enough? Right now, you are either anchored to Him, or you are in the process of drifting away.
- *Which one are you doing right now?*

PRAYER: Can you say to Jesus: "You are all I need. I'll follow you anywhere. I'll give up everything. You are my God; my Savior; my life; the anchor of my soul"?

Let Him pour His love over you right now; let the Spirit of God unite your heart to His.