

hebrews

JESUS: THE BETTER WAY

Following rules is something many believers do. How often do we trade in the complete and perfect gift of Jesus for a list of "things" that we've been convinced we need to perfectly execute? And how often do we limit Jesus in our lives because we fail to have a complete and full understanding of Him? Why would anyone want to live this way?

The author of the book of Hebrews had a specific reason for writing to his audience — to build the case that Jesus is better than the religion they were used to. He saw first-hand how these believers were reverting back to living life in bondage and adhering to religious rules.

The message of Hebrews is that Jesus Is Better, because Jesus Christ is superior to all. He is supreme in our lives and in the church. Because of that we press into him, not giving up instead living a faith-driven life, doing his will, pleasing him and bringing him glory.

Over the next 13 weeks, we are going to be looking at the first six chapters of Hebrews. One commentator makes the point that the gospels tell the story of the impact of Jesus' work while he walked on earth. Hebrews tells of Jesus Christ's work while seated in heaven. This is where he is now and all the resources of eternity are for him to invest in us. Having studied the Gospel of John together, Hebrews becomes a natural progression.

Hebrews starts out like a sermon and ends like a letter. You'll notice how just about every section starts with words like 'now,' 'for,' 'therefore.' It shows that it is a thoughtful progressive argument. It's like a logical reasoned argument reinforced with lots of Scripture to back the argument up.

Author, date and location

Overall there is uncertainty over who wrote Hebrews, from where, to where and when. Origen wrote in around 254 AD, 'Who actually wrote the epistle, God only knows.'

The content of the book shows it was written to Christians who had been Jews and gentiles who had been drawn to Judaism but had become Christians. It's likely that it was written to the churches in Jerusalem but not certain. It also refers a lot to the sacrificial system in the present tense and it's likely therefore that it was written before the destruction of the temple in AD70.

What is clear is that Hebrews was 'unanimously and enthusiastically accepted by the early church as the inspired word of God, written by the Holy Spirit through someone anonymous.' (Pete Briscoe). Be encouraged therefore to dive into the book as a group rather than try to speculate too much on who wrote it.

Outline of messages starting on 15 April

1:1-4 - Jesus, Better

1:5-14 - Who's really in charge?

2:1-4 - Freedom for rule followers

2:5-9 - Message to the hurting

2:10-18 - Afraid to die

3:1-6 - Church v. Jesus

3:7-19 - Hearts that are deadly

4:1-11 - Don't fall short, rest is available

4:12-16 - Out in the open... A healthy approach to sin

5:1-10 - What to do when you mess up

5:11-6:3 - Christian Risk Management

6:4-12 - Can you lose it all?

6:13-20 - God's promise or my effort?



hebrews

WEEK 1 • 15TH APRIL 2018 • HEBREWS 1:1-4

1. What are the various ways that you can think of God having spoken 'long ago?' (v1)
 - Have a look at John 1:1-4 & 14-18. What makes the words of the Son different to the ways God spoke 'long ago?'
 - To what extent do the words of the Son require a different response?
2. Verses 2-3 include seven statements describing the greatness of Jesus.
 - Which one stands out to you most and why?
 - Which statement is most likely to have a positive impact on the way you live your life?

hebrews

WEEK 2 • 22ND APRIL 2018 • HEBREWS 1:4-14

1. Hebrews 1 presents Jesus as the one who is really in charge.
 - In what ways does the passage demonstrate this?
 - Have a look at Psalm 2 which speaks ultimately of Jesus. What is the context of Jesus' superiority?
 - How does this affect your perspective on world events?
2. In contrast to many western nations, the kingdom of God is not democratic; 'Your throne O God will last forever.'
 - What do the following verses tell us about the character of God? Exodus 34:6-7, Isaiah 11:2 & Hebrews 1:8-9.
 - What would be different for a nation if it was permanently governed by a king with these characteristics?

3. Jesus rules with justice — he rules according to what is right. This is something that is often rejected in our day where people choose what they want to believe instead of accepting God's standards.
 - How have you seen this affect conversations about difficult issues either publicly or with friends (e.g. marriage, gender, euthanasia).

 - What have you learned about engaging in these conversations with grace and truth?

4. We see in this passage (v9) that Psalm 45 links joy with righteousness — that the presence of sin robs us of joy.
 - How is this something that you have seen in your life?

 - How might a verse like Psalm 51:12 be a help for either yourself or those around you where you find yourself caught up in a sinful pattern?

hebrews

WEEK 3 • 29TH APRIL 2018 • HEBREWS 2:1-4

1. The writer of Hebrews urges his readers to pay attention to the words of Jesus 'all the more.' The sense of this phrase in Greek literature was 'exceedingly' or 'beyond measure.'
 - Why do you think the writer uses such strong language here?
 - What would it look like if you were paying this level of attention to Jesus' words?
2. Verse 3 describes the message of Jesus as a 'great salvation.'
 - What is so great about this according to Ephesians 1:1-14?
 - Paul's prayer for the Ephesians (v18-19) was that God would enable them to know this all the more. Why not pray for each other that your hearts may be enlightened all the more.

3. Hebrews 3:8 shows us that one of the ways people can drift past is a hard heart; Galatians 3:5 shows it can come from trusting in following the rules.
- Are there any other ways people can drift past that you can think of?

 - What are some 'rules' we might try and follow to make ourselves feel good enough for God? What does it look like to pay attention to Jesus instead?
4. Drifting away carries the sense of 'great loss occurring imperceptibly.' It's a great consequence that ultimately involves eternal separation from God. Why not pray for those in your life who don't yet know Jesus - that they would pay attention 'exceedingly' to the message of Jesus.

hebrews

WEEK 4 • 6TH MAY 2018 • HEBREWS 2:5-9

1. Have a look at Psalm 8 which is the the Old Testament text that is quoted in this week's passage.
 - What does it reveal about the dignity and importance of people?
 - How does this compare to the way you see yourself? What might need to change?
2. Verse 8 tells us that God has made everything subject to Christ. What does Ephesians 1:22-23 tell us about God's purpose in this? What effect do you think this should have for what we expect God to accomplish in and through us?

3. While Jesus is victorious and supreme, the full realisation of his kingdom is in the future when he returns. As we wait, we experience the conditions of a broken world. Have a look at the following verses: Romans 8:18, 2 Corinthians 1:5-7, 1 Peter 4:13-14.
- How do they adjust our perspective on suffering as Jesus-followers?

 - Which verse is most relevant or encouraging to you and why?
4. What does 2 Peter 3:8-10 tells us about the reason for Jesus not returning immediately? How does this affect your view of outreach? As you think about the people in your world that you are praying for, what is one thing you can do this week to help them towards believing in Jesus?

hebrews

WEEK 5 • 13TH MAY 2018 • HEBREWS 2:10-19

1. The passage begins with the assumption that God is bringing 'many' people to glory; it's something that may not seem evident when we consider our city.
 - What do these verses tell us about the nature of the community God is gathering? (Revelation 5:9 & 7:9)
 - How does this affect your expectation of what God is doing through the church in Wellington?
2. While our sin can often leave us with a sense of shame, we learn here that Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters (v11). How might a deeper understanding of this help us to come as we are in church community?

3. The death of Jesus broke the power of death over us, a power that enslaved us (v14).
 - In what ways does/did death enslave people?

 - What does Revelation 1:17-18 tell us about that?

 - What would your life look like if you really lived as if death had no power?

4. It may seem morbid to talk about death but it is a really important conversation because we realise that even in this issue, there is reason for hope.
 - What are some of the perspectives or beliefs that people in your world have around death?

 - How does what we're learning here help as you engage in conversation with them?

hebrews

WEEK 6 • 27TH MAY 2018 • HEBREWS 3:1-6

1. When called to consider Jesus (v1), the word means to fix your eyes or mind on something. What are some of the ways you are trying or have tried to do that?

2. It's important to notice how this passage refers to 'we' and 'our' rather than 'I' or 'my.' How does this affect the way you respond to the call to consider Jesus?

3. Our confidence and hope is something to boast about or take pride in.
- What are some other things that the Bible says people take pride in? (Romans 4:2, 2 Corinthians 5:12, Galatians 6:4)

 - How would your experience of life group be different if people constantly took pride in these things?

 - What about if your life group was a community where people took pride in the confidence and hope found in Jesus?
4. The word confidence in verse 6 is used to mean speaking boldly – it's confidence that's shared. Why not take some time to share with one another how you have seen the faithfulness of God in your own life?

hebrews

WEEK 7 • 3RD JUNE 2018 • HEBREWS 3:7-19

1. Procrastination – putting off until tomorrow what should be done today.
 - Why do you think people do this? If you don't, what motivates you to get things done today?
 - Why do you think there is such an emphasis in the Bible on, "Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts?"
2. How are the hearts of Israel described in verses 8-9?
 - What do the following verses tell us about the situation for us in the age of the church? (Jeremiah 31:33 & Ezekial 36:26-27)
 - How can we ensure we are continually soft-hearted towards God and open to his work in our lives?

3. Hebrews 3 shows that one of the clearest evidences of being 'saved' is that there is a continuing belief in Jesus Christ as Lord (Hebrews 3:6 & 14). However, this is not the only evidence, what are some others?
- Ephesians 1:13-14, Romans 8:14, Galatians 5:22-23, 1 John 2:10
 - Imagine a friend asks you for some advice; they say, "I believed in Jesus when I was younger and got baptised. But now I'm not so sure if it's true, do you think I'm going to heaven." How might you approach this conversation?
4. The lesson from Israel is that they saw God move miraculously and yet they chose to grumble.
- How can you grow in noticing God's work in your life and sharing that with others?
 - How can your Life Group be a community that encourages one another daily?

hebrews

WEEK 8 • 10TH JUNE 2018 • HEBREWS 4:1-13

1. God talked about our entering rest as a promise. What is the significance of this according to 2 Corinthians 1:20?
2. Verse 2 shows us that just hearing the good news is not enough — our response is faith. Have a look at Ephesians 2:8-9. How would you explain the relationship between grace and faith to someone who had never heard of them?
3. The concept of rest is given in the context of the Sabbath where God rested from all of his work.
 - How does the writer of Hebrews tie in the idea of rest to faith in Jesus? (Hebrews 4:9-10)

- How do these verses show what that rest looks like practically? (Romans 5:1-2, Galatians 3:2)
 - What are some signs that show you're not acting like you're at rest with God? How do these verses encourage you to live differently?
4. The passage finishes with a well-known verse about God's Word.
- What is a purpose of God's Word according to verse 12?
 - How might your life begin to look differently if you used Psalm 139:23-24 as a prayer every day as you read some of the Bible?

hebrews

WEEK 9 • 17TH JUNE 2018 • HEBREWS 4:14-16

1. This week's passage is about the privilege we have to approach God. What keeps you from approaching God? Are there times you find yourself staying away?

2. Have a look at the parable Jesus tells in Luke 18.
 - Think about what the two people's lives looked like. Which one seems like they're acceptable to God?

 - What is the message that Jesus is teaching through it and what can we learn from it in the way we see ourselves and others?

3. Think of a big event in your life – (e.g.) starting a new school or job, moving house, getting married).
 - How does the experience change your ability to help others going through that same thing?

 - How does this help you to understand verse 15 better?

4. Other major world religions have a god figure who sets the standard, and people have to figure out how to become acceptable to that god.
 - How does this passage in Hebrews demonstrate that Jesus is dramatically different to this?

 - What about these verses? (John 1:12, Romans 5:8, Ephesians 2:8-9)

 - Imagine a friend believes that all religions are the same. How might you explain the distinctiveness of Jesus and grace to them in everyday language?

hebrews

WEEK 10 • 24TH JUNE 2018 • HEBREWS 5:1-10

1. We're told that as high priest, Jesus is able to deal gently with those who sin.
 - What is the difference between someone who has dealt harshly with you over an error versus someone who deals gently?

 - Which one helped you to change more and why?

2. What does verse 7 reveal about the humanity of Jesus? In what ways can you identify with his experience? To what extent does this make Jesus seem more relevant for you?

3. 'Learned obedience through suffering' means that Jesus put obedience into practice - he made a habit of it.
- How do you see God challenging you to new levels of obedience? What are you learning here?

 - What does it take to be a person who develops a habit of saying 'yes' to God?
4. Jesus is revealed as the source of eternal salvation.
- How was this different to the past experience of Jewish-Christian readers of the letter? (Hebrews 10:1-3)

 - How does Ephesians 1:13-14 add to this?

 - How does the foundation of eternal salvation affect how you live?

hebrews

WEEK 11 • 1ST JULY 2018 • HEBREWS 5:11 - 6:3

1. Imagine if you had never been weaned off of milk and that's all you ever ate/drank now.
 - What would be different in your life?

 - How might this help us understand the need to move to spiritual solid food?

2. What is the marker of maturity referred to in verse 14? What might change in your life if this were even more true for you than it is now?

hebrews

WEEK 12 • 8TH JULY 2018 • HEBREWS 6:4-12

If you didn't listen to Sunday's message, it may be helpful to listen to some of it as part of your life group discussion.

1. As you reflect on Sunday's message, what is clearer for you now than before? Is there anything that you're still not sure about? What questions do you have?

2. Following Jesus begins by believing (John 3:16).
 - What does Hebrews 3:14 say about this?

 - Have a look at Acts 2:38. What should we expect genuine believing to look like? How is this different to just intellectual assent?

3. Acts 2:38 says that a follower of Jesus receives the Holy Spirit - the powerful presence of God in their life.
 - What characteristics is he producing in our lives? (Galatians 5:22-23)

 - How have you seen some of these characteristics growing in your life?

 - How do you see the need for these characteristics to grow further?

4. Have a look at 2 Peter 1:5-10.
 - What does Peter understand the purpose of maturing in faith to be? How does this fit with Hebrews 6:11-12)?

 - What does it look like in your life to make 'every effort' (2 Peter 1:5) and what steps could you take towards this?

3. Abraham was able to wait patiently for God's promises to be fulfilled.
 - What does the passage tell us about how he was able to do that?

 - How do you find waiting for God to move? Is it easy to be patient or not? What have you learned about what helps?

4. Hope is a major theme of this passage — it's also a major theme of a little-known letter, Titus. Have a look at Titus 3:4-7. What does it show about the hope we have and where it comes from?

5. Verse 19 tells us that this hope is like an anchor for the soul.
 - How does the concept of an anchor help us understand the purpose of this hope in our lives?

 - What can lead us to lose hope and how does what we're learning here help us guard against that?