

Lifeline March 17, 2004
The Book of Hebrews

I want you to get together with those people that are sitting together with you on the couch you are on and go over the following:

What image or word comes to mind when I say:

Church

School

Pizza

Baseball

Martha Stewart

President Bush

The Bible

Lifeline

Now look up on the screen and tell me what you think of when the next 10 pictures goes across. (Flip through the slides one at a time for about 5 seconds each).

The images we just saw are for the most part all related in one way shape or form connected with Christianity. The problem we sometimes gets into is we start to get caught up in the different images, symbols, traditions of Christianity that we lose sight of the person and relationship of Christianity. Well tonight, we are starting a 3 week series through a book of the New Testament that dealt with this same problem to some extent back in the earlier part of Christianity. That book is the wonderful letter to the Hebrews.

Before we dive into this amazing book we need to keep in mind three things concerning those it was initially gave to.

1. The people were heavily influenced by Jewish practices and thought. This plays into how we are to understand what the author of the book is talking about and the struggles they were going through. One of the difficulties to understanding and reading this book comes from the reality that one must know a good deal about the Old Testament and in particular the book of *Leviticus* in order to fully understand the theology and concepts that show up here. For instance, in next week we are going to look at a couple passages that describe Christ as our High Priest. If you are not familiar with what the High Priest for the Jews did yearly, you lose the meaning behind what it means that Christ is our High Priest.

Another issue that we will somewhat discuss tonight and will definitely see on Sunday is the Jewish thought that no one could see God and live. Right along these lines is the thought that God could not die. This is one of the major, in my opinion, stumbling blocks the Jews in the past and in the future still have concerning who Christ said he was and is. The writer of Hebrews dispels this myth but without the understanding of the thought can we truly have an appreciation for the Christians that were struggling with this notion.

2. Were struggling in their faith in the midst of persecution and trials. On our last night talking about the book of Hebrews we will see just how the author tries to persuade them in keeping their faith. The Jewish Christians that received this sermon went through things that most of us today never could dream of. However, as we study this part of Hebrews we will see that we too need to realize what the author meant concerning the “great cloud of witnesses” we have cheering us on. In this section we will also see what responsibility we have to each other in our faith.

3. Needed to take their faith a step further and deeper. Throughout a great deal of this book our author will lay out a specific aspect about Christ and then use that to spur others on to being a better Christian and going deeper than we would ever dream of. In fact, as you read through this book, and I encourage you to do that as we go along in this journey the next three weeks, there were times when the author flat out tells our readers and us today that we aren't doing things they way were should. We sometimes get caught up in what we already know and forget that the Christian walk is something that we must continually work on, we can't ever get content and comfortable with where we are but instead must strive to have a faith that grows and is deeper with each year, month, week, and day that we live.

Tonight we are going to look at two passages that set the scene for what we are going to see Sunday night in “The Passion of Christ.” If you have already seen the movie hopefully this may help reiterate what you saw on the screen and for those of us who have yet to see the movie will help set the stage for what we will see. I will do my best not to tell you what the ending is but leave you in suspense.

Right now I want you to think of some people that are superior to you. What types of people come to mind? What makes some superior to another person? Right at the outset of the book the author is challenging the thinking of the Christians concerning who they thought was superior to whom. The answer is: Christ is superior to all that has been, will be, and is to come. Nothing is superior to Christ. In fact if you want to make an extra note on your lifeline handout you can mark this as the theme: Christ is far better than the old way of things, better than prophets, priests, and angels.

Hebrews 1.1-4

^{HEB 1:1} In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.⁴ So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

For the next couple of minutes we are going to go straight through these verses along with a couple other from chapter 2 and see how this will help us as we prepare for the Passion of Christ this weekend.

1. Christ is superior to the prophets of the Old Testament. Verse 1-2 and gives us our first contrast of the book. I know at least once before I have clued you in to what I believe the greatest word in the bible is. Can anyone recall what that word is? A little hint it is found in verse 2. That's right the word "but" is what I consider the greatest word in the Bible. This is so because of what always comes after that word and how it always gives a clue on something that is either better or that sits in stark contrast to the preceding statement.

Here in these verses the contrast is between the prophets of old, the method that God used to speak to His people, and Christ the Son of God, the new method.

2. Christ is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of God. Verse 3. This is the reason most Jews do not accept Christ for who He is. In fact, it is probably why some of you here tonight may not accept Christ for who He is. This is one theme that goes through the remainder of our book and really sets up a lot of the discussion we will have over the next couple weeks. It is also the center of the movie "The Passion of Christ". You cannot walk away from that movie so I am told, or read the accounts in the Gospels without getting this as the motive of the Pharisees to crucifying Christ. In the book of Hebrews this is one the many truths that should spur us on in our faith and help us to grow.

3. He is superior to the angels. Verse 4. This is the point I want to expound on for the remainder of the time together using another passage of Hebrews found in chapter 2. Please turn again with me to Hebrews 2.5-9.

The prequel to the *Passion of Christ* can be found from reading and understanding Hebrews 2.5-9a.

Hebrews 2.5-9

HEB 2:5 It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. ⁶ But there is a place where someone has testified:

"What is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?"

HEB 2:7 You made him a little lower than the angels;
you crowned him with glory and honor

HEB 2:8 and put everything under his feet."

In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. ⁹ But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

1. Mankind was created to rule over all things. Vs 5-8a (See also Genesis 1-3) I want someone to read for me what God told Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden before the fall took place in regards to our role as mankind over the earth. Read for me Genesis 1:28-30.

GE 1:28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

GE 1:29 Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground--everything that has the breath of life in it--I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

Alright I need a volunteer to help me out as we go through the following verses and hopefully help us understand what is going on here in Hebrews. (Give the volunteer the flashlight). This flashlight represents for us tonight the power, rule, and scepter so to speak that Adam and all of mankind received from God when we were created. That is the point to the first couple verses we read in our passage.

When we were created everything, including the angels, were put underneath our command as humans. We held the power of the world in our hands like our volunteer holds the flashlight in His. This is something that baffled many of people in our past and some of us still today, as our writer put it. Why in the earth Lord would you even think of allowing us to have this power. After all we are just like dust on the shelf when it comes to the big picture of things. In spite of that, God still gave us this power and right.

Yet it didn't last. 2. Mankind did something that causes us to lose the power and kingdom we once ruled. Vs 8a. As I stated earlier a good knowledge of the Old Testament is crucial to understanding what is going on here. Go back to Genesis for a minute and let's pick up our analogy again. Someone read for me Genesis 3.14-15.

GE 3:14 So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,
"Cursed are you above all the livestock
and all the wild animals!
You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust
all the days of your life.

GE 3:15 And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel."

Okay I need another volunteer here. Our volunteer now has become the serpent. When Adam and Eve sinned it caused our power, rule, and scepter to be transferred from our hands to the hands of the one who became our ruler. That is why Hebrews states that “Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him.” At the point that Adam and Eve sinned all of mankind lost the power that we once had. But back in Genesis God promised that we would someday get that power back and here in Hebrews our writer is starting to explain how that took place. But this part of verses points to our next point and the next verse.

3. In essence we needed someone like us to save us from ourselves. Vs 8a-9
But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. This is exactly where the movie picks up and what we will see. Jesus who has we found out in the first chapter is superior to the angels, just as we were before the fall, and because of that he decided that he would help us get back what God originally gave us. He did this by becoming like us and going through what we will see in the movie. If you are left in suspense and not sure you want to wait until this weekend and the movie read and study the next couple verses and you will see exactly what I am talking about. But it is here that we are going to leave as we look forward to the “Passion of Christ” on Sunday.

What we just talked about sets the stage for our aftermeet this Sunday. If you have not seen the movie and were not planning on seeing it with us I would hope that what we discussed tonight would get you thinking about joining us for this wonderful movie. I also hope that our time tonight helps you in your faith as you realize some more truths about Christ and what he has done for you. If tonight you want to know more about Christ and what he has done for you please come see me. As we study Hebrews the next two weeks I hope that you will be open to being challenged and will allow your mind to be expanded. Let's Pray.