

Sermon Notes & References

**Hebrews:
Our Great Saviour**

January 12, 2014

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10. 10:23

11. 11:1

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^A John 14:5

^B Hebrews 2:3, Acts 18:24

^C Hebrews 3:12

^D Hebrews 12:4, Acts 18:2, Hebrews 10:32-34

A. Introduction

I. Making Us Believe

- a. In a message given almost 50 years ago, Pastor Ray C. Stedman of the Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California, recounted this event: **The other night some of us were gathered in a home discussing the state of affairs of the world. We commented on the fears, the tensions, the sense of futility that prevails in so many circles these days. Earlier someone had read the eighth chapter of Paul’s letter to the Romans, where he speaks of the whole creation groaning and travailing in bondage, and futility stamped upon all things. In our discussion the question arose: “What can we do about this?” As Christians, we knew the answer to the world’s problems, but the problem was: “How to make the world believe the answer?” Among us was a young Christian who seemed considerably troubled by our discussion. With a deeply concerned look on his face, he said, “Why is this? Why doesn’t the world believe what we have to say?” Then he added, “I think it’s because so many Christians don’t act like they believe it themselves.” Then he asked the logical, but thorny, question: “How can we make Christians believe what they believe?”**–(2).
- b. How can we as Christians be brought to believe so fervently that the people see by our actions that we do believe?

2. Hebrews Answers that Question

- a. Hebrews directs our life focus
 - (A) to our Great Saviour
 - (B) to Jesus, the Christ
 - (C) to the Son of God
- b. Jesus is the only object of faith
 - (A) that can change our lives so people can see Him in us
 - (B) so they may come to believe what we Christians believe
- c. Jesus said it Himself
 - (A) **“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”** (John 15:5)
 - (B) too many Christians seek to be Christians apart from Him

B. The Book of Hebrews

I. What is the form of this book?

- a. in our English translations it is frequently headed as
 - (A) “The Epistle to the Hebrews”
 - (B) or, “The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews”
 - (C) but the headings at the beginning of this and other NT books in the Greek manuscripts, are usually not the work of the author, but rather of the

copyists and compilers to identify each section

- b. Hebrews does not have any of the marks of an epistle (i.e., letter)
 - (A) there is no identification at its beginning
 - (1) of the author
 - (2) of the recipients
 - (B) which Paul, Peter, James, Jude and John do in their letters
 - (1) (as an aside, properly speaking neither is 1 John a letter)
 - (C) and only the last few verses have the form of a letter
- c. the writer Hebrews rather describes it as a 'word of exhortation' (13:22)
 - (A) so it is more like a well crafted sermon than a letter
 - (B) and in its form it serves as a treatise of practical doctrine

2. Who wrote Hebrews?

- a. has been a subject of debate from earliest church history
- b. one early tradition, proposed by Clement in Alexandria, Egypt,
 - (A) was that it was written by Paul in Hebrew,
 - (B) then translated by Luke into Greek
 - (C) against this it can be argued
 - (1) it does not show the marks of translation, such as are found in the early chapters of the gospel of Luke where he depended upon Hebrew (Aramaic) speaking sources
 - (2) it uniformly quotes the LXX version of the OT and depends upon that translation in some places for its arguments even when it differs markedly from the Hebrew Scriptures
 - (D) moreover, the author says that the gospel message was 'confirmed to us by those who heard,' (2:3) i.e. Christ's disciples, on which Paul strongly affirms in Galatians he did not depend
- c. others who have been proposed as its human writer are
 - (A) Barnabas, who as a Levite would be familiar with the OT ritual – but this was information freely available to the Christian church
 - (B) "... a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures." (Acts 18:24)
 - (C) jointly by Priscilla and Aquila
- d. Origen, a second century Alexandrian Christian scholar, disagreed with attributing it to Paul, but summed up the argument, saying, 'But as to who actually wrote the epistle, God knows the truth of the matter.'⁻⁽³⁾ or as more than one wise pastor, when questioned on this subject, has said: 'whoever the writer, the Holy Spirit is its Author.'

3. To whom was it written?

- a. again, there is a diversity of opinion
- b. some have maintained that it was written to Gentile Christians
 - (A) on the basis that retreating back from Christianity by Jews could not be described as ‘falling away from the living God.’ (3:12)
 - (B) but to depart from Christianity is indeed to fall away from the living God as He has finally revealed Himself in Jesus Christ
- c. others say that it was written to Christian and other Jews in Jerusalem as an apology, defending Christianity as the fulfilment to Judaism
 - (A) hence explaining salvation in terms of the OT sacrificial system
 - (B) using a rabbinic form of argument
 - (C) but the writer would not then have used the LXX translation to those Hebrew (Aramaic) speaking Jews
- d. that it was written primarily to Jews seems obvious given both the illustrations and arguments used
 - (A) but this does not mean it was not for the Christian church at large
 - (B) as persecution began originally in Jerusalem, and believers were scattered, it was Jews who formed the nucleus of new churches
 - (C) Paul’s practice was to first seek Jews and proselytes in founding new churches, as these had understanding of the Scriptures
 - (D) so while being especially meaningful to Jewish Christians, since the body of Christ is to be one, it would also give insight to their fellow Christians of Gentile background

4. When was it written?

- a. as the temple services are spoken of as currently continuing, this was sometime before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70^{AD} and probably before the Jewish war which began in 66^{AD}
- b. in encouraging them not to fall away from Christ, the writer says, “You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;” (Hebrews 12:4) which suggests that this took place before the martyrdom of Christians in 64^{AD} under Nero.
- c. on the other hand, its readers included some who experienced the expulsion from Rome by Claudius in approximately 51^{AD}, Acts 18:2
 - (A) ³² But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, ³³ partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. 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. (Hebrews 10:32-34)
 - (B) although this could be a reference to later events
- d. so 51-64^{AD}, a period of growing persecution of both Christians and Jews, fits with the contents of the book

5. What is Its Subject

- a. is, as already stated, Jesus Christ, the Son of God
- b. our Great Saviour
- c. and, to describe His One-of-a-Kind Greatness
- d. the writer shows the Greatness of His Person

- e. by the Greatness of His Work, specifically the Work of Salvation
- f. but interwoven and illustrative of the greatness of our Saviour are a number of themes, many bearing on the fact that the reader will not fall away from his trust in Christ on account of this life's difficulties
- g. without any attempt to derive an outline of the book thereby, and simply apple-picking a verse from each chapter, listen to ...

C. Some Highlights From Hebrews

1. Person of the Son:

- a. as Jesus is the Central Theme of the book, we point first to ...
- b. "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." (Hebrews 1:2)

2. Salvation by the Son:

- a. we read this earlier in the service: a great Saviour, a great salvation
- b. "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," (Hebrews 2:3)

3. Warnings:

- a. as befits this word of exhortation, this sermon, there are warnings
- b. "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." (Hebrews 3:13)

4. A Sympathetic Saviour:

- a. is this a difficult world in which to be a Christian; yes it is – but our Great Saviour understands this and can help
- b. "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." (Hebrews 4:15)

5. Reproof:

- a. do we say we believe? ... that we are Christians? ... and act otherwise? ... then we need to be bluntly told so!
- b. "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 5:12)

6. Jesus our Forerunner:

- a. with all the difficulties of this world, how do we know that it will all turn out right in the end? ... Christ has gone ahead of us
- b. "where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." (Hebrews 6:20)

7. Once for All Salvation:
 - a. how do I know our Saviour's salvation really works?
 - b. "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." (Hebrews 7:27)

8. The New Covenant:
 - a. maybe I need to keep the Law as well, just to make sure that I am really saved ... a real temptation for Jews then and now; and others.
 - b. "When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear." (Hebrews 8:13)

9. The Real Temple:
 - a. let us distinguish between the temporary (this world) and the real
 - b. "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;" (Hebrews 9:24)

10. Perseverance:
 - a. more encouragement
 - b. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;" (Hebrews 10:23)

11. The Nature of Faith:
 - a. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1)
 - b. and an entire chapter of illustrations

12. Running the Race:
 - a. and an incentive to persist from those illustrations
 - b. "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," (Hebrews 12:1)

13. The Sacrifice of Praise:
 - a. "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 13:15)
 - b. that is the final purpose of our salvation, that Jesus Christ be praised

D. Conclusion

I. Salvation:

- a. not professing a set of teachings;
- b. not participating in a set of rituals;
- c. not practising religious exercises;
- d. but a relationship to a Person:
- e. Jesus Christ

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ASV American Standard Version of 1901
AV Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of the commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

Barnes – *Notes on the New Testament, et alia*, by Rev Albert Barnes, Gall & Inglis, Edinburgh

BM – *Biblical Museum*, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870

EBC – *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan

EGT – *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, Hodder & Stoughton

Gill – *Exposition of the Old Testament, Exposition of the New Testament*, by John Gill, D.D.

Kerux – The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com.

NICNT – The New International Commentary on the New Testament, The Epistle to the Hebrews, F.F. Bruce, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., © 1964

RWP – *Robertson’s Word Pictures of the New Testament*, by Dr. A. T. Robertson

TYN -- The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Hebrews, Donald Guthrie, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., © 1983

2. 'The Final Word,' by Rev. Ray C. Stedman, 1965-03-07, <http://www.pbc.org/>, Kerux sermons #4935
3. Quoted by NICNT, *in loc.*