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# Highlights from Hebrews

A contemporary rendition of the Letter to the Hebrews

**Scripture:** Hebrews

**Sermon Series:** *Hebrews: The Supremacy of Christ*

**Topic:** Word of God



## Introduction

When the early church received edifying letters from the apostles or those closely associated with them, they gathered the saints together and had the letters read out loud to the whole community. Copies were made of those letters and then they were passed on to other churches to be read in the same way there.

This week I wanted to be able to summarize the highlights of Hebrews, but as I began doing this, the power of the this whole letter struck me. In stead of pulling out one or two or threee verses, I began to imagine, what it would be like if we were to receive such a letter by snail mail from one of the apostles today. What would it be like if we were to gather together to have it read among us? Here's what I imagined it might sound like.

Dear church,

I know you're busy, but I have wonderful news for you. I know no one uses paper and pen anymore, but you must have this letter read among yourselves. Silence your phones and put them down for a few minutes and consider this.

In ancient times, God used to speak to mankind through various ways, such as dreams and visions in the night. Prophets and holy men were the only ones who received these special messages. However, something incredibly wonderful and uniquely special happened in the first century. God spoke to mankind through His one and only Son, His eternal Son, who stepped out of heaven and entered earth by becoming human.

This Son is the One whom God has ordained to inherit the whole earth. Also it is through Him that God actually created the earth. The Son is the shining beauty of God's goodness. His character, power, and personality are exactly like the Father. In fact, the Son is so powerful that the universe continues to exist by the word of His command. He is stunningly magnificent. He sits with His Father on the throne of the universe because, in the first century, He willingly offered His own body as an atoning sacrifice, to pay for the sins of all who would trust and obey Him.

Because of this incredibly brave, obedient, and loving act, God the Father exalted Him to the highest seat of honor. He conferred upon Him the highest rank and the most excellent name in all of the universe. He outranks all men and all angels. God the Father even commands all angels to worship Him. This is astounding. Consider how much more glorious and powerful angels are than men. If the more glorious and powerful angels must worship the Son, then how much more ought we weak and impotent humans worship Him?

Oh, I plead with you, worship the Son. Do not ignore or reject the gospel message that has come to us through the Son. If God, as we are truly told in the Scripture, destroyed and punished all who rejected or ignored the message He long ago sent to them through angels, then how fearful it is to ponder what kind of punishment awaits those who reject or ignore the message God has now sent to us through His only Son!

The Son is the One to whom God has now transferred all authority over this world. He is the One for whom and through whom God created this world. There is now nothing outside His

control. I know it does not now look like He controls everything, but in the end this will become abundantly clear.

What we do see now is the grace and compassion of God the Father. These kind qualities are evident in the fact that God temporarily humbled His only Son by His becoming human. He did this in order for Jesus to experience death, so that some of us humans might experience eternal life. It was immensely kind of God to accomplish our salvation for us by sending His Son to become one of us. As you already know, the name of His Son is Jesus, who is right now seated at the right hand of the majesty on high, crowned with glory and honor. In other words, the Son left paradise and entered into the temporal suffering of earth so that we who would join Him in His suffering could, through Him, enter into the eternal joy of heaven.

All of this is the breathtaking work of God. This is why the Son on the last day will not be ashamed of those who trust Him. He will stand up for those who suffered with Him, but He will reject those who refused to suffer with Him.

Since we suffer it is only right that He who would save us should also suffer. In fact, it is by entering our suffering, including the suffering of death, that He accomplished our salvation. Jesus Himself suffered and died, but then on the third day He rose from the dead! He entered death and then killed death by the power of His resurrection. How ironic. Jesus died so that death would die!

Therefore, Jesus' death and resurrection has changed everything. Death no longer has any power over those of us who are joined to Jesus by faith. If death has no power over us, then neither does the devil. We no longer need to fear death or the devil. O how many people are held captive by the fear of death. The resurrection power of Jesus destroys the power of death and the power of the devil. Jesus suffered a brutal death so that we could be set free from the fear of death and the fear of the devil.

This is why Jesus had to become human. So that He could be merciful to us suffering humans. By suffering and dying, as all humans do, Jesus became a priest for us. Think about this for a moment. Jesus was faithful and obedient to God the Father who called Him to such suffering. The suffering Jesus endured was not a surprise to Him, but rather it was part of the Father's plan for His life. And Jesus remained faithful to that calling and that plan until His dying breath. Oh let us be faithful like Him.

Jesus was even more faithful than Moses. Moses was faithful throughout his life, but he did not endure the degree of suffering that Jesus did. Therefore, Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses. Glorify and worship Jesus, not Moses or any other spiritual hero, past or present. The true disciples of Jesus will worship Him. You can know that you truly are His disciple if you keep worshiping Him until your dying breath.

Don't allow anything to keep you from worshiping Jesus. Do not harden your heart by choosing to cherish temporal things above Him who is eternal. Do you remember the rebellious children of Israel who suffered God's judgment in the wilderness for refusing to believe and obey Him? Those who disbelieved and disobeyed did not enter the Promised Land. They did not enter because they did not believe Him. God prevented them from seeing the Promised Land because of their lack of faith. Do not be like them. Keep believing, obeying, and worshiping Jesus. Doing these things is how you can know that you truly are a disciple of Jesus.

Fight against all unbelief in your life. Have faith in God's promise. Through David<sup>1</sup> God long ago promised that the eternal, spiritual Promised Land of rest still stands open to all who will have faith in Him. Do you hear Him calling you to enter into His rest? Then later, long after king David, God repeated that promise of rest through Jesus. Jesus said, "Come to me all who labor and are heavily burdened and I will give you rest... for your souls?"<sup>2</sup> The eternal rest of the Father is open to all who will believe in God through Jesus the Son.

Are any of you struggling and suffering? Since Jesus is like a great priest who suffered, He can help you when you suffer. He suffered for a little while, but now He reigns from His throne in heaven. When you suffer, then in your spirit by faith run quickly to Him, for He understands suffering. He can sympathize with your suffering and weaknesses because He too experienced the same when He was here on earth.

He can also help you when you are being tempted to sin. As you know, Jesus is human. Yes, He is the Son of God, but He is also the Son of Man. He is made of the same stuff as you and me. He too is flesh and bone. Don't forget this. Throughout all the days of His life on earth He experienced all the same temptations that we experience—every single one of them. BUT, *He* never sinned, not even once. Therefore, when you are tempted, run to Him who is seated on a throne of grace and there you will find mercy and grace to help you in your time of need. Because Jesus is human, He can deal gently with us as we struggle with the many weaknesses of our humanity.

Furthermore, you should realize that it was God the Father who sent Jesus to be this kind of priest for us. God ordained Jesus to be for us a merciful and kind priest. God did this because He loved us. Even though Jesus was eternally with God the Father in all the joys of heaven, yet the Father still chose to send His perfect and pure Son to enter into the sinful, suffering of this broken world in order to redeem his elect. It was God's idea to provide salvation for sinful souls through the death and resurrection of Jesus. We should worship Him for a such gracious gift of salvation.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 95:7.

<sup>2</sup> Mt. 11:28-29.

God decided to save us in this way so that Jesus would be, for all who would obey Him, the source of eternal salvation. Jesus, even though He's been in heaven now for more than 2,000 years, has not forgotten the struggles we humans endure. His memory is perfect and it never fades. Therefore, He is the only one who is able to save you forever and deliver you from temptation. Jesus is our forever priest and the only priest we need.

Oh, there's so much to say about this, but I'm afraid you won't be able to understand it. By now you should be able to understand this, but you are so easily distracted by so many unimportant things. In fact, by now you should be teaching this to others. But you actually need me to teach this to you again! You've become content with spiritual baby food. The truth of God's word is like spiritual steak for your soul, but you've pushed it aside choosing instead the non-filling, sticky, cotton-candy of sin. You will not survive if keep doing this. If you want to grow in Christ and become spiritually mature, then you must make a habit of choosing what is good over what is evil.

So make up your mind. Are you content to be a spiritual toddler or will you start acting on what you know deep down in your soul to be true? I tell you the truth, if you continue refusing to obey Jesus, as you know you ought to do, then you will prove that you never were truly saved in the first place. If you think that you can pretend to be a Christian and your soul escape unharmed, then you are fooling yourself. Do you really think that you can trick God?

After seeing people's lives transformed, hearing so many testimonies of what God has done, hearing about and even witnessing miracles, listening to the word of God preached—knowing it is true, and then turning away from all this to go secretly play with the sins of this world, do you really think you can get away with such spiritual hypocrisy? Do you think God is blind and will ignore such betrayal? Doing this would be like you crucifying Jesus all over again! Do you think God would turn a blind eye to that kind of treachery?

Think of it this way. There is a man who owns two fields and both receive the same rain. As a result, one field produces a crop full of food which is good for people. The other field produces nothing but thorns and thistles, which is useless and actually hurts the people who walk through it. What will the owner do with those two fields? The fruitful one he will bless and rejoice over for it produced a good and helpful crop. However, the other field will be chopped down and burned because it did not produce any good fruit. Which field are you?

I know these are tough words, but you need to hear them. I trust that you will make the right choices. I have seen God at work in your lives and I know that He will not abandon the work He has begun. However, you too have some work you need to do and it's time that you get to doing it. I'm saying these things because I want you to keep your faith in Him firm to end of your life. I want you to be assured of your salvation. I'm not saying this to cause you to doubt it. I'm saying these things to motivate you because I'm afraid you've become spiritually lazy. So get up. Move ahead. Go forward in your faith.

Keep your mind on the promises of God. When God makes a promise, He can't help but keep it. You know it is impossible for God to lie. Every word He speaks is true, yet consider this. After stating the promise to bless Abraham, He then went on to swear by His own name to keep His promise. When people swear that their word is true, they always swear by some higher authority than themselves, but there is nothing higher than God, so this is why He swore by His own name. The point is this, when God gives His word, it is impossible for Him to fail to keep it. Therefore, keep hoping in God's promise. Such hope is like an anchor for your soul.

This is why Jesus came to earth, to guarantee God's promise to Abraham. You see, so many people think that by doing good deeds (i.e. keeping the law) God will allow them into heaven. But they miss one important fact. God is morally perfect and he demands moral perfection for all who enter His heavenly home. The fact is that no one is morally perfect, except Jesus alone. This is why faith in Jesus is the only way to get into heaven. To get into heaven you must either be morally perfect yourself—which no one is—or someone who is morally perfect must take you in. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus IS morally perfect and He will take into heaven anyone who will go to Him in faith.

This is why Jesus is able to completely save all who draw near to God through Him. Think about this for a moment. Jesus is the only human who never sinned. He alone is morally perfect. He is the only human whom God ordained to be messiah. Jesus fulfilled all the OT, messianic prophecies. Jesus is the only human who never sinned because he is the only human who died and then was raised on the third day and then was taken alive up into heaven. And Jesus is the only human who is right now seated at the right hand of God on the throne of the universe. Jesus is the fulfillment of all of God's promises to Abraham. God promised Abraham that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through one of his descendants. And Jesus is that one descendant through whom all people can now go to God the Father!

Jesus is like the temple. He is the place to meet God. Jesus is the place to worship God. He is the place to experience God's goodness. Jesus is the place where spiritual washing and cleansing of the conscience happens. He is the priest who brings us into the presence of God. Jesus is the place where blood is offered for the forgiveness of sins. Animal blood doesn't take away sin. Jesus shed his perfect blood one time only and His sinless blood is sufficient to save forever all who will entrust the eternal destiny of their soul into His pierced hands.

Won't you put your faith in him? He lives to make a way for you to get into heaven. Draw near to God through Him with full assurance of faith knowing that through Him you can have a clean conscience. Hold fast to your faithful confession without wavering, for the Day of the Lord is drawing near.

Turn away from sin. Embrace righteousness. Keep the faith.

It is impossible to please God without faith. Faith trusts that God actually exists and will reward those who seek Him. Remember the faith of all who have gone before you; like Able,

Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Joshua, all the judges, Daniel, and Jeremiah. These all by faith turned away from the temporary rewards of sin choosing rather to seek the eternal reward of sanctification. All these endured because by faith they could see Him who is invisible.

By faith they escaped death, crossed oceans, defeated armies, brought down city walls, enforced justice, conquered kingdoms, stopped the mouths of lions, survived flames, were made strong when weak, and some even received back their dead by resurrection.

By faith they were given the strength to die, be tortured, refuse release, endure mocking, flogging, chains, imprisonment, be stoned, run through with the sword, and others sawn in two. The people of faith have suffered greatly down through the centuries. By faith they endured famine, homelessness, and poverty. They lived in caves, deserts, and mountain dens. This wicked world is not worthy of such faith-filled people.

These all died only having partially received the fulness of God's promise. God has something better in mind—the complete fulfillment of all promises will only occur when all his elect children, like you and me, arrive safely in heaven. Only then will every enemy be defeated, Satan be locked up forever, and death be completely done away with.

Therefore, since all this greatness of the new kingdom awaits us, along with all the great heroes of old, then keep running the race of faith. Listen to their voices as they call us forward to faithful living. Throw off anything that hinders your faith and the sin that so often trips you up. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who for the great joy that was set before Him endured the shame and suffering of the cross and is now seated victoriously at the right hand of God.

Do not grow weary when wicked people are hostile towards you because you are a follower of Jesus. Remember they were hostile toward Jesus too. Do not grow weary when He disciplines you. Remember, the hardship you must now endure is not because God is against you. He is for you. He is not punishing you. He is perfecting you so that you can enjoy His holiness. Jesus has already bore the punishment of your sins. You are not being punished a second time for the same sins for which Jesus has already died.

The suffering you must endure now is fitting you to fully enjoy the glory of heaven. Don't be distressed because you suffer. Be distressed if you do not suffer. God only disciplines His children. If you receive no discipline, then you are not His child. But you are His child and He is at work within you. I know it. So submit to the work of holiness that God is doing within you. Do not resist Him. Submit to Him. Humble yourself by allowing your soul to be trained in righteousness. Later you will see what wonderful happy and holy fruit it will bring to your life.

As I conclude, encourage each other with these words. Hold up those who are weak. Come along side those who are stumbling. Be patient with those who have tripped and fallen. Remember that practical, personal holiness is necessary. Without it, you will not see Jesus.

Don't allow any bitterness to take root in your heart. If you do, it will not only defile you, but it will also contaminate everyone around you. Be on guard against all forms of sexual sin. Remain virgins until your wedding night and then remain faithful to your spouse alone until you die. Those who reject this will be judged by God.

It's time for me to go, but let me share a few final thoughts.

Be content with what you have and keep yourself free from the love of money. Be kind to one another showing hospitality often and without begrudging it. Welcome strangers at your table, for who knows, they just might be angels. And visit those among you that are in prison, because it could just as well be you.

Remember the words of our LORD, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."<sup>3</sup> Jesus said the same, "I am with you to the end of the age."<sup>4</sup> Pray for and respect those who are your spiritual leaders. They should serve out of joy, not out of guilt or grudgingly. If they are not serving joyfully, then they will be of no benefit to you.

Don't be lead away by the false teachings of man which are wrongfully presented as the doctrine of God. In all that you do, do not avoid doing good, for doing good always pleases God the Father. Finally, pray for us that we will be able to come to you soon.

Now may the God of peace who raised from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you to do His will, working in you that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom belong all glory forever. Amen.

Kind regards,

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<sup>3</sup> Josh. 1:5.

<sup>4</sup> Mt. 28:20.