

The Letter to the Hebrews - A Journey Together in Christ

If God is committed to our joy and our glory why is life so hard? The answer in the book of Hebrews informs us that life is a journey. “It’s a journey from weariness into rest. It’s a journey from alienation into the presence of God. It’s a journey from isolation into the city of God. And the only way you’re going to get home is by fixing your eyes on Jesus. You don’t get home not by sprints and bursts but by fixing your eyes on Jesus.” (Tim Keller)

We are beginning a series in the book of Hebrews the first Sunday of September. The title of the series is, “A Journey Together in Christ.”



It’s important to know some things about this book as we begin this series.

We do not know who wrote the book of Hebrews. We do know that it was probably written before A.D. 70. We do know the author knew his readers and wanted to see them again (13:19). We do know that he knew Timothy, the disciple of and fellow laborer with the apostle Paul (13:23). We do know that he was not an eyewitness of Jesus as the 12 apostles were (2:1, 3). But we do not know if it was written by Paul, Barnabas, Luke, Apollos or Clement of Rome. Though all of these are possible suggestions by scholars, we still do not know. Therefore, we can stand assuredly with the scholar Origen in any discussion about the authorship of this letter and say, “only God knows certainly”.

We do know that the purpose of the letter was to encourage first century Christians to remain faithful. Times were difficult for these marginalized urban Christians living in the first century. They had faced intense persecution and had lost or were in danger of losing much of what was important to them. There were those who had met this suffering with joy but others were giving up and leaving Christ and his church. And some were in the middle in danger of compromising their life of faith with a life in the way of the world. Raymond Brown writes, “The letter appeals to all these severely tested believers to keep their faith firmly anchored to the moorings of truth, to maintaining their steady confidence in Christ and to press on to mature Christian stability (2:1; 3:6; 6:1).” The writer does not exhort these Christians to remain faithful in the journey by turning their eyes upon themselves hoping for inward strength, nor to the practices of the law, and not to their difficulties, or their hateful contemporaries, but to Christ. He exhorts these Christians to remain faithful in the journey by filling their vision with Christ so that he extends the horizons of their faith, hope, and love, and dominates whatever their experience is along the journey. The purpose of this book is to exhort Christians on in their journey by dominating their thoughts and hearts with the sufficiency of Jesus Christ and the promised reward all who live by faith in him receive.

We do know this letter was written to the *Pros Ebraious*, ‘to (the) Hebrews’. But this title does not tell us who precisely were the recipients of this great inspired epistle. We do not know the exact location of the church that this letter was addressed to. It is suggested that Rome was the most likely destination since there are so many references to the city, more than any other New Testament book. But others suggest Alexandria, Jerusalem, and other cities in Palestine. We do see by the content of the letter that it was written to Christians who knew a great deal about the Old Testament. But it is interesting to note that there is no mention of the Temple. Some scholars suggest that it was written to Jews who became Christians who would have been familiar with the Old Testament. However, other scholars suggest that because of the Apostles preaching and the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem outward that Gentile Christians would have also had a general working knowledge of the Old

Testament Scriptures. It seems fair to assert that it was written to Jewish and Gentile Christians dwelling in a city where they would have been heavily influenced by the Old Testament Scriptures.

We do know that what dominates the message of this letter is the revelation of God and the work of God. The revelation of God, or the word of God in Christ, dominates the opening and closing chapters (1-6; 11-13). And the work of God in Christ dominates the four chapters in between (7-10). The message is what God has said to us in Christ, and what God has done for us in Christ. One commentator says, "Hebrews expounds the finished word of God, found in both the Old and New Testaments and brought to completion and finality in Christ (1:2). It also expounds the finished work of Christ who fulfills God's purposes not only in what he says but in how he lived and died. His saving work is complete and effective. What he achieved on the cross "once for all" effects the salvation of all who believe, obey, and continue." (Brown)

Why is this message relevant for us today? In an age of pluralism it is important that this letter emphasizes the necessity of God's salvation in Jesus Christ. The New Testament asserts "a scandal of particularity", that the only way to God is through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. This letter points us to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and his work for the only way of salvation. In an age of deconstructed Christian orthodoxy by those who once held an important place in our world by their Christian witness, this letter is relevant. It not only grounds and upholds Christian orthodoxy in the person and work of Christ. It exhorts Christians to remain and hold fast to this orthodoxy warning us of the great dangers of deconstructing the blocks of our firm standing. In an age where it seems more virtuous to call into question what we've believed this is a relevant book. It is also relevant in an age of compromised orthopraxy. A life of faith in Jesus Christ is expressed by a life of love defined by Scripture. Those who live by faith walk by love, and love is expressed by doing what God in Christ commands. Much of our failure as a church in our orthopraxy has come from deluding God's pleasure as revealed in Scripture with a mistaken notion of grace that is colored by the lenses of our own relativism. While it is wrong for the church to endure by returning to the law as a way to live before God acceptable in his sight. It is also wrong to abandon his law as a way to live in love toward him and our neighbor. This book keeps us from both extremes by keeping us focused on the word and work of Christ as our life. Finally, this letter is relevant to any Christian on the journey of a life that is difficult. Whether those difficulties are from without or within, whether they were unexpected or expected, difficulties tempt us to shrink back from faith in God and an expressed faith in love. This book gives us a real perspective on the Christian life and how to journey on to our home going in Jesus Christ by grace.

Let us journey together in Christ as we seek to worship together around his Word revealed in this letter, as the words of the writer of the book of Hebrews encourage us -

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. - Hebrews 10:19-25

"How Did You Do It?"

This is a question that Noelle and I get often from parents who are raising young children. "How did you do it with six children?" This question does not usually arise from parents who have six children. It comes from those who have one or two or three. And the answer is, "I don't know! We just did it." This is how I try to answer because I think it's more helpful than my pretending like I do know. And I sometimes add to the answer by saying, "It was a blur." And another addition to the answer is, "By God's grace." I think sometimes doing what we've been given to do, especially parenting young children in our age of busyness, by God's grace is a blur. Noelle and I sometimes talk about those years, and even with our children, who are now adults, and mostly what we end up doing is laughing - unless of course I find out how my doing it by grace in the blur was hurtful to my wife or children, then there is acknowledgement, forgiveness, and then comes tears and laughter. I'm not trying to belittle the importance of raising children. Our Lord certainly doesn't (Deut.6:4-6; Eph.6:1-4 just to name a couple). But I'm belittling the idea that there is a formula, a secret, or some way that has not been discovered, for raising children. Living in the blur of raising young children by grace demands a doing expressed in love, and a lot of times that love is expressed by asking your spouses (if you have one) and your children's forgiveness, because sometimes you do and sometimes you don't know what you're doing. The blur of doing by grace expressed in love is - leading our children to know the Lord who made them, loves them, and expresses that love for them in his saving grace everyday in Jesus Christ, and to live for his glory not their own. AND IT IS NOT A FORMULA FOR WELL ADJUSTED SUCCESSFUL CHILDREN WHO ACHIEVE THE AMERICAN DREAM.