

Sermon-February 10th 2019

Grace Street Fellowship, Dr. Jim Burgin, pastor

SERIES: A Faith Worth Holding
1 "God's Final Word"

Scriptures – Hebrews 1: 1-3

OPENING

1. "Daddy, are we famous?" The question was asked by the 7 year old daughter of Joseph Stowell, today an author, but then a pastor of a small Baptist church in the Midwest. No, honey, we're not famous at all, said the pastor/father. The little daughter looked up at him with sincerity and a touch of consternation, and said, "Well, we would be if more people knew about us."
2. Would you say that Jesus is famous? Yes, but often for the wrong reasons.
 - a. One writer, for example, says that Jesus' life was what mattered, but not His death.
 - b. Others use Jesus for their own political purposes, saying Jesus would have done this or that, but when someone points them to what Jesus did say about the subject, and then he isn't their authority anymore.
 - c. Some people know about Jesus, but they don't know him.
3. Today, we begin a new sermon series titled "A Faith Worth Holding" from the book of Hebrews.
 - a. The New Testament book is one of the most avoided in Scripture, because it is often difficult to understand;
 - b. The book isn't signed, so we don't know who wrote it. For a long time, people thought it was Paul. Others say Apollos, but most today are content to say, "We just don't know."
 - c. It was written, as the title suggests, to the Hebrew people, Jews who had become Christians.
 - d. They were pressed by Jews for leaving the faith, and they were persecuted by the Romans for being Christians.
 - e. Many of the original readers were considering abandoning the Faith, and returning to Judaism. The author writes to remind them of the superiority of Christianity over Judaism, and points them to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
 - f. In other words, "It is a faith worth holding."

THE MESSAGE OF HEBREWS IS A MESSAGE FOR OUR TIMES

1. They were steeped in a culture of secular morality, and so are we. No longer, a tempest in a teapot, but more like a ship whipped around by a turbulent storm, we live in days of shifting, unsettling morality. To many, it feels like the foundations are being shaken. It is made worse by the way the teabags of immorality steep the water throughout the pot.
 - a. Our Culture: For Example, there are gale force winds now surrounding Virginia's top two political leaders over three things:
 - i. A Culture of Abortion which blurs the line between abortion & infanticide;
 - ii. Accusations of Sexual Assault, disguised as consent or misunderstanding;

- iii. Racial Injustice. – Often disguised in the form of themes or memes, but which in fact assault the dignity & worth of an entire class of human beings.
 - iv. Russell Moore is the ethicist for the Southern Baptist Convention. In an astute article he notes that these issues are rooted in the counter-Christ idolatry that sees human dignity and human lives defined not by their inherent worth, but as objects of power.¹
 - b. The culture of Rome routinely killed babies, simply because they weren't male. Slavery of human beings was commonplace and accepted, and was considered part of their net worth. More slaves you had, the more powerful you must be. Sexual immorality was rampant.
 - c. How do we live in times like these?
2. Believers then were treated as the Problem, and increasingly, so are we
- a. Jewish Christians were persecuted – The Roman governor Nero was a despicable and unstable human being who blamed Christianity for his problems, and turned the culture against them. The way he tortured and put Christians to death is unspeakable in polite company, and in the presence of children.
 - b. NY Times Article titled “Take A Number” – published September 29th, 2017 indicates that there are 110 Million S.T.D. Infections at any given time, and it is increasing. Doctors are struggling to stay up with medical treatments.²
 - c. The Atlantic Magazine in 2018 published an article about Richie Peterson titled “The Perfect Man who wasn't.”³ Richie was a good talker and a good listener who seemed eager for a relationship. He was good with kids. He entered intimate relationships with multiple women from whom he masterfully stole tens of thousands of dollars each.
 - d. Christians hold to biblical truths – For example, intimacy belongs within marriage. If our culture could see this truth as a blessing and not some kind of legalistic judgement, then so many people would not have their hearts broken. We are designed beautifully. Christians simply suggest that people follow God's design, so that they won't get hurt – in the same way that we would want someone to stop at a stoplight, so as not to be hit. Yet, for holding to biblical values, we are increasingly labelled as “haters.”

THE MESSAGE OF HEBREWS IS A MESSAGE FOR OUR CHURCH

1. We have believers here who are “young in their faith,” still on milk, but not solid food. Some of these believers are new to the faith, and others have been Christians for years, but have never grown;
2. We have “soon to be” Christians here – people seeking, but not quite ready to make the leap;
3. We have disobedient Christians here – some intentionally, and others drifting away unaware;
4. We have struggling believers here this morning – a financial crisis, a relationship struggle, disoriented in your relationship with God, because of an unanswered prayer, or a circumstance that is difficult to overcome.
5. We have Christians here who want to grow deeper in their faith.

¹ <https://www.russellmoore.com/2019/02/02/what-were-missing-in-the-ralph-northam-scandal/>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/29/health/chlamydia-syphilis-gonorrhea.html>

³ <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/04/our-time-com-con-man/554057/>

6. The early readers of Hebrews fit into all of these categories.

THE MESSAGE OF HEBREWS ADDRESSES IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. Can religion save me? Isn't it enough?
2. What happens if I lose ground spiritually? Does it really matter?
3. Can I lose my salvation?
4. What about angels? Are they real?

TRANSITION – LET'S TURN TO OUR TEXT FOR TODAY.

JESUS IS GOD'S FINAL WORD

1. A final word is one that is both clear and authoritative over all others
2. A doctor should have more authority than grand mom's home health remedies;
3. The boss will have the final say over the impassioned plea of co-workers;
4. An experienced, trained mechanic will have a better word than someone just reading the engineering plans.
5. – A few days before his death, Dr. F.B. Meyer wrote a very dear friend these words: "I have just heard, to my great surprise, that I have but a few days to live. It may be that before this reaches you, I shall have entered the palace. Don't trouble to write. We shall meet in the morning."
6. Jesus is the final word in that he is the answer to all that the Old Testament has been pointing.

WHAT IS THE CONTEXT?

1. The readers of this message from the author of Hebrews are Jewish Christians.
2. They are experiencing persecution on two fronts:
 - a. From their Jewish brothers and sisters for abandoning the faith;
 - b. From the Romans for being Christians, especially from Nero, who set the tone;
3. These new Jewish Christians are being tempted to abandon their Christianity to return to Judaism.
4. The writer of Hebrews writes to say "NO!" "Why would you ever give up Christianity to go back into an inferior religious system? Dr. Robert Jeffress, in his sermon series on Hebrews titled his message "The Final Word." Jeffress summarizes the book of Hebrews like this: "Jesus Christ is the superior prophet who offered up the superior sacrifice in order to obtain a superior salvation."
5. Since the author of Hebrews is writing to a Jewish audience, the writer argues meticulously to demonstrate how Christianity is superior to every element of Judaism.
6. We will see how Jesus is superior to the angels, to the lawgiver Moses, to the Levitical sacrifices, but he begins with the prophets.

GOD'S PAST COMMUNICATION

1. Purpose of the Prophets: The word prophet is a compound word, meaning "one who speaks for another."

- a. They weren't Crystal Ball gazers, or stare into the sky to come up with their own message.
 - b. Amos 3:7 says, "Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets."
 - c. No prophet ever said, "I feel," or "I think."
 - d. No, It was "Thus, said the Lord."
2. Their message was fragmentary – (verse 1)
- a. *At many times* – literally "in many portions." 44 different writers over 39 Old Testament books written over 1,500 years. Every prophet spoke the truth 100% of the time, but their message wasn't complete. Every prophet had a piece, but not the whole picture. Isaiah spoke about God's holiness; Amos, spoke about God's Justice, etc.
 - b. *In many ways* – Prophets preached, acted out messages, visions, dreams, handwriting on the wall in Daniel.
 - c. Illustration with Grace Street Youth acting out the Temptation scene of Genesis 3.

GOD'S FINAL COMMUNICATION

1. Last days – The writers of Hebrews believed we are in the last days, but he wrote that 2,000 years ago.
 - a. We are living in the last days. The era before the coming of Christ. The era of Christ living on the earth (33 years), and the era which began with Christ's resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit into the world.
 - b. Another way to understand this. When you are traveling to a destination, and in the distance, far away, you see a mountain with two peaks, and they look very close together. However, when you get close, you realize that there is a huge valley in between, and that it will take some time to traverse the valley to climb the final peak. We are currently in the valley on our way to the second peak. Christ could come back today.
2. Jesus Christ, the Son is superior to the Prophets, because
 - a. Heir of all things - Romans 8:17 – We are joint heirs.
 - b. Creator of the Universe – Jesus didn't just appear on the scene in Bethlehem. Col. 1:16 – by him all things were created and for him; Moses could write about creation; Abraham could think about counting the pebbles of sand and the number of stars. David could praise God for the majesty of his Handiwork, but Jesus is the agent of creation. John 1: 1 says "In the beginning was the "Word," and the word was with God, and the Word was God. Through Him all things were made."
 - c. Radiance of God's Glory –
 - i. *Radiance does not mean reflection*- Reflection means that Jesus received his light from somewhere else. Radiance means that Jesus himself was the source of the light.
 - ii. Former President George W. Bush spoke at Dallas Baptist University Friday night. He said one of the tough things he's realized is that history fades with some memories. Growing up as a child, Pearl Harbor was just a fact of history. For many young people today, Bush said, 9-1-1 is just a fact of history. But for him, it continues to be a passionate, living memory.

- iii. Jesus' light never dimmed. When he took on human flesh, it was like putting on a lampshade over a brilliant light, but the light wasn't dimmed. The disciples saw that light in the transfiguration – when the flesh of Jesus dissipated to the brilliance of the Glory of God.
- d. Jesus is the exact representation of God's nature (his being); - “exact representation” means an imprint – a stamp, or a Roman ring, which makes an impression on a sheet of wax. Jesus is the impression of God himself. He is the perfect representation of God himself. Jesus is God.
 - i. People say things like this: “Jesus never claimed to be God.” That’s just something made up by the church. “Jesus was just a prophet, a good man, etc.”
 - ii. But Jesus did claim to be God – John 10:30 – “I and the Father are one” John 14:9 – Have I been so long with you and yet you don’t know me? He who has seen me has seen the Father.” Disciples were saying Jesus we want to see the Father. Jesus said He who has seen me has seen the father.
 - iii. After the ladies’ appreciation banquet Friday night, someone saw me dancing in the crowd – and they said I stood out.” I don’t want to brag, but several of you told me that I just “stood out.” In fact, someone mentioned to me after the dance number that my dancing was a little bit like Adam Levine, the lead singer for Maroon five, who just last Sunday, did the half-time routine at the super bowl. If you are too old to know who Adam Levine is, then let’s say, Tom Cruise. Or, if you are too old to know who Tom Cruise is, let’s just say “Fred Astaire.” I was a stand out.
 - iv. Now, what if someone said to me. You know, I would really like to get to know Adam Levine, to find out what he’s really like, to spend time with him. And what if my response was “I am Adam Levine are One. If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen Adam Levine. You might not believe me. You might get the leadership team to call the paddy wagon. Or, you might make an emergency call to Amy, Desiree, or Paulette.
 - v. But you wouldn’t have any doubt as to what I was claiming – that I am, in fact, Adam Levine. Jesus was the Son of God, and the very essence of God Himself.
- e. Jesus sustains “all things by His word” (verse 3). He holds all things together.
- f. Jesus provides purification for our sins;
- g. Jesus completed the work

CONCLUSION

INVITATION