

HEBREWS
Introduction to the Book of Hebrews
Hebrews 1: 1-3

Introduction: The Significance of the Book

This morning we embark on the exposition of a piece of literature which has no known audience, no known place of origin and no known author. It is one of the weightiest books of the New Testament, and one which is not easily understood, and more often simply left alone. The liberals cluck quite angrily at this book, the Calvinists and Arminians fight over it, and the charismatics many times are not even aware of it. In the New Testament manuscripts, the position of Hebrews within the canon varies widely. In some it follows immediately after Romans; in some it follows 2 Corinthians; in some after Galatians, others after Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, Philippians, Titus and Philemon (where it is in your Bible), (Metzger, Textual Comm., 661).

But although through the centuries there has been some mystery ABOUT this book, there can be little question about the message OF this book! For like no other book in the Bible, the Book of Hebrews tells forth the supremacy and excellence of Jesus Christ. This book tells us and the world, through brilliant argumentation, that Jesus Christ is the completely unique and absolutely final revelation of God.

The Book of Romans argues for the justice of God being satisfied in the saving grace of the cross; Galatians deals squarely with Christian liberty; I Thessalonians (among other things) paints a picture of the second coming of Jesus Christ--but in no other Book (the Gospel of John comes close), is the EXCELLENCY of the person and ministry of Jesus Christ made so plain. If you feel you pretty much know all there is to know about Jesus Christ, that you've exhausted all the learning about Him that there is, then I invite you to feast on this Book with me! For my friends there is no nobler undertaking that we can work on than getting to know Jesus better! There is no better use of your time than to learn more of what He has done for you and how He has done it. The Book makes many contributions to the doctrines of Christ's Incarnation (His physical life), His substitutionary death, and His priesthood. The Book of Hebrews also tells us much about the relationship between the New Covenant and the Old, the interpretation of the Old Testament and the life of active faith. As one commentator has said:

"The church would be incalculably poorer without the teaching of this inspired book." (Hodges, Bible Knowledge Comm.)

Introductory Matters

As soon as we begin to read this work we are likely to ask, who wrote it? The bottom-line on that question is that we cannot be sure. Some feel it is from the hand of Paul. Others feel it was written by such men as Apollos, Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Luke, Silvanus and Philip the Evangelist. One interesting suggestion is that one of the above had before him a much shorter manuscript from the hand of Paul and incorporated it into a longer treatise. But we cannot be conclusive. Sufficient to recognize that the Book of Hebrews displays its divine inspiration clearly.

Next we must try to get some understanding of to whom this work was written. It is not strictly a letter (since it lacks an epistolary introduction), although it closes like a letter of that time. It is perhaps best considered a theological treatise in semi-letter form. Dr. P.E. Hughes (who has written one of the finest modern commentaries on the book), calls it,

"...the most extensively developed and logically sustained piece of theological argumentation in the whole of the N.T."

No wonder it is the darling (along with Romans) of conservative systematic theologians. But to whom is the work written? Probably to a Christian church largely Jewish in membership, in a city such as Cyrene (in North Africa). Under continual pressure from their unbelieving fellow Jews they were tempted to give up their Christian profession and return to their ancestral faith. Even more, they may have been tempted to withdraw from civilized life altogether and adopt a kind of wilderness experience as was common among some separatistic Jewish groups. However, regardless of who wrote this work, and where it was first sent, the Christian church has rightly regarded it down through the ages as a powerfully relevant message from God, who has definitely spoken to us in His Son Jesus Christ.

Verses 1 and 2a

It is fantastic that God has spoken to man! Man is not the center of the universe. And although God loves His creatures, He is not obligated at all to communicate with them. But unlike the fantasies of many about God, the God of the Bible desires the fellowship of His people. And so it is truly a marvel that through the centuries, God has chosen to communicate with men.

In the earliest days, He spoke audibly to men. Then in dreams and visions, and in probably untold many other ways. The fathers of Israel heard His voice often, and still struggled with unbelief. Have you ever heard someone say, "If God would only give me a sign, then I would believe." In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31), Jesus tells of the rich man in hell, who says,

"No, Father Abraham, if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." And Abraham said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead."

Supernatural phenomena do not insure belief. God is not a silent God. Dr. Francis Schaeffer (who incidently, just went home to be with the Lord this week), wrote a book on this point, entitled, He Is There And Not Silent. There is the infallible record before all men of His words in the Bible. It is because we see these writings as authentically inspired, that we call this book "Scripture."

But is God still speaking in visions, and dreams and audible voices? I would not say that He cannot, or that He never will again. But this passage says that "...in these last days (He) has spoken to us in His Son" (or Son-wise, as the Greek puts it.) Christ is God's final Word. He is enough. Sometimes I stand in amazement at some Christian groups who simply do not seem satisfied with the revelation of Jesus! Or with the record of His life and resurrection...Could we really have a better

word from God? Could a prophet announce FURTHER truth that is in some way more necessary for us to hear than what we have from the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the New Testament? I will never say that God cannot reveal Himself through modern supernatural means, but it seems to me that when a Christian reads his Bible and perceives the Holy Spirit illuminating a verse, or a paragraph or a chapter or even a whole book to his life--that THAT process is indeed supernatural, and exciting enough. If you have not yet figured out what I am talking about, the fact of the matter is that I have a real theological problem with some of modern charismatic phenomena.

But the context of this book is the finality of God's governing of the world. He called a people for Himself out of nothing, and He called them Israel. He led them, provided for them and promised them in over 300 prophecies a redeeming Messiah. Jesus Christ came to earth, spilled His own blood that men OF ALL NATIONS might have eternal life, and that has been the message the church should have stayed with for the past two thousand years.

Dear ones, do you have a hunger for God to speak to you? Study the Scripture. Do you have a longing to communicate with the gracious God of the universe, who has all the answers, and is in control of all that happens? Get to know your Bible. The Bible is the Word of God. It is not fable, it is not fiction, it is not fairy-tales. The whole Bible has the signature of God on it and in it. With an open heart, the Bible has an answer to any problem you may have.

Verses 2b - 3

The Lord Jesus is not only the final and supreme revelation of God, His person and work are vastly superior to the Old Testament prophets. What a great book Hebrews is for sharing with our Jewish friends! Christ has seven credentials to make Him eligible to give a superior revelation to that of the prophets:

1. He is God's appointed HEIR. He is the ruler of the universe. All that God is and has belongs to Christ. The relationship that the Father has with the Son does not diminish the authority or rule of the Son--neither does it lessen that which is the Father. He is equal with God in all things. (Matt.11:27; Psalm 2:7,8)
2. Christ is the Creator. This is also spoken by Paul in Colossians. The word for worlds here is really "ages." Christ created all things, and time as well. You yourself are the product, marred by sin, but nonetheless the handiwork of God in Christ. John 1:3; Col. 1:16
3. Christ radiates God. He is the shining forth of God. How repugnant that light is to the world. They deny it, cringe under it, and so would we but for God's grace. John 1:14

"...he that has seen me has seen the Father..." John 14:9

4. Christ is the substance of God. The word in the Greek for "exact representation" is "charaktēr" and is used only here in the New Testament. It was used especially of the impression or stamp on coins or seals. Jesus Christ is the exact designation of God. Therefore His revelation is superior. cf. John 10:30

5. Christ is the redeemer. Christ's superior person gave Him the right to do a superior work. He solved the sin problem at the cross forever. That is such a wonderful thing, that men can scarcely believe it! "Come on--you mean ALL my sins paid for forever???!---Am I on Candid Camera?"

6. Christ is the sustainer. If Jesus quit holding all things together by the word of His power, the universe would instantly fly apart into oblivion. Not only did Christ make all that is, He also holds it together--and by the way, He doesn't get tired either--His power is infinite. Friends, this is the Jesus we cling to--this is the God we pray to!

7. Christ is the King. Men put Jesus on the cross. God put Him on the throne. Men today say, "Religion should be kept in the homes and churches--keep your Jesus talk to yourselves." God has made Him heir, and King. There is no compartmentalization of religion in heaven! --no relegating of Jesus to the Sunday School room. He is the King.

Note: If Jesus is at the right hand of the Father, until His second Coming, how would He appear in person to leading radio and television preachers today, as they sometimes claim?

The time will come in the millenium too, when Jesus will occupy physically the throne of David which is yet to come. cf. Isaiah 9:6,7

The world around us is in tremendous need of a touchstone of truth. I am not an alarmist, but all over the world, men are scurrying for answers to life's problems--problems many times which are not simple. The world is in tremendous need of redemption from sin, and without it man will face a God who the Bible says is a consuming fire. Jesus Christ is God's ultimate revelation--there is none better! Apart from Jesus Christ there is only the vague forshadow of Christ. The whole Old Testament points forward to Christ, and that is essentially the theme of the Book of Hebrews--the supremacy and excellence of Jesus Christ.

Some of you can relate to the search for a hero, a leader, someone to believe in. We will spend eternity in love and amazement at the depth and being of our creator and savior, if we are Christians. If you have never trusted Christ, and He has always just been a religious name to you--He can become YOUR Savior simply by trusting Him in your heart and asking Him to forgive you of your sin, and cleanse you. He will respond, and you will know the excellency of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS
Jesus Christ is More Important Than Angels
Hebrews 1:4-14

Introduction: The title of this message is deceiving. We are not going to talk about angels so much this morning as we are about the general importance of a life centered on Jesus Christ. It would be interesting to be able to publish a textbook on angels which delineated completely the nature, thoughts, habits, etc. of angels. The trouble is that the Bible only gives so much information. And that for a good reason, because we would spend much too much time delving into angelology if there were any more data. For those of you who are interested in learning something of what the Bible DOES say on the subject of angels, I would recommend Mr. Whitlow's upcoming Sunday School class on angelology.

For us this morning we are only going to say a couple of things about angels, because the point of our passage is that Jesus Christ is superior to angels. And the practical application of that point is that we need to beware of the tendency for other things to supercede the importance of Jesus Christ in our lives. The writer of the Book of Hebrews is expressing concern over the Hebrew Christians spiritual condition. He was concerned about these people's lapse into spiritual dullness due to a fading vision of Jesus Christ. He had the same feeling about these Christians as Paul did about the folks in Galatia, when he wrote,

"I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain."
Galatians 4:11

And so the author is trying to stir his readers up, unto a fresh glimpse of the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ. We need this too! We are not immune to this same problem. We need to be stirred up, agitated, and awakened to the absolute necessity of having our lives centered on Jesus Christ--in our business lives, in our homes, in our neighborhoods, and in our little church. It is a destructive attitude to say, "Apostasy cannot happen here." That is the first step down the road to falling. And if history means anything, statistics clearly show that in all probability this church will go apostate sometime in the future. I can think of nothing more heartbreaking, because I love this church, but it would be foolish to say that it cannot happen. And INDEED I hope that we will be the statistical oddity!

But clearly the tendency among men, in churches, and in theological seminaries is to go liberal, to deny Jesus Christ, and to slowly become apostate (which means simply to fall away, or to deny Jesus Christ, after formerly having professed saving faith in Him. (John 6:66; Matt. 24:9-13; I John 2:22; 2 Pet.2:20; Acts 21:21; 2 Thess. 2:3, the latter two places where the Greek word "apostasía" is used).

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson tells of a liberal seminary professor, who some years ago had an evangelical Christian for a student. He challenged the student's faith and said, "If the bones of Jesus were dug up in Israel tomorrow, that would hurt your faith, but not mine," to which the student replied, "If the bones of Jesus are dug up tomorrow, I will no longer call myself a Christian."

We need to keep our faith in Jesus Christ vibrant, alive, warm, lest we begin to slowly entertain thinking like this professor's, and begin to elevate other things to the throne of our lives.

A Brief Word About the Angels: For the Jews, the angels were very significant. Angels of course, are not the mythical baby-like wimps playing harps that we see so often in religious art. They are extremely powerful and intelligent creatures who exist for the glory and service of the Lord. In Acts 7:53 we read,

"...you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it."

And in Gal.3:19 we are told that the Law came because of transgressions, "having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator." They are his emissaries, his messengers and his agents of grace and judgement. And in the Jewish mind they were extremely important. They were though to be SO prominent in fact, that there was said to be an angel over everything. The Talmud (commentary on the Mishnah, the second century collection of oral laws) in fact says that there is an angel over every blade of grass. And the Jews felt that angels had great insight into God's purposes that men did not have. That is the background of our passage this morning.

Note: While the supernatural realm of angels and demons is naturally fascinating to us, we must never let it supercede our wonder and amazement at the One who created it all, the Lord Jesus Christ!

Verses 4 and 5: The Lord Jesus is much more worth following than angels. And our author is going to show from HIS Bible, why that is so. In ancient times men did not simply have a 50¢ copy of the Scripture they could carry around with them. They took the reading of their sacred writings very seriously, as does our author. His Bible is the Old Testament, and he will now support the statement in verse 4 with seven Old Testament quotations. In verse 4, the text, "He has inherited..." is in an interesting tense in the Greek. It is the perfect tense, and puts stress on the continuing possession of a more excellent name by the Lord Jesus. His name has been, is now and always will be greater (BETTER) than Gabriel's, and Michael's, and far greater and better than any name on earth. In 1968 I knew people who thought Richard Nixon would rescue the world from fear, poverty and the tragedy of Vietnam. In 1861 the North pinned their hopes on a man named Abraham Lincoln and the South on a man named Robert E. Lee. In 1521 those churches involving themselves with the Reformation in Germany placed their hope in a man named Martin Luther. But all these leaders died. Jesus Christ is a more excellent figure to follow, He has a superior name--the word superior, is the Greek word "kreitton" which really means simply "better." And we will have more to say about this word during the Lord's Table next week, Lordwilling.

So we see that really the theme of this book is that Christ is possessed of a greater dignity than any other being, so great in fact that He must be classed with God!

Now in verse 5 the author breaks open his Bible and quotes from Psalm 2:7 and from 2 Samuel 7:14 and applies these two passages to the Messiah. No angel can claim the Father-Son relationship with God that Jesus and the Father have. It is the fundamental relationship that exists between God and Christ. The promises made to David regarding his son Solomon were not exhausted in Solomon. Jesus Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of ALL OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

Verses 6 through 13: The following verses include quotes from Deut.32:43 (or Psalm 97:7), Psalm 104:4, Psalm 45:6,7, Psalm 102:25-27, and finally from Psalm 110:1, which is probably the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament, and is clearly Messianic.

Each quotation is cited to show in varying ways how Jesus is better, or superior to the angels, and how His character is so much more worthy of worship and study.

Jesus Christ is the "first-born", the most important, the prominent one. He sends His angels where He wills, and they herald His coming and going. You will remember that twice in the past year we have said something about angels: at Christmas time we dealt with the angels at Jesus' birth, and at Easter we spoke of those at His resurrection. There is some connection between angels and various winds and fire--not in a pantheistic way, but in some marvelous way by which the Son sovereignly uses angels.

Not only is Jesus Christ the King, but His Kingdom is righteous! (Vss.8,9) The righteousness of His government proceeds from the righteousness of His person, (Plumer). His Kingdom is not founded on fraud, violence, wrongdoing of any kind, but on justice, equity for all, and grace. Of all people, liberal politicians should become acquainted with Jesus Christ! There is no better example of the champion of the downtrodden, the oppressed, the hungry, the mistreated, and the persecuted. There is no better advocate to have than He Whose Kingdom is absolutely righteous.

Verses 10 to 12 quote from Psalm 102:25-27 and bring out the Son's eternality and His supremacy over creation. It has become very popular to view the universe as having evolved from nothingness. In fact, if you want to kill your reputation in the professional world real fast, just say you believe in the Genesis account of creation, and beyond that, that you believe that Jesus Christ is in fact the Creator. Poppycock, they will all say. The media, the learning institutions, the textbook industry have all made it look foolish to hold to special creation. Notice I said, they have made it LOOK foolish. Actually I don't care how it looks. I have investigated the matter somewhat, I have read my Bible and I see there that God needed no spontaneous generation, no Big Bang and no natural selection to come up with the giraffe, the gazelle, the horseshoe crab or even the quahog. We should study science, but to let it rule our minds makes it a god. And the day is coming when the creation will all be dissolved (vs.11). The Lord Jesus (whom we pray to, and trust daily for our salvation, will come along and roll it all up like a garment.

Just like when I get home at night and I hang my coat up, or throw it on the chair for Renée to hang up. The Lord will simply roll up the universe. As beautiful as creation is. I thought I had seen some pretty country in my day, but I was really impressed with central Connecticut last weekend! But it is nothing that the Lord cannot simply undo what He has made. That is our God! That is our Lord Jesus!

The Lord doesn't change, He does not grow old, He is constantly fresh!

Verses 13 and 14: The point here is that to NONE of the angels has He ever said these things. Their purpose is not to receive glory and power to rule. Their purpose is to minister (which incidentally in the Greek is the same word as we use for deacons, "diakonian" to serve) to Christians. This is a place where we might be tempted to wish that we had more information. Does each of us have ONE guardian angel, several, one for each church? We cannot say, but it is encouraging to know that their purpose here on earth is to assist the Lord in the care and wellbeing of the saints. There are so many times when we just don't know what calamity we have just missed because of the ministry of angels. They are here no doubt, and through all their ministry, are fascinated that God is saving us by His grace. Don't worry, I have no doubt that one day you will be able to converse with an angel, and He will tell you of things you never even thought of, of the greatness and excellence of His Lord Jesus Christ, who by His grace, is your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Now at this point in this message, I must confess to you that I have always struggled with the practicality of this passage of Hebrews. And it has finally come to me that the point for us here, is that since the Lord Jesus is greater than angels, since He is far more worthy of honor and glory and obedience, how can we let ANYTHING supercede the importance of Jesus Christ in our lives? If you are truly a Christian, then you BY DEFINITION recognize to a degree the necessity of centering your life around Christ. When a person becomes a Christian, he or she HAS TO INITIALLY BE STRUCK with the wonder at His grace. I do not believe anyone was ever truly regenerated who simply felt, "Oh sure, I guess my sins are paid for (yawn); I suppose I have trusted Christ for eternal life somewhere along the line." There are plenty who SAY that, but I don't think Jesus Christ is a reality to them yet...

But how many of you, having originally been excited over your salvation, have in recent months or years lost the joy of the Lord, lost the joy of fellowshiping with the saints, and been tempted to go back to Egypt? As Dr. S. Lewis Johnson says, "to go back to eating the garlic and leeks and cucumbers along the Nile?"

Do you need a fresh glimpse of the greatness of Jesus Christ? Throw yourself into a study of the Scripture. The study of the Word of God is the most important thing you can do. It is not the only thing you should do--we should not be social hermits. But it is the FIRST thing you should do!

Do you need someone to love you? The story is told of the little boy who was asked by an adult why he was crying. He had little tracks running down his somewhat dirty face, and was very sad. "Why are you crying?" the adult asked him in his front yard. "Because my mommy just died. I wish I had somebody to love me who wouldn't die?" Do you need someone like that? The Lord Jesus Christ has met death with a crushing blow. He hasn't died. He is your redeemer, if you have trusted Him. He cares for you, has revealed Himself in so many ways, has made Himself available 24 hours/day, has given us the most precious thing He has, His own Spirit, to abide with us, and on top of it all, He calls us His friends, if we belong to Him.

It ought to keep our self-concept charger up permanently to realize that the greatest Being in the universe, better than kings, better than generals, better than angels even, loves you and cares for you, and wants only the best for you.

I hope as a church we never lose the joy of the Lord. And if we have lost some of it, may God bring it back into our midst! May we be not just an organization, but an ORGANISM which gathers to praise our Lord with sincerity, no inhibitions, and offering up the sacrifice of praise.

Do you need to refurbish your spiritual condition, your priorities? Then do it, do not delay. Then you can sing that great old hymn,

O Lord my God, When I in awesome wonder,
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made.
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.

Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee;
How great Thou art, How great Thou art.

A BETTER WAY
Word Study of "Kréittōn" in Hebrews

As we consider this morning what Christ has done for us, both in His life and on the cross, I would like for us to think about one word which is found frequently in the Book of Hebrews (13 times, in fact). It is the word "kréittōn" which means "better".

All of us come from different backgrounds, and varying views of religious duty. Some of you were raised Episcopalian, some Roman Catholic, some Baptist, and some of all kinds of other upbringing. And therefore we each have certain memories that we draw upon about what constitutes proper worship. Some think we should be more formal in our church gatherings, some less formal. Some think we should implement the use of all kinds of visual aids in reminding us of our Savior. Some think preachers should wear robes and special collars. And so the discussions go on, seemingly endlessly. But a point the writer of Hebrews wants to make perfectly clearly, is that at the bottom-line, there is NO FINER WAY, than in FOLLOWING JESUS CHRIST. In this writer's mind, let there be no mistake! You will find no better "religion", no better way of running your life, no better Master, and most importantly, no better savior, than Jesus Christ!

Christ is better than the angels (1:4), He brings a better hope (7:19), He is the guarantee of a better covenant, a better arrangement between God and Man (7:22), He does a better job of mediating that arrangement (8:6), and in fact because Jesus is the Mediator, the provisions of the contract itself are far better (8:6, 9:23). At the bottom-line level, you just have a much better deal in following Christ. Consider with me your old life, how you viewed God (if indeed you even believed in Him), getting to heaven. At best before you met Christ, you only had a vague and ill-defined glimmer of a hope of getting to heaven (or "nirvana", or "utopia", or etc.), and even that glimmer of a hope was really only based on speculation and imagination rather than on some sort of verifiable transaction. You probably lived in a certain amount of fear of death. You probably had a lot of guilt you had to live with, that your former religion did not provide for the removal of. And finally (there are many OTHER comparisons we do not have time to make), you probably felt constrained to reassess your relationship with God, that maybe the way you viewed Him last year, or last week has become obsolete--to re-evaluate every so often when you thought about it.

Within the Body of Christ on earth today, there may be better churches than this one, there may be better programs and there no doubt are better preachers...but as you face temptations to go back to various aspects of your former life, KNOW that you will find no better WAY than a life of following Jesus, and a Biblical theology. Our "religion" is not just one in a hodge-podge of relativistic choices in the world (or even in our city). This is the BEST. There is none better! We are not perfect, and the way we practice our faith is not perfect, but the faith ITSELF is the finest there is. And that is because we didn't make it up or figure it out! It was brought into operation by the death of Jesus. And as far as God is concerned, His promises, based on the work of Jesus, are unbreakable. You won't wake up one morning to find in your mailbox or under your pillow or on the front page of the newspaper, that God has revoked all provisions of the "Jesus Contract." Therefore as we consider Jesus' death, let us hold fast to His promises, and to those made by His Father to us!

HEBREWS
The Danger of Drifting
Hebrews 2: 1-4

Introduction: This past Wednesday was the fortieth anniversary of the Allied invasion of Nazi Europe. And as I watched one of the specials on TV commemorating that event, I noticed a poster that an old French patriot was carrying last Wednesday in Normandy. It said "Lest We Forget..." I thought, "how could anyone forget?" But time has a way of eating away at what were once very vivid experiences. In fact there is a move afoot today in Germany, among some school age children, to really deny that the Jewish Holocaust ever even occurred! And the old people in Germany, who remember the horror of the death camps, just shake their heads...

This is the theme of this morning's exposition: "Lest We Forget!" As time moves on, and we grow older in the Lord, those of us who have met Him as our personal Savior and Lord, there is a tendency for the past to grow fuzzy. With most of us, the time when we first heard the Gospel with listening ears, and it first occurred to us that this stuff about Jesus Christ might be real, and when we first prayed and knew that God heard us, because we were newly made right with Him,... that time can begin to fade into the past. We become wearied with the activity of the Christian life, and burdened down (or just downright bored) with church functions, and the joy of the Lord begins to disappear. That is an INEVITABLE TENDENCY that all Christians must come to grips with. And if we are not very careful, we will slowly begin to neglect our walk with Jesus Christ, and slowly move towards total apathy. This is a danger in ANY church, and in fact, is the probability given enough time...UNLESS steps are taken to arrest it!

So this morning, dear ones, we are looking at the danger of drifting. That is what is on the mind of the writer to the Hebrew Christians in our passage this morning: "Lest We Forget."

Hebrews 2:1 How seriously do you take the doctrines of grace? I mean, what the Bible says about God and man and salvation through Jesus Christ alone,...how much attention do you give those ideas? Everyone here (I think) has heard at one point in time or another, about the free gift of eternal life, available through God's Son...and about the free grace of God making that gift available without cost...and about man's desperate NEED of being reconciled with God, and about the true EXCELLENCY of Jesus Christ, above all others who have ever lived... How seriously do you take these things in your lives? The writer to the Hebrews says, "HEY! We've got to start paying much closer attention to those things which we have heard, taken hold of, and (maybe) have begun to take for granted. And the reason is that IF WE DON'T, we will start to slip--you can bank on it!"

The danger of drifting is made all the more easy by the free society in which we live, and we must recognize our freedom as a blessing, but also as an inducement to grow apathetic. In the latest issue of Open Doors, there is a letter from a young Soviet soldier named Pyotr, who is currently "stationed" in Soviet occupied Afghanistan, and who writes home to his Christian sisters Anna and Lizel. He is one of many young Christians who, probably because of refusal to take the military blood

oath, has been sent to the 120⁰ "deadly quagmire" that Afghanistan has become. He is without a Bible, and asks in his letter that his parents might send him a New Testament.

The issue also tells of the tiny Himalayan country of Nepal where the Christian population has grown from 500 to 15,000 in the last five years, but where they have no trained Christian leaders, and where being baptized is punishable by six years in prison. And the stories go on and on.

We have such an abundance of Christian things here, that it is a real danger that we grow sleepy about the real content of our faith, and taking our faith seriously. And this is a theme we are going to look at at least five more times in the Book of Hebrews.

Where you see the words "drift away" in your English Bible, these translate a Greek word used only here in the New Testament. It is a nautical term, and it means to quietly slip away or past. Plato used the word to mean something slipping from one's memory. It is not something which happens suddenly. It just sort of slips away quietly, unnoticed. Is your Christian life in danger of just sort of slipping away? Are you neglecting the fires in your heart for the Lord? I hope not, but if you are then please take heed to the things "Which you have heard." Remember back to when you were excited about Jesus Christ, about sharing with others about Him, about reading His Word and marvelling at the truths in it, that you knew you could learn in no other place!

I would like to list a few things that I think can (or WILL) contribute to drifting spiritually:

1. Having as your experience a familiarity WITH the truth, without the reality OF the truth. This is where the truth of the Bible is theoretical to you only, but you are not taking it into your life. This is a pitfall too common in Bible churches, and where the Scripture is studied academically.

"You believe that God is one. You do well, the demons also believe and shudder." James 2:19

2. Neglect in attendance. I will not harp on this, but it is a proven contributor to spiritual drifting. If the regular fellowship of the saints, and being under the sound of the teaching of the Word is too much trouble or not as high a priority in your life as some other things, then I would fear that you are already drifting. Cf. Hebrews 10: 24,25
3. Ceasing to take your brethren seriously. When we come together for sharing (which we do often), do you listen attentively to what is being said? Are you interested in what God is doing in your brother or sister's life? If you grow bored with such testimonies, I fear you are already drifting.
4. Adopting worldly thinking. This is always easy to do, especially if television is a big part of your life. We are being programmed to view things in a certain way-- I watched about ten minutes of "The Facts of Life" the

other night.' One of the girls is being forced to accept the divorce of her parents as just a "fact of life." The notion is that the divorce really isn't anyone's fault, and in time, it will be for the best, and we will all survive it and perhaps even be better people for it. And we are all sitting there, letting our emotions do our thinking for us, and quietly being programmed to accept that morality.

The whole course of this world is really contrary to a true believer. If you are a Christian, you will have a constant upstream battle. What do you have to do to float downstream? Nothing! A dead fish can float downstream. But only a live fish can swim upstream! The moment you relax, you start to float back downstream again, and the current of worldly thinking is always there, usually subtle and quiet.

5. Catering to a "pet sin." Each Christian has weak spots in his life which are peculiar to him, though not to him alone (I Cor.10:13; Heb.4:15). And if we allow ourselves "slack" in that area, we are just feeding the tendency to drift. We need to starve out those "pet sins"--we will never be sinless before we are with Christ (and any Christian who COMES ACROSS as though he thinks he's sinless in this life needs to go look in the mirror for a little while at all the zits!) But we need to recognize and accept our weak areas, and work on them. Catering to a pet sin just cools off your love of Jesus!

Hebrews 2: 2-4 The older revelation, the law of Mt. Sinai, was communicated by angelic intermediaries, but God's final revelation was given in His Son and therefore demands correspondingly **SERIOUS ATTENTION**. At the bottom-line (please forgive the cliché), God will be just with the matter of sin. All sins will be judged exactly. The commentator Matthew Henry said,

"The severest punishment God ever inflicted on sinners is no more than what sin deserves."

The writer is asking the question, "If that is how God's judicial system works, how will anyone escape if he refuses salvation?" It is a brutal logic! But it really makes sense, doesn't it? If your house is burning down and a fireman puts up a ladder to the window where you're coughing out at him, and he says, "Just step out on the ladder! You don't have to buy it first!" and you say, "I'm sorry, I really don't believe that ladder exists--and this cough is just from my asthma..." How will you escape? The logic of this argument is inescapable!

As far as non-Christians are concerned, I think more people stay lost because of indifference and carelessness to the Gospel of Christ, than those who boldly reject it.

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson tells the story of a theological seminary where a professor was critiquing a young seminarian's classroom sermon. The professor asks the student what his sermon will be about, to which the student replies "I am preaching from Hebrews 2:3. And I have two points." And the professor

asks him, "What are the two points?" And the student replies, "Well, the first point is 'So Great Salvation.'" And the professor says, "Well, that's good. And what is your second point?" And the student says, 'A Little Advice On How to Escape If We Neglect It.' There is far too much preaching like that today, because there is NO escape if we neglect it!

Now why is this salvation great? It is great because of it's AUTHOR!

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:16

It is God who planned in eternity past to rescue man! He is the engineer of the plan. It was HIS heart that was moved with man's desperate condition in sin.

It is great because Jesus Christ is the EXECUTOR of it! The second person of the Trinity is right there, involved with the most detailed workings of the plan, and in fact the one who puts it into operation!

It is great because the Holy Spirit is the ADMINISTRATOR of it! The third person of the Trinity is the One who is activating the plan today. He is the One who moves on men's hearts, shows them their condition without a Savior, and plants belief in their hearts that they might flee to that Savior.

It is great because of the RESULTS of it! That men might live forever, might not have to pay for their own sins, and might have a relationship with the Lord. It is great because it IS SALVATION--a rescuing!

It is great because of its PENALTY! The great Puritan theologian John Owen, in his commentary on Hebrews said,

"Can any man perish more justly than they who refuse to be saved?"

Unbelief is a harsh taskmaster. Our message needs to be that you can never understand life until you know that at the center of all meaningful existence is a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ (S. L. Johnson).

Verse 4 shows us that God has not remained hidden. He has substantiated His message in all kinds of ways (which makes me think that these things mentioned in this verse are FOUNDTIONAL, and by design not meant so much for today, as they were in substantiating the original proclamation of the Gospel in the first century.

Now you may be thinking, "I do not want to drift!" What are some things I can do to keep from drifting?

1. Sit under the teaching of the Word of God regularly. This places a great responsibility on those who teach the Bible, for they are entrusted with expounding the Scripture in such a way as to keep you excited and paying attention to "the things which you have heard."
2. Make use of the great opportunities we have in this society to listen to good teaching and preaching on tape. There are some messages which I have on tape

of Bible teachers which I have listened to many times, I have grown to love them that much. You should use the time you have to enrich your soul! I have been finding that in my study time for this series, as I read many commentaries each week, I am not quite so moved in them as when I put a tape on by one of my favorite teachers on Hebrews--then I am intrigued, and moved to the gravity of the Scripture's message!

3. Nothing substitutes for daily Bible reading. Do you do this? It is not a matter of Law. But if you want to keep your heart warm for Christ, if you want to avoid drifting take the greatest preventative step there is--immerse yourself in a daily time in the Word!
4. Use the time you have with other Christians to try to communicate about spiritual things--Be real, and accept your brethren where they are. A sign of spiritual health is when the things of God flow easily from a person's lips.
5. Learn to cherish right doctrine. Saving truth is not just speculative, or theoretical--it is ALIVE, and it governs the whole of life.

If you are not a Christian, or are not sure about where you stand, I would remind you that there is one question that no man on earth can answer. No angel can answer it. No devil in hell can answer it. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
King Jesus Is Like His Brothers
Hebrews 2:5-18

Introduction: About 3,500 years ago there lived in Egypt a man who was not an Egyptian by birth, but who had risen in society to a point where, in our country, he would be called the Secretary of State. He had lived in Egypt for many years, having originally been sold as a foreign slave by his brothers, and had developed quite a reputation for wisdom and fairness. And then in later years, there swept through the Middle East a severe famine, and men came to Egypt to buy foodstuffs, Egypt being sort of the breadbasket of the region. During this famine, the man's brothers came to Egypt from Canaan to buy food. The man recognized the traders as his brothers, but did not reveal his own identity to them--they had thought him to be long since dead. Through a complex series of ploys and feints, this head of Egyptian state finally reveals himself to his ten brothers, and although they were poor, hungry, in a foreign land,... and although this man (who is of course Joseph) was the number two leader in Egypt...he was not ashamed to call them brothers! In fact a very happy reunion results, the past is forgotten, and though great vengeance could have been taken by Joseph on his brothers, instead, he condescends to them, extends them bountiful kindness, and among all is clearly very pleased to be reunited to his family!

Joseph is a type of Christ--for quite a few reasons, but none the least because of this IDENTIFICATION WITH HIS BROTHERS! Jesus Christ, though He is the King of the universe, is also greatly pleased to identify with His brothers, and to be like them and with them! The idea that God may grudgingly save some out of the world, but make them exist in some far dungeon for awhile, or be yet very distant from Him, is foreign to the Bible--and it is foreign to the Book of Hebrews. I hope you will see this morning that Jesus Christ is like us, He has brought us near to God, and in so doing He has effected for us many benefits and blessings.

OUR KING IS LIKE US (Hebrews 2:5-9) What is your view of the nature of man? It is quite popular today to view man as a noble animal, beset with various sicknesses and environmental maladies, but nonetheless a good creature, and capable of incredible feats. The Bible also views man as a noble creature, but because he was created in the image of the Creator God. And he is stained and tainted in every part of his being by something called sin. And this applies to every man that ever lived except one--the man Jesus Christ. He was truly a man--He came into the world in the usual way, lived a life, had brothers and a career, and yet was also the Christ, the Messiah of Israel. Our author uses a portion of Psalm 8 to show that Messiah is both a man and the King. He is the Lord of the universe. He is Lord of Israel. He is Lord of the United States, He is Lord of New Bedford, and He is Lord of your life and mine--whether we recognize it or not.

The Congressional Record, published daily as a chronicle of the happenings in Congress, doesn't record any allegiance to Jesus Christ. We have yet to read in the newspaper about the various factions in the Persian Gulf War seeking refuge in the Lord Jesus Christ. His Kingship

is not seen by all yet--but WE can be assured of it, and watch it with spiritual eyes. The point for us to latch onto is that we have a King, and He is like us! And the time is coming, I believe in the Millennial Kingdom, when all shall see with their eyes and hear with their ears the magnificent reign of the one we call Savior today.

The Bible teaches two comings of Messiah (vs.9). The first was in the first century, when He went to the cross. Every Sunday should be a remembrance of the cross for us, dear ones. Think about what it cost the Eternal Son to come down from heaven and be a man. The goal of that was that "He might taste death for everyone." He wanted to be so much like you and I and all of His own, that He had to taste death to do it. But it was a taste only--because He rose from the dead! Our King is like us! When He left heaven there was no turning back. The Eternal Son became like men in all ways except for sin. What a marvelous thing--what a marvelous MOTIVATION on God's part--I love the Evie song where she sings,

"Oh How He Loves You, Oh How He Loves Me..."

Now when it says here that Christ tasted death for every man, does it mean every man of all time? Some have been very dogmatic that it does. But the problem is that if that were true, then every man of all time would be saved, and we know that that idea (called "Universalism") is false. Rather I believe this means that Christ has suffered for the world as the One Savior--that the writer has in mind the cosmic scope of the sufferings of Jesus. And more specifically, the context refers to believers in Christ (1:4; 2:10; 2:11). But again, the main point is that Jesus is our King--and our King is not unlike us, even in death!

OUR KING HAS BROUGHT US NEAR TO GOD (Verses 10-13)

Do you see what is happening in these verses? We have a sovereign King--and the great thing is that He and we are of the same stuff! Because that is how the Father planned it! We don't have to go through angels, humanly priests, or even "proper channels." The king is a member of your family.

During the Civil War, one of the leading generals had several sons who also served in his army. And while he loved them, he was very careful not to show them any favoritism whatsoever. One day the General was riding down a section of his lines and while he pulled his horse up to inspect one battery of artillery, a grimy artilleryman came up to him, saluted and asked if there were any special instructions. The artilleryman was so covered with the soot and dirt of battle that the General did not recognize that it was his own youngest son. And when the young soldier informed him as such, while he did not break protocol or military discipline, there was for a few moments when the two walked off and shared a brief time of special tenderness between father and son. And we have such a greater closeness and access to OUR Captain!

What God is doing in and among us is to sanctify us--that is to make us more and more like Him. He is in the project with us. He is clearly the foreman, but He is doing the work right in our midst.

Jesus Christ's Father is our Father. Our Father is Jesus Christ's Father. Therefore He doesn't mind at all to call us His brethren. That is what you get for being a Christian; did you know that?

Even though we are sinful, rebellious, disobedient, He is at work in us, if we are truly saved, and He is not ashamed of us. That should do something for your self-concept, dear ones.

1. It should alleviate the guilt of sin.
2. It should keep you always rejoicing and generally happy. A constantly depressed Christian is a contradiction of terms.
3. It is a weapon against the whispering accusations of Satan.
4. It should affect the way you treat your brethren in Christ.
5. It should affect the way you treat your children.

Our King has brought us near to God. This cuts across what many of us naturally think about God, even after we have become saved. We are somewhat uncomfortable with the degree of familiarity that God the Father has afforded us in the Son, and in His grace. In fact most thinking non-Christians are amazed (as Joseph's brethren were), at such undeserved kindness! As well we all should be!

Note what is said in verse 12, a quotation from Psalm 22. In our worship, the Lord is the worshipped. but He is also a participator! He, in a sense, is sitting here singing and praising the Father with us--not because He is a created being, but because He is pleased to be among us! Truly amazing!

OUR KING HAS PROVIDED FOR US (Verses 14-18)

I hope you find the things we have in Christ encouraging. The benefits of being a Christian are almost innumerable. There are at least six benefits listed in these last verses of chapter 2 that we have by virtue of being born again--and that, by the way, means that these are things that non-Christians must live without.

1. Through the death of Christ, the devil is destroyed. He cannot hurt us. He may scream at us, accuse us, oppress us and try very hard to discourage us. But He cannot harm us, and his greatest tool, physical death, is powerless against the children of God. This is also one reason why I believe that it does not make good Bible sense to say that a true believer can be possessed by the devil, or by demons. (Verse 14)
2. Since the author of death is destroyed as far as Christians are concerned, so is the fear of death. Christians, you need not live in bondage to the fear of death. My mother called me a few weeks back and told me of the death of a close friend. She could not deal with it, and she herself lives in terror of death. It is sad. Christians are freed from that kind of bondage. (Verse 15).

3. The ministry of Christ on earth was not rendered for angels. He extends, by virtue of His perfect priesthood, mercy to us. He's been through what we are going through. He knows how we struggle, how we fail, how we doubt--he understands all of our troubles--do you pray to Him as to one who really knows what you go through? That should impact your prayer life. He is the granter of abundant mercy. Grace is getting what you don't deserve. Mercy however, is NOT getting what you DO DESERVE!!! (Verse 17)
4. Jesus is not going to change His mind about you, or fail in being YOUR High Priest, if you are a Christian. He is a FAITHFUL High Priest. That's the same thing as a flat-out guarantee! You can bank on His love for you, His ministry on your behalf.
5. There is another benefit we have in verse 17. The KJV calls it "reconciliation." The NASB calls it "propitiation." The NIV calls it "atonement." These are all theological words (which, I might add, we ought to be able to understand and use), and probably the best is "propitiation." It means that, through taking care of our sins Himself, Jesus has made us acceptable to God. This is of course the Gospel in nutshell. (Verse 17)
6. If someone came to you and asked for help because they were tempted to kill a policemen, most of you wouldn't be able to identify with him. If someone came to you and asked for help because they were tempted to run off to Hollywood and join the cast for "Three's Company" again not many of us would be able to identify. If someone came to you and asked for help because they were tempted to swear, some of you could identify. If someone came to you and asked for help because they were tempted to be unfaithful to their spouse a number of you could identify. If someone came to you and asked you for help because they were growing more and more tempted to cut people off at the intersection of State Road and Hathaway Road, I dare say ALL of you could identify!! Jesus is able to help those who are tempted in every temptation--from the biggest--drifting away from the faith, to the smallest. That's because He has been through it!

This passage stands before us this morning as a testimony that Jesus Christ is like us, He has brought His people near to God, and in so doing, He has effected for us many blessings and benefits. What will you do with this, this morning? Will you drift, slowly grow apathetic in your faith? Or will you keep your love for Christ warm and alive and vibrant and full of good works for Him. Be encouraged, dear ones: we have a merciful and faithful High Priest. His ministry does not grow old or obsolete.

—quote from Lumen,

If you have never personally trusted Christ yet, all these things can be yours--just by virtue of your becoming a Christian. Just by putting your complete trust in Jesus Christ alone to pay for your sins. Then you will see the King, and you will know the joy that He is like His brothers!

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
Christ, Moses and Perseverance
Hebrews 3: 1-6

Introduction: The Jewish Christians to whom the Epistle to the Hebrews was written were struggling with a weakening evangelical witness. The pride with which they had formerly testified to Christ, was draining away, (Hughes). The writer is telling them in this great letter that they can still not have to be ashamed of Christ. Although they had grown somewhat in their faith, the facts about Christ had not changed. Jesus Christ was STILL superior to the angels (who were extremely important in Jewish theology). Jesus Christ was STILL superior to all the Old Testament prophets. And now the writer is going to tell us that Jesus Christ is even greater than who was the most revered Old Testament leader, Moses.

But fear not, dear ones! This will be no boring exposé about Moses, or just a theological treatise on some remote subject! There is much here to capture the attention of the listening Christian in 1984. Because this morning we are also dealing with the subject of the perseverance of the saints. And we could hardly ask for a more practical subject to discuss, and see what the Scripture says!

I hope this morning that you will not just allow me to "preach" these verses to you. I hope you will not just nod the head, think to yourself, "Hmm, that's interesting..." and then leave the matter until the next passage that we expound. No. Instead I hope and pray that you will see the great matters before us. I hope that you will recommit yourself to seeking a greater vision of Christ in your life. That's why we gather, you know! So that each week we can stimulate one another a little more to loving Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 3:1: This verse opens with the word "therefore." This is what we call a structural marker. When you come across words like this, it's like the old style Railroad crossings you used to see, where they would say: "STOP! LOOK! LISTEN!" That's what structural markers do for us. They bring us to a pause where the writer is saying, "STOP! Check it out! Dwell on this for a moment!"

He calls his readers "holy brethren." Actually the Greek reads "saintly brethren". There is, of course, much confusion about the subject of the saints. Some feel that only those people who have lived especially good and religious lives should receive the canonized status of sainthood. And then, really only after they have died. That is a noble concept perhaps, but it does not find its ground in the Scriptures at all. In the Bible, the saints are just Christians. They are just everyday sinners, but they are saved sinners, people who have trusted in Jesus Christ to be their personal Savior. So, meet St. Neil. And down here we have St. Russell, St. Michael, etc. And here the writer is addressing his readers as his brothers in Christ. To be a saint just means to be set apart for God--not by virtue of our merit, but by virtue of having been set apart BY God in Christ--by virtue of our POSITION in Christ!

This section is written to "partakers of a heavenly calling," who were looking for a heavenly country (11:16; 12:22). There is a proper sense in which our perspective SHOULD be "other-worldly." In this Christianity

is vastly superior to Judaism. We have a great hope (as we shall see in verse 6). Judaism was an earthly calling with an earthly inheritance. Christianity is a spiritual and heavenly calling with a spiritual and heavenly inheritance (MacArthur). In fact it is now possible to be a member of a Jewish synagogue, and believe in little if any hereafter at all. If you are a Christian, you have much in the here and now. But your real inheritance still awaits you!

Now the main idea of this verse is in the words "consider Jesus." What a great little phrase, for that is really what this whole book is about. That is what our mission on earth is, to try to help the people around us to CONSIDER JESUS. That puts great responsibility on us to not turn people off with secondary things BEFORE THEY'VE EVEN CONSIDERED JESUS!!! The Greek here means to "fasten the mind down upon, to apply one's mind diligently, to give thoughtful attention to" (katanoēsate). It is our responsibility to reflect regularly on Christ. I think many times we are weak in the Christian life because we do not do this. Now Christian reflection is not, as some non-Christians might think, psychological brainwashing. It is NOT just sitting around talking ourselves into this Christianity stuff! But proper Christian reflection means to meditate on the greatness and the beauty of Christ. We surely have no lack of data on the subject. We are blessed with four Gospels full of information about Jesus. Christian reflection means taking the time regularly (and I must lobby here for DAILY time) to commune with Christ. Consider his greatness, dear ones! He is the Lord, but He is near to us. He conquered sin and death, but He can feel every weakness that you and I have to deal with. He is the Creator of all things, but He is still touched when a single sparrow falls. Brethren, we have not even BEGUN to fathom the depths and magnificence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Dr. John MacArthur tells the story of when he used to pay fifty cents to go through the back door of the orchestra hall in Los Angeles. He would go up to the balcony with two or three of his college textbooks and sit there and listen to a whole concert while he did his homework. He says, "I listened to Bartok and Moussorgsky and many other great composers. As I listened I began to gain a great appreciation for the masters. To anyone who would say to me that he did not appreciate great classical music, I would say, 'My friend, go to the orchestra hall and stay there until you enjoy it!' You have to learn to love the masters. You have to learn to recognize great beauty and great genius. If you want to enjoy Jesus you have to stay with Him until you learn to enjoy Him. Stay there until your Christian life is one thrill after another!"

Jesus is also described in this first verse as "the Apostle and High Priest of our confession." As an apostle, He is God's representative among men. As a High Priest, He is men's representative with God. So for us as Christians, we need to get to know Him better, because He is both these offices for us. He is the final revelation of God. And He is our sole mediator with God. When you know Christ, no human minister or priest can do any more for you, as far as mediating between you and Christ! Sometimes people respond to me as though I could get them closer to God. Nothing could be further from the truth. If Jesus is your Lord and Savior, you could not be closer or more precious to the Father!

I would like to offer just a few brief suggestions in HOW TO GET ALONE WITH GOD:

1. Find a place that is relatively distraction free.
2. Choose a time when you are not overly rushed.
3. Don't try too much Bible reading or praying at one time. Consistency is the key, not setting world records!
4. Keep a little journal of one or two thoughts each day from the passage you have read.
5. Talk to God just as you would to any friend.
6. Believe that God cares for you, and is interested in your concerns, as you approach Him in Christ.
7. Choose one verse a week to commit to memory. This will temper your heart with God's concerns!

Hebrews 3:2-5 Christ is compared now to Moses, and the allusion is to the comment made by God Himself about Moses in Numbers 12:7,8.

"He is faithful in all My household; with him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the Lord..."

As great a man as Moses truly was (though not without weaknesses I might add), to confuse his greatness with that of Christ, is the same thing as confusing the greatness of a building with the genius that designed it.

I have a layman's interest in architecture. I know just enough to distinguish a few styles, and to appreciate innovation in design. When I was taking an architectural design class in college there was a professor, revered by many for his genius, named Dr. Ferrari. He was notorious for taking students' projects from time to time and tossing them out of the third story window of the architecture building, if he didn't like them. (Needless to say he was a little eccentric). But he was not deriding the many hours of effort a student had put in on the project. Rather, he was making a (memorable) statement about the lack of imagination and thought that he perceived the student had put into the model. For the Jews to elevate Moses to a place of equal stature with Jesus Christ, was to make the same statement, in a sense, as the writer to the Hebrews. "YOU'RE NOT LIVING UP TO THE RIGHT STANDARD--YOU'RE NOT APPRECIATING THE GENIUS OF CREATION. YOU'RE GETTING LOST IN THE BUILDING IT-SELF, AND FORGETTING THE BEAUTY OF THE BUILDING'S CREATIVE GENIUS!"

Now verse 4 is an interesting verse, and has a truth in it that I think we all too often overlook. Men exercise creative abilities every day. Some of you are very creative. But the source of creativity is God. He is the source of all that we can imagine, our "nobility" as creatures made by Him. I believe this is an evidence that men are different from animals. Animals are controlled primarily by instinct. Creativity is not their nature. But we, as men, because we are made in the image of God, can have fresh ideas. We can write songs, design buildings, come up with new recipes, write books and on and on. Now it is true that what we create is influenced by imitation sometimes, and by learning, and by trial and error. Nevertheless, creative endeavors of men are a silent testimony to the existence and genius of God.

Technology is quickly becoming the deity of many in our modern age. Many people, some very intelligent and educated, virtually worship the technological revolution of this century. I appreciate technology too, but I would pray that we do not fall into what Paul taught about almost two millenia ago when he said that man's sin CAN escalate to the point where he exchanges the truth of God for a lie, and worships and serves the creature rather than the Creator...(Romans 1:25).

Now Moses was an example of sticking too the task. He was faithful as an overseer and a leader among God's people. The context of Numbers 12 is that the "chips were down" against Moses, even in his own family. But He was faithful anyway to what God had called him to do. BUT in this he was merely a foreshadow of Christ's faithfulness. Moses was but a type of Christ. Jesus Christ's coming was truly the great service for men. All the servants of the Old Testament were merely foreshadowing the great ministry of Jesus Christ as a servant. And any service we render to one another or to the world is merely a reflection of what Jesus has done for me. In fact, our service to one another, when we serve one another, THAT is an act of worship! We are thanking God for serving us in Jesus Christ's ministry on the cross. That should keep us ever humble about what we do for Christ and for each other.

Hebrews 3:6 Notice that Moses was faithful as a servant IN the house of God (which means among the PEOPLE of God). Jesus Christ was (and IS) faithful OVER His house, His people. And the writer now uses one of the scariest words in Scripture: "IF". We are the people of God IF we hold fast. If we do not hold fast to the truth, then we are NOT the people of God. This verse introduces what is a major theme in the Book of Hebrews, that is the subject of APOSTASY. In church history there have been several eras of apostasy. The word apostasy simply means to "fall Away, or to depart". Apostasy was evident in the first century, by the letter to the Laodiceans in Revelation 3:14-22. Apostasy was evident in the fourth century when the Arian church said that Jesus Christ was not fully God. Apostasy from Bible truth was the rule rather than the exception for a thousand years before the Reformation. And just last week 28 of 39 Bishops in the Church of England said it is no longer necessary to believe that Jesus Christ IS God. We are living now in an age of great apostasy (and one of revival as well in other parts of Christendom.)

Continuance in the faith is the proof of the reality of our faith. If we continue, we have truly believed. If we have not continued, we have not truly believed. Notice that the text says, "whose house we ARE..." NOT "whose house we BECOME..." The trouble we get into sometimes is that we forget how we entered the house. We enter the family of God by faith, not by good works. It is by the grace of God that a person, ANY PERSON, can become a child of God. But many times we forget that soon after becoming a Christian. We get the idea somewhere that you keep yourself in the house of God by good works. That is not true. You are KEPT by the power of God and held in the family by grace too! I like the little saying:

"Take hold. Hold on. Never let go."

I want to urge you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, to hold fast

to your profession of Christ. Seek the face of Christ. Strive after a greater vision of Jesus Christ in your day to day lives. Learn to enjoy Christ. Build your confidence on the Word of God.

My oldest friend is a fellow by the name of Jeff. We have been friends since 1963. A few months before I became a Christian in 1972, Jeff made a profession of faith in Christ. He bought a Bible, started going to church, and corresponded with me about MY OWN need for Christ. In March of '72 I became a Christian. And we had a few brief months of fellowship through the mail. Then that next summer, we were both home from college, and I was shocked and very confused to see that his faith had faded, indeed had died. To this day (I just talked to him on the phone last Sunday, his birthday), he thinks Christianity is a fool's religion. Jeff did not hold fast. He had heard the Word, but it did not take root. He never learned to enjoy Christ. The subject of the perseverance of the saints is one which we shall, Lordwilling, develop much more in the coming weeks in the Book of Hebrews.

But brethren, my prayer for each of you who know Christ, is that you will hold on. That no matter what troubles might come your way, no matter what doubts you may have to deal with, that you will hold fast to your profession. And I will be doing everything I can to help you do just that!

If you do not yet know Christ personally, you can! It doesn't cost anything. It is free. You simply must trust personally in the person of Jesus Christ to be your Savior and payment for sin. And when you make that commitment to Christ, you will know the joy that knowing the Lord can only bring.

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
Do Not Harden Your Hearts
Hebrews 3:7-19

Introduction: Do you know what a "mole" is? Not the squinty little subterranean creature...but in espionage terminology? A "mole" is an individual who a foreign government works into your government's higher levels over a period of ten, fifteen or even twenty years. It is a person who essentially gives his life to skillfully masquerading as a faithful and dedicated supporter of one government when really he is a top level secret agent for another. The author John LeCarre has written in recent years several books on the subject in novel form but which really almost stand as textbooks. The subject is scary. But as I have read several of LeCarre's books, and I find the implications frightening, I am not half so terrified at the concept of a "mole" as I am at the concept we are dealing with today: the concept of "apostasy."

In the Bible "apostasy" means to fall away or to depart from the faith. Beyond that, it is to know the truth and then to willingly and intentionally turn away from it. It is NOT just simple rejection of the Gospel. But it is the person who makes an initial commitment to the Gospel, and then later to deny it. This is what the Hebrews were in great danger of doing, and the section before us this morning is a warning against this.

These readers had at least intellectually accepted the Gospel, and called themselves Christians. But because of the love of sin, or because they had begun to be ridiculed by people around them, they had started to waver and hesitate. They were not willing to throw their whole weight on Jesus, and thus they became apostate (MacArthur). That possibility scares me far more than the notion of political or international deception. The stakes are much higher. We need to understand apostasy and the warning given to us here "Do not harden your hearts."

Hebrews 3:7-12 The writer is now going to amplify what he has said in the previous section--"Consider Jesus." The alternative for a Christian NOT considering Jesus more and more is to fall into unbelief. Unbelief is what lies at the heart of all apostasy. You or I may at one point hold to certain truths, but later come to disbelieve them. That is why we need to "hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope until the end" (verse 6).

Notice in verse 7 that the quotation to follow is attributed to the mouth of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the author of the Scripture through the human writers. It is hard to find a doctrine more wonderful than the inspiration of the Scripture by the Holy Spirit. Do you want to hear the Holy Spirit? Are we a Spirit-filled church? Then let us hear what THE SPIRIT says: Today, remain pliable to the Spirit! The emphasis of course in this section is on TODAY! Don't wait until tomorrow or next week or next month to get yourself right with Christ. You can't live tomorrow's Christian life today and you can't relive the past--TODAY is the day to deal with whatever spiritual difficulties you are facing.

The quote before us is from Psalm 95, which is a commentary on the Exodus from Egypt many years before. The Psalmist applies the warning from the Exodus to his day. The writer applies the same truth to the Hebrew Christians in the first century and the same truth stands before us today--DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS!

Israel was the classic illustration of unbelief in the face of overwhelming evidence. God delivered them from their enemies time and time again. He provided all their needs in the wilderness. Even so they complained that they would starve or die of thirst--though they had seen TWO WATER MIRACLES (the opening of the Red Sea and the provision of drinking water at the rock at Horeb (Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 20:2ff). UNBELIEF NEVER HAS ENOUGH PROOF. The Israelites had seen the Lord working supernaturally in their midst for forty years. Yet they fell into unbelief.

There is little (if anything) which grieves and angers the Lord like unbelief. He has revealed Himself and His will clearly in the Bible, and yet still men deny His truth, even that He exists. How do you feel when someone tells a lie about you? Indignant? And there was severe discipline for those who rejected God's truth. Nothing is more illogical and unreasonable than unbelief. Really, unbelief is just a matter of the will--the person simply doesn't WANT to believe. And I look at all the argumentation by skeptics that God is not, or at least is not as the Bible says, as simply unbelief and not WANTING to believe.

Verse 11 mentions God's "rest." In Scripture there are several "rests." The first is the "rest" of the Sabbath, instituted by God after He created the universe and the principle of which we should recognize. The second is in Palestine, on entering which the Israelites were to rest from much toil and misery. There is also the rest which born-again Christians experience in this life in being at peace with God and free from the guilt of sin. And the fourth is the kingdom of heaven, the final rest. Unbelief disqualifies a person from any kind of rest. It is no wonder many non-Christians that we know live in such emotional and mental turmoil--without knowing Christ personally there is no peace, there is no rest. But for the faithful Christian the rest of heaven is unspeakable great!

The Bible doesn't tell us much about heaven. I think one reason is illustrated by the boy who sits down to a bowl of spinach when there's a chocolate cake at the end of the table. He's going to have a rough time eating that spinach when his eyes are on the cake. And if the Lord explained everything to us, all that is ours to come, I think we would have a rough time with our spinach down here. (V. Havner)

And C.S. Lewis has said concerning our living in these old bodies down here that we have these bodies much as English school boys are given ponies. They have to learn to ride on ponies before they are ready for the glorious stallions that are even now arching their necks and pawing the floor in the heavenly stables.

So, let us take care with our lives and not allow an evil heart of unbelief to overtake us. Do not ever make the mistake of thinking that you are immune from falling into unbelief. If you are truly

a regenerate Christian, then you cannot fall into ultimate apostasy. But don't ever look at yourself as being incapable of denying the truth of Scripture. When doubts arise, deal with them honestly. Denial is not a cure. And even worse is to nurture doubt. That is what the devil is trying to do to the church today. And the church is truly compromising, accomodating the devil in many ways. But when you develop a doubt--investigate the matter in Scripture. Get counsel on it, study to show yourself approved. Turning away from Jesus Christ is not just rejecting a religion, it is rejecting God. Notice that apostasy in verse 12 is "falling away from the living God." When a person leaves his Christian profession he is leaving life. And his road is tragic, because he will find no answers anywhere else. Nothing is more miserable than a person who once professed Christ, and now lives in a meaningless existence, which is about what life without knowing Christ is.

"You can never understand life until you know that at the center of all meaningful existence is a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ." (S. Lewis Johnson)

Hebrews 3:13-19 It is our responsibility to NOT HARDEN OUR HEARTS AGAINST THE LORD. And we are given a tool to help us in preventing that from happening. We are given each other! Now there are many reasons why we tend to fail at encouraging one another. Sometimes we refuse to do the encouraging, and other times we refuse to allow ourselves to be encouraged. But whatever the reason when we go UNencouraged, do you see what is at stake? Mutual encouragement of one another is what we have to ward off unbelief. This is serious business! I have never understood the Christian who says (or feels) "I don't need anybody--I can do it on my own. I'm not going to share my burdens." That attitude may preserve a machó image, but it couldn't be more unbiblical. The other deception is the insecurity trip: "I can't encourage anybody. I don't speak well, I don't have much to offer." Nothing could be further from the truth!

Do you try to encourage somebody often? The root meaning of the word for encourage here (parakaleō) means coming alongside to help. It is used by Jesus of the Holy Spirit in John 14:16. Do you come alongside someone, help them along, regularly?

Do you allow yourself to be encouraged by someone regularly? I grieve for some of you who I feel won't allow anyone inside of your life. And you hurt sometimes, but for whatever reason, you live your life pretty much alone. Why? Even in our small church I know there is someone who can really be a true encouragement to you! Allow the Holy Spirit to move as He wants to. Do not harden your hearts!

Everything we do, every activity, every meeting, every Sunday service, should be encouraging each other. If there is some meeting, some aspect of our church which is there just to be there, and is dead weight, we need to evaluate it. Life is too short to waste time on merely institutional "church business." We need to emphasize the encouragement of one another! You need it. I need it. We are going to try to organize a little to this end with the Barnabas Project. If someone goes unattended, unministered to in our church, we are just not doing what is most important!

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
The Rest of the People of God
Hebrews 4:1-13

Introduction: One of the basic ideas in most religions is that there is a time in the future when those who make it (according to whatever the requirements of that religion), achieve a certain final happiness, or peace or reconciliation of all their problems. Indeed this is almost universally assumed with most people, and only the cynical deny it or make fun of the concept. Some call this final state nirvana, others utopia, others final bliss and so forth. It is the basic hope that most men like to live with in their breast. While some today espouse various forms of nihilism (nothingness: that there is nothing after this life, and that all religion is fantasy), most would like to believe that it is possible at least, to at some time in the future, reach a final resting place. As well, most do not care to try to articulate what that place is, and how they will reach it.

The Bible speaks to this subject rationally and specifically. For the people of God, there is a future rest. For those who hold to the Scripture as the true Word of God, the idea of a future rest is not an outdated, trite or man-made concept. It is our real hope and expectation. This morning we are going to be reminded that there IS A REST FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD, and that WE NEED TO PRESS TOWARDS THAT END!

In our section of Hebrews this morning the concept of rest is referred to no less than ten times. The rest that we are speaking of means no more self-effort as far as salvation is concerned. It means the end of trying to please God by our works. God's perfect rest is a rest in free grace. Once a person has entered THAT rest; once he or she has realized that they cannot make themselves right with God, and they put their personal faith in Jesus Christ to accomplish that...THEN there is a new freedom in other areas of life. It means freedom from fear of being accepted by God, and a growing release from the power of many annoyances in life. The Christian has a confidence that no other person on earth can have. He knows that God is his friend, not his judge. This point seems like arrogance to many non-Christians when they first hear it. But we must keep at the forefront of our testimony that it is Christ's righteousness that allows us this rest, not our own goodness or performance.

This letter is written to Jewish Christians who were on the verge of falling back from their initial profession of faith in Christ. They had begun to think that maybe this Christianity stuff was just an illusion. They were not willing, some of them, to throw their full weight on Jesus Christ. And they were in danger of becoming apostate. Dear ones, the alternative to faith is not just backsliding. It is not just fruitlessness. It is apostasy. Unbelief is a serious, terrifying matter. And as a church we need to be on guard always for its beginnings--NOT because if we don't any or all of us might lose our salvation. But because the Scripture commands us to be a real encouragement to one another; to assist one another in our daily walks with Jesus Christ, to the end that in each of us the faith proves real!

Hebrews 4:1-5 One of the greatest mistakes a church can make is to assume that each of its members is, because he is a member, automatically growing in Christ. It has always bothered me when I would see spiritual growth of a church measured by such things as membership lists, growing budgets, establishment of new committees and other purely organizational factors. There is really only ONE measure of growth: ARE YOU CLAIMING MORE AND MORE OF THE PROMISES OF SCRIPTURE? Is the Word of God becoming more and more a part of your daily life? We have Bible studies, push Quiet Time, talk about Scripture memory not just because these are the things evangelical churches are EXPECTED to do! We have Vacation Bible School, Video Bible series, Sunday School and a Sunday morning message NOT because, "Well it seems like those things are appropriate for a church." We do these things to the end that you and your children may GROW in your dependence on the Living God! We hinge all that we do on the premise that the Bible is real, and that it is authoritative. And beyond that, that it contains certain promises! In fact all that we do as Dartmouth Bible Church, is done because we are leaning on the Bible. That is what the rest of the people of God is all about! And it is a rest that we are still going to be talking about in the year 2034, if the Lord tarries.

But some hear this same Bible, and while they hear it with their ears, they don't hear it with their hearts. They may even give some evidence that they have trusted in it, but haven't really mixed their hearing the Word of God with depending on it--with faith. The passage before us says:

"Make no mistake about it. Those who do not trust in the Word, shall not enter the rest of God."

Notice that the "promise remains." The door is still open. For many in the world today, especially young people, there is still the availability of entering that rest. Even when Israel rejected the promised land by their unbelief (and Kadesh-Barnea was the climax of Israel's unbelief), God did not finally reject them. Even today, the Bible teaches God has not finally rejected Israel. There remains a future for the ancient people of God in their Messiah, Jesus Christ. For you, if you have not trusted Christ, is the door of your heart still open. Is your heart still sensitive, pliable to spiritual things? I plead with you to flee to Christ. Believe what the Word of God says about your state without a Savior. Cling to Christ! It is really never too late to find Jesus Christ in your heart by faith:

In his younger manhood Jerry McCauley was as debauched as can be imagined. His children were starving because he spent his money on alcohol. His little girl died of malnutrition when she was about four. The neighbors gave enough money to buy her some new clothes and a casket to be buried in. But in the middle of the night, McCauley broke into the mortuary, took the clothes off his dead child, and exchanged them for a drink. Nevertheless, not long afterward, Jesus Christ reached down and changed the man's life and he later became one of the great preachers America has known. THAT is grace. (MacArthur)

I want to challenge you this morning. Have you really trusted in the facts of Scripture? I didn't ask do you know Scripture? But have you stirred into what you have heard from the Bible or read in it

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
Jesus' Perfect Priesthood
Hebrews 4:14-16

Introduction: I would like to speak to you this morning about our great High Priest. Throughout the Book of Hebrews the high priesthood of Jesus Christ is exalted. We have seen that Christ is superior to angels, and therefore we should not be distracted as Christians by the supernatural things that we do know about in the cosmos. Christ is superior to the prophets and to Moses, and therefore we should not place our confidence in leaders and human figureheads in the church. And we have looked at the peril of turning away from Christ, once having come to understand who He is.

The message now turns to the POSITIVE side of the Gospel. Many people have a caricature in their minds about fundamental or evangelical Christianity. Somehow they have gotten the idea that all we talk about is fire and brimstone. Now while I do believe in a literal hell, the message of salvation is POSITIVE. Salvation does immeasurably more than keep us out of hell! That it does do that, I praise God! BUT THAT IS NOT THE END OF THE STORY! Salvation not only saves from spiritual death, it brings spiritual life! If we accept Christ, what we receive because of that acceptance is ours because of WHO JESUS IS! If there were no other reason in the universe to be saved, knowing Jesus Christ would be enough! (MacArthur).

Three things make Jesus our great high priest--His perfect priesthood, His perfect person and His perfect provision. All other priests in the Old Testament were but shadows and symbols of HIS priesthood. This is what the three verses before us this morning are about!

Jesus' Perfect Priesthood (verse 14)

The word "since" in verse 14 is what we call a structural marker. It points back to the previous argument--being diligent to enter God's rest--and says, "We need to press on to enter God's rest: See what a great Advocate we have to help us do it?" The Lord wants us to know that if we are Christians, He is near to us. He is not far away and inaccessible. Notice it says, "we have" not "there is." It is not just that Jesus Christ IS a priest. It is that He is MY priest. I need no other. I could have no other!

The verse tells us also that Jesus (being man AND the Son of God) has "passed through the heavens." This shows that Jesus Christ was totally victorious not only over death, but also no longer bound by the physical laws of the universe. Today we can take astronauts and hurl them into space by means of rockets and they can circle the earth in Space Shuttles or in Space Stations and even walk in space in space suits. BUT they are still in the space-time continuum! Even if we could send them to the farthest star we know about, they would still be IN THE HEAVENS. Christ went THROUGH the heavens into the presence of God and He had no space equipment!--Just a glorified body.

The words "passed through" are significant because they refer back to the work of Aaron the high priest of Israel in Moses' day. The high priest passed through the court of the tabernacle, through the holy place and then passed through the Veil into the Holy of Holies where he made

atonement once per year for the sins of Israel. He could not linger there but could stay only as long as it took to make the sacrifice. This day is what the Jews call Yom Kippur--the Day of Atonement, and they still celebrate it, though they no longer have a temple or priests. But all of this is only a shadow of what Jesus did! Have you truly received Jesus Christ as your high priest? If you have you need to HOLD FAST, as God holds you fast! (Cf. Leviticus 16) Let us resolve to grasp onto Him at all cost. No matter what trouble or temptation may be wooing your heart to despair your profession of faith, KNOW THAT your High Priest, your "archiereia magan", is ministering on your behalf RIGHT NOW! Hold fast to what you believe. Jesus Christ is giving His full attention to matters of your salvation. He is not going to forget you. He has transcended this world, but He is still vitally concerned for you and me. But He is not only a minister TO His brethren, He is like His brethren!

Jesus' Perfect Person (verse 15)

Here the dignity of our high priest is coupled with His tenderness. I like the New English Bible here: "because of His likeness to us, has been tested in every way, only without sin." And notice the double negative! It stresses a positive truth! Jesus Christ not only intellectually understands our weaknesses--He sympathizes with them. He understands what it's like to be tempted to lust, to cheat, to kill, to steal, to doubt, to...

B.F. Wescott notes here:

Sympathy with the sinner does not depend on the experience of sin, but on the experience of the temptation to sin, which only the sinless can know in its full intensity. He who falls, yields before the last strain.

Jesus felt the full power of temptation, and in such a way as none of us can understand. Do you wrestle with fear? Jesus understands that. Do you struggle with some kind of lust? Jesus understands it. Do you fight sickness? Jesus feels for you. Do you struggle with relationships in family, work in the church? Jesus Christ knows what you're talking about! If you share a trouble with a Christian friend, your hope is that possibly he/she will be touched with it. Maybe.

Charles Spurgeon said:

You are touched, He is touched, at the same time. A pang shoots through my heart: that pang has been felt by my Lord also. A grief has stirred the waters of my spirit, and the Spirit of the Great High Priest has moved in harmony with it...It is one thing to see pain, but another thing to be touched with the feeling of it. Treasure up this view of your Lord's sympathy, for it may be of great support in the hour of agony, and a great restorative in the day of weakness.

Jesus Christ knows about stress, pressure, insecurity, disease, sorrow, poverty. Go to Him. Trust in His love, Christian. You can find no finer friend and no better helper.

We should not gloss over the little phrase "without sin," ("chōris hamartia" in the Greek). Jesus could not sin. This stands as one of

your own personal response of faith? That is the most important question that can be asked of you in your life.

If you run a red light and a policeman pulls you over and starts to give you a ticket, you don't show him your copy of the state of Massachusetts driving laws as your defense, do you? You don't try to establish your innocence by telling him that you have read the booklet many times and know most of its regulations by heart. Far from making you innocent, this would make you all the more responsible for living up to the laws and all the more guilty for breaking them. Knowing the law is an advantage only if we obey it. (MacArthur) Cf. Romans 2:25.

Hebrews 4:6-10 In the Bible unbelief results in a notion of being independent from God. The feeling of independence from God results in specific acts of disobedience. Before Adam and Eve fell in the Garden of Eden, they lived with God's rest:

Adam and Eve were completely righteous when they were created. They walked and talked with God as regularly as they walked and talked with each other. They were at rest in its original and fullest sense. They relied on God for everything. They had no anxieties, no worries, no pain, no frustrations, no heartaches. They did not need God's forgiveness, because they had no sin to be forgiven of. They did not need His consolation because they were never grieved. They did not need His encouragement because they had never failed. They only needed His fellowship because that is why they were created--they were made FOR Him.

For Israel in their whole history just about on up to today however, we struggle with rebellion, sin, and all the problems of being fallen creatures. But in Christ, as Mike Martin was encouraging us about last week, we have all the hope we could want. For the future rest which we look to, there will be a full realization of all those things which Adam and Eve in their rest didn't need, because they were not yet the REDEEMED people of God. And the rest of Hebrews 3 and 4 is primarily yet a future rest!

In verses 9 and 10 there is mentioned the fact that there is coming Israel and for us something called a Sabbath rest. A Sabbath is the rest of God when His program is finished. The first Sabbath was after God created the universe. The next will be at the consummation of time. Then we shall be at rest. Cf. Revelation 7:9ff; 14:13. I like what the twelfth century theologian Peter Lombard said:

"In the presence of God, we shall be at rest and we shall see, we shall see and we shall love, we shall love and we shall praise. Behold what will be in the end without end; for what other end is ours than to come to the kingdom of which there is no end." (quoted in Hughes)

But Christians, we must be diligent, we must be zealous to enter that rest! The word used here is the exact opposite of the spirit of unconcern that the Hebrew Christians were displaying. Are you concerned about where you are at spiritually?

Today there is a beautiful suspension bridge across Niagra Falls. This bridge was built very ingeniously. One day an engineer flew a kite across the Falls. When it came down on the other side, he had it anchored so that there was a slender cord stretched across from one side of the Falls to the other. Now who would have believed that a little cord could become a suspension bridge? However the engineer did not stop with just one cord. He tied a heavier cord to the little cord and pulled it across. Then a heavier cord and another and another, until soon there was a steel cable across the Falls. To this was added another cable and another and finally there was a powerful bridge across. This is true also of the Christian life. By faith we lay the first strand across the spiritual chasm, which is our initial act of faith in God and in His Son Jesus Christ. **BUT WE DO NOT STOP THERE!** That is just the beginning. By faith we continue to lay more strands and then more, until we have matured enough to have a solid cable. But we do not stop there! Because we must continue to build the superstructure on a solid foundation. We spend our whole lives building more and more onto the superstructure. We claim one promise of God after another, just like building materials. We apply each promise to our lives and we **KEEP** doing this until we reach the rest of God.

The bottom line in the Christian life is **OBEDIENCE**. It is not feelings, it is not whether your mental faculties can figure everything in Scripture out, it is not even being the best systematic theologian in the world. **IT IS OBEDIENCE**. From verse 12 we see that we cannot escape the gaze of Scripture. This is what makes the Bible different from any other book in the world. It is a spiritual book. It is an **ALIVE** book! You may have all the Christians that you know fooled. You may have the reputation for being the most mature, the most sacrificial, the most educated...But the Word of God looks down into the deepest places of your life. I'm not even sure **IF THERE IS ANY DIFFERENCE** between the soul and the spirit. But the Scripture can even pierce these two!

That is the God that we are dealing with (vs. 13). He is not mocked and He is not fooled. Our Christian lives are only as real as they are genuine! Let us dig in for the long haul. **PLAN to hang in there** whatever the cost. Accept difficulties in your life in the long-range perspective of entering the rest of the people of God.

The Israelites provoked God by their disbelief. They faced a "No Water" situation, and instead of trusting God, they fell into unbelief. Psalm 95 is a later commentary on that occurrence and Hebrews 3 and 4 quotes the same event. What "No Water" situations do you face? No money? No companionship? No Christian relatives? Learn to rest in God! First look at the past. Then learn to view the present in the light of God's faithfulness in the past, and consequently, rest in God for the supply of your needs. It is not necessary to scheme, to work, to be busy trying to discover a way to beat the "No Water" situation. Leave it in the hands of God!

Christians, with the light that God has given you, will you respond to it? I pray that you will!

the great aspects of Jesus Christ that the world and the devil love to attack. They cannot accept that Jesus Christ, while suffering all the anguish and temptation that He did, did not sin. In fact I think that one of the great deceptions that you hear people sometimes say is that "Well, Jesus COULD have sinned, He just had complete victory." No. He was perfect in being and in will. If you wonder how Jesus could really understand your weaknesses and yet never have had the possibility of sinning, just remember that many doctors, who perform certain types of surgery thousands of times, have never had the operation themselves, and yet understand the surgery far more than you or I ever will!

As Dr. John MacArthur notes, "Sinlessness alone can properly estimate sin." His temptations were all the more terrible because of His perfection. So, whatever Satan brings our way, there is victory in Jesus Christ. He has been there.

Not only is Jesus' ministry as a priest perfect, and not only is His person perfect, but the provision that He makes for us is perfect also!

Jesus' Perfect Provision (Verse 16)

In America today, access is the name of the game...Access to enough capital for investment...Access to your spending money 24 hours/day with a Bank Card...Access to enough of the right information to do the right job...access to options on career planning...access to your boss...access to your church leaders...access to your government leaders. Access to enough recreation...access to enough cable TV channels... We really spend alot of time and effort today fighting for ACCESS to all kinds of things.

And yet the greatest provider of the most needed kind of access, is Jesus Christ; because He has offered free access to the Living God, by way of His priesthood. And yet people reject it, and deny their need of it. But every man and woman is BORN with a need of access to the throne of grace!...a profound need.

Drawing near to the throne of grace was a basic fundamental of the Protestant Reformation. It is fashionable in some circles today to view the Protestant Reformation as a great mistake, something that we should feel ashamed of and work to heal by the Ecumenical movement of our day. But the Reformation was a revival of Biblical truth that had been lost in the endless ritual of Roman Catholicism. The Reformers: Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and others nailed to the masthead of their movement three great principles taken from Scripture: 1) No sacrifice but Calvary; 2) No priest but Christ; 3) No confession but the throne of grace. With these three principles, the Reformation turned Europe upside-down during the Middle Ages. (Arnold)

Notice that it is with confidence that we can come near to the throne. The KJV here says "boldly" and that might connote brazenness or disrespect today. No child of God may ever approach the throne of grace irreverently, flippantly, carelessly or presumptuously. But we can come with liberty, and with frankness. That is what this means. We are to come as we are, say what we feel, and ask what we need.

And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. (I John 5:14,15)

It's in time of need that we can come before the throne of grace. Do you have a need today? Do you need some help? Are you using your access? Are you using it regularly, as a regular part of your life? My wife and I were talking the other night about trying to pray more together. And she said something I appreciated. She said we ought to get to the point in having prayer together that it is just completely natural, as natural as having breakfast or dinner together. That's what our individual prayer lives should be like too! Just like eating a regular meal--that pleases the Lord, and makes use of the access that the Lord Jesus provides.

When I was in the sixth grade I had a friend who had a friend, whose Dad flew one of the President's helicopters. And Dick and I visited the boy's house one day, and in the kitchen was a black telephone that had no dial on it. It was a direct line to the White House. Not believing it (even though I remember it said "White House" on it), I picked up the receiver and the operator immediately said, "White House." (Needless to say I was scared witless!) We have access just like that, in time of need. Why don't we use it?

Let's hold on fast to our profession so that when we're 60 and 70 and 80 years old we still are telling the same testimony about the reality of Jesus' perfect priesthood!

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
Christ Is the Perfect Priest
Hebrews 5:1-10

Introduction: Biblical Christianity has very few visible devices. It is a religion not based on things which are seen. We have no uniforms, no icons hanging around the auditorium, we do not call this the sanctuary, and we have no altar. Our religion is only as real as the degree to which Jesus Christ reigns in our lives. A Jew in the first century might have asked a Christian, "How can you claim to have the right way to God when you have no priests? You do not have anyone doing intercession with God for you!" Of course the Christian can reply to that, "We DO have a high priest, and one who is perfect in every respect! He is Jesus Christ!"

The heart of the Book of Hebrews focuses on Jesus' High Priesthood. Our priest is not one who goes in and out of a temple on a daily basis continually making sacrifices for us. The heart of Christianity is its SPIRITUAL REALITY. And we can only perceive that reality by faith. The trouble is we naturally do not want to have to keep exercising faith. We want our religion to be visible. Well, don't be too downhearted--there IS a visible indication of our religion, something that we can see clearly with our eyes with which we can say, "Yes, that's Christianity alright!"

This is pure and undefiled religion religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world." James 1:27

By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. John 13:35

In Jesus Christ, we can come directly before God. You couldn't ask for a more dynamic and a more excellent approach to the problem of religion. The Old Testament was the beginning of God's program for men. The New Testament is the completion of it. It is marvelous that we, in this age, in 1984 here at 52 Morton Avenue, can come before the throne of grace for help in time of need. Oh, that we might appreciate that truth more fully!

Rules for Human Priesthood (Verses 1-4):

The writer is going to give us here three basic qualifications for a Jewish High Priest. He must be appointed by God. He must be sympathetic with those to whom he ministers. He must offer sacrifices on their behalf.

No individual who has ever lived on the earth better fulfills the first aspect--being called and appointed by God. Men NEED a mediator between themselves and God. Our wickedness because of our natural bent towards sin is so total and is so far-reaching, that we need someone to intercede with God for us. Do you not? This is the first point, logically, in evangelism, I might add. Unless we can bring an individual (by the Holy Spirit's work) to the place where he sees that he NEEDS a mediator--that he cannot approach God alone--he will never trust Christ for the right thing! Jesus Christ above all others was a man, taken from among men, and given this office. He was truly a man. He felt all the things that you and I feel, the only difference being that He did not sin. He lived thirty years before He even began His ministry. He had probably fifteen years in

as a carpenter. He lived as a responsible citizen, NOT in a free country, but in an occupied one, much like living in Afghanistan might be today, with all the oppression and hardships of an oppressed people. Jesus was taken from among men alright!

Secondly, Jesus Christ can understand your weaknesses, having had them Himself! And therefore He deals (as any good High Priest should have) gently. That does not mean that He was wimpy. Gentleness is not an effeminate or a weak characteristic. It is a godly one. And when you struggle with some weakness, you are more apt to be touched when someone comes to you for counsel and encouragement on that same matter. Jesus is touched with ALL WEAKNESSES. He is surely an excellent High Priest!

The human priest must continually offer up sacrifices both for the people and for himself, under the Old Covenant. And he did this job not out of a career choice that he made. There was no self-actualization involved! A priest had to be called by God. There was honor in the high priesthood, and it was never to be coveted and sought after. Jesus Christ is the epitomy of self-lessness. And He was called by God to be the supreme High Priest--the one who did not have to make a sacrifice for Himself, and did not have to repeat the process daily. In these two things He totally eclipsed the Old Testament office of the priesthood while fulfilling it. Can you see why the notion of a priesthood today is totally absurd?

While obviously this section does not directly speak to the question of the professional ministry today, I believe that there are some important principles which do bear on us today:

1. Before a man takes upon himself the office of pastor or elder, there should be some sense of divine calling on him.
2. A minister who does not constantly work at feeling for his people, at growing each year MORE sympathetic for their weaknesses, which sometimes are his greatest ministry difficulties, is not fulfilling his calling.
3. While the ministry is not offering sacrifices for sin, it is hard work and something the minister should be constantly busied with. It is tragic that somewhere along the line ministers have gotten (or earned) the reputation for laziness and slovenliness. No one should be more consumed with the importance of his work than the man called by God to invest his life in the people of God.
4. There is a certain amount of honor with the call to the ministry that should be recognized with the people. Use of the title "reverend" is an artificial honor, and an inaccurate one, when addressing the minister. But respect is not artificial, for if the man is in the position in God's will, he is there by God's placement.
5. Ministers should never be self-appointed. If God has called a man to a certain flock, that flock will recognize it. This is the appropriate form of "ordination."

How Christ Fulfilled the Priesthood (Verses 5-10)

It is amazing that with all the glory of BEING God, of being the Creator, and of being the Lord of the universe, when it came to the priesthood, Jesus did not glorify Himself. There was perfect unity in the Godhead as to who does what; God does the appointing. Jesus does the obeying. The writer substantiates his claim with two Old Testament references: one from Psalm 2 and one from Psalm 110.

Jesus Christ is the Eternal Son, and He sustains a unique relationship with God the Father. He is eternally begotten, that is, He has the relationship of a son to a father eternally. He is also forever a priest. His priesthood will never become obsolete, He will never tire of it and it cannot be overthrown. The priesthood is after the type of Melchizedek, whom we meet in Genesis 14, and will deal with again in Hebrews 7. Melchizedek was a man about whom we know very little. He was a king (of Salem, the predecessor to Jerusalem), and a priest as well. Aaron was not the first priest, nor the best. Aaron's priesthood ended when the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Roman armies. Melchizedek's priesthood continues on in Jesus Christ. Can you see the marvelous continuity between the New Testament and the Old? Christians are really more Jewish than Jews!

So often we think of Jesus' real ministry as being in the last week of His earthly life. We think about the trial, and the scourging and the agony of the cross, all of which we should meditate on regularly (that's why we have the Lord's Table). ---But His LIFE was part of the atonement as well! Verse 7 tells us that His ministry during His life was also consumed with offering up sacrifices as well! Could there be a better offering on your behalf, dear ones, than the tears of Jesus Christ, and the words of intercession FOR YOU coming from His perfect lips?

"I was in His mind, the night He prayed for me,
I was in His mind, before Gethsemane,
Because He saw me, because He loved me!

I was in His heart, when Calvary's hill He climbed,
I was in His heart, when He dies for all mankind,
Because He sought me, because He loved me!

Where you read (in the NASB) "piety", what that means is "reverent submission." Although Jesus Christ was the Son of God, He still had to obey the will of the Father in providing a sacrifice. Let us never fall into the wrong idea that it was easy. Jesus didn't enter into His ministry not knowing all that it would entail. He had perfect knowledge of what was in store for Him. And still He was obedient. You've heard people say, or maybe said yourself, "Well, if I knew such and such was going to be THAT hard, I sure wouldn't have done it! Jesus had no prior ignorance to the difficulty of His task--and yet kept right on!

Now, because He DID learn obedience, He is the source of eternal salvation. Just sort of comes right off the page and hits you right between the eyes, doesn't it? HE SUCCEEDED IN HIS TASK. THEREFORE HE IS THE SOURCE OF OUR MAKING IT. But there is the requirement of obedience to believe. The root of all unbelief is simply disobedience. When a person rejects Jesus Christ, they are in essence disobeying God at the most rudimentary stage. Coming to Christ carries with it, on the other hand, the joy of having obeyed God's

call. Trusting Christ is not just a passive, do nothing, "Well, if God is going to save me, then let Him go ahead"--kind of fatalism. We plead with non-Christians to "Trust Christ." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!" It is active! It is the most dynamic thing a person can do with His life! It is the most exciting decision a person can ever make...

So, there IS still a High Priesthood. But it only has one priest in office--the man Jesus Christ.

For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. I Timothy 2:5

Brethren, we need to remember this morning what it is Jesus is doing today for us. He is our great High Priest. And He continues to plea your case before God the Father, with the evidence of His own blood, and motivated out of a great love for you.

Let's live our lives this week in light of that fact!

The Problem of Immaturity
Hebrews 5: 11-14

Introduction: My little girl Jocelyn is getting to the age where she can begin to distinguish likes and dislikes in what she eats. She likes yogurt, hot dogs, green beans, peas, apple sauce and my wife's special Mexican casserole. She doesn't care for spinach, or lima beans. When she was smaller all she wanted was milk--morning, noon and night. She still likes milk now--milk on her cheerios in the morning, a cold glass to wash down the quahogs at night--but if we gave her nothing but milk now, it wouldn't take long at all for her to throw a holy fit. That's because she is growing. The more she grows, the more solid food she enjoys and can handle. As far as meat is concerned, she is up to cut up chicken and hamburger. AND I'm sure it will be a little while at least before she develops a liking for prime rib!

Spiritual growth is like this too. When a person first comes to Christ they have a need for alot of milk, and they are not too interested in strong meat. When a person first becomes a Christian, they have a need for the basics. And they develop quite a taste for them. What is this milk that new Christians need?

1. Basic doctrine.
2. Basic discipleship--Quiet Time, witnessing, fellowship, consistent attendance in some group of believers.
3. Baptism.
4. Restructuring of the basic God-concept.

This is all necessary and good. And the growing Christian will never outgrow the need for these things! The problem comes when a Christian has grown, and then stops growing, and goes back to struggling with the basics. As a pastor, when I see this, it is frustrating. When you have been working with an individual and they stop progressing and developing in Christ, and have to go back and re-instruct them on Quiet Time, on faithful service to the Body, on who Jesus Christ is, on justification by faith, etc...it is hard. We don't learn this point easily, I am convinced.

It seems that whenever you read about a new football coach taking over a team, the first thing he says is, "We've got to get back to basics." The reason is that everyone forgot them, and needs to deal with them again."

This stalling out in the Christian life, and the subsequent reversion to milk as the preferred diet is the subject of our passage this morning. Sometimes churches have in them people who function as members but are really unregenerate. They may LOOK like Christians, but are still in their hearts unconvinced about the genuineness of the promise of God in Jesus Christ. The central theme of the Book of Hebrews is the superiority of the New Covenant to the Old Covenant. In other words, "Don't stick around in the old life--press on in the new!" The RESISTANCE to press on in our Christian lives is the subject of this morning's passage. It applies to both Christians and non-Christians. We all need to flee to Christ, and to trust Him more and more.

DULLNESS PREVENTS UNDERSTANDING (Hebrews 5:11)

The writer to the Hebrews is a little frustrated with his readers. He would like to delve into the excellencies of how Christ's priesthood compares to that of Melchizedek (and he will get around to it in chapter seven). But first he feels compelled to rebuke these Christians for stalling out (or in the case of the non-Christians in the group, for not fully embracing Christ).

They can't understand what he wants to teach them--not because he is not a good teacher. NOT because the material itself is too esoteric for them, or really unnecessary. But because they themselves have become sluggish. The writer is not saying that they are intellectually or spiritually inferior. Their slackness, their dullness of hearing is an acquired state, not a natural one (Leon Morris).

Often times when a person first becomes a Christian, they are very excited about it. New life, a new perspective on the whole world, a new hope, new family, etc. There is an initial love of the things of Christ that I love to watch. BUT it is always sad if that newborn excitement gives way to stagnation. And if stagnation sets in, it affects the persons attentiveness, and his ability to receive and retain solid instruction (P. E. Hughes). It will manifest itself in boredom with the Word of God, doubting of important doctrines, and a preoccupation with the faults of others.

Paul had to deal with this same state of carnality at Corinth, where I believe, the situation was worse.

"But I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?" (I Corinthians 3:1-3)

It is my conviction that the state of immaturity in the faith, pulls on us all the time. We gravitate naturally towards becoming stagnant. Therefore we need to take care to grow. Growth doesn't come just because you LOOK like a Christian.

I could go to the store and buy a New England Patriots uniform, and some football shoes and a professional-style football. But that wouldn't make me a member of the New England Patriots Football Club.

For non-Christians, it is possible to hear the Gospel, get excited about it initially, but they neglect to act upon it. The result is they become hardened to it, and very difficult to teach. Also, for Christians, when they become spiritually hardened, they become difficult to teach. When we do not trust in and act upon a part of God's truth that He is showing us, we become hardened to it.

I hope you will take whatever steps are necessary to avoid becoming dull of hearing.

just going to church--not doing anything TOO radical or demanding. The point is that if you don't keep moving in your Christian life, you won't stand still for long--you will start slipping backwards. And if you let the slide continue for very long, you will probably need to be RE-INSTRUCTED about the need for Quiet Time, about the truth of certain basic doctrines, and about basic ethics of right and wrong in the Christian life.

Your stomach will DEvolve. It will go from being able to efficiently digest the meat of the Word, back to just being able to handle milk. Its a miserable state for a Christian to be in...

If you are a young Christian this morning, take the Apostle Peter's words to heart:

"Therefore putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babes long for the pure milk of the Word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Word" (I Pet.2:1-3)

There are few things to me so beautiful and exciting as a new Christian lapping up the Word of God. There are few things to me so sad as someone who professes Christ who is bored with the things of God, and is satisfied with going to church("Churchianity").

DULLNESS REQUIRES BEING TAUGHT AGAIN (Hebrews 5:13,14)

Non-Christians and even some young Christians struggle with accepting fully that Christ is all our righteousness. But the more a person grows in Christ, the more he sees his own utter lack of virtue or godliness apart from Christ. When an individual begins to dine on the doctrines of grace, and this is indeed strong meat, he begins to see the magnificence and excellency of God's plan of salvation for men.

But if we stick to milk, we will never fully appreciate all the greatness of what God is doing on the earth today. We in short, will short-change ourselves from all that God wants to show us. I see this in many ministries that seem to always be talking about two or three of the same passages of Scripture. I want to cry out, "Let's get on with it!"

The more a person grows in his or her faith, the more perceptive they become about what is right and wrong--in general, and for their own lives. Spiritual sensitivity and discernment is a sign of maturity. The spiritually mature person can tell between right and wrong behavior. He can also discern right and wrong doctrine. He is practiced in these things. He is not sluggish.

The word here for "trained" is the word for which we have the English word, "gymnasium." The mature Christian is disciplined in the gymnasium of understanding right from wrong. He does not waver on what the Scripture says is right. And he does not waver on what the Scripture says is wrong. He is like the gymnast on the parallel bars, who moves skillfully about the bars, and whose abilities are finely tuned. He does not constantly struggle with ethics or with doctrinal excesses. He knows how to keep his priorities on target, and what is important in the Christian life.

DULLNESS IS UNPRODUCTIVE (Hebrews 5:12)

It is possible to be exposed to a great deal of truth from the Word of God. And yet being exposed to truth doesn't guarantee that it will take root.

It is estimated that at Dallas Theological Seminary (which I believe is the greatest seminary in the world), somewhere around 5% of the student body is probably really unsaved. That translates into about 50 to 60 seminary students, who are exposed to the truth of God all the time, in the original languages no less, and yet are maybe not truly saved. Now the screening process for the Seminary is very thorough. But in the church there are people who think they are saved, who know truth in their minds, but have never allowed it to take hold in their hearts.

One of the greatest dangers that you can encounter in your Christian life is to grow too cerebral, that is, too intellectual about your faith. People in Bible Churches across the country, and folks in many of the Reformed churches around particularly struggle with this.

We DO NEED to be smart about our Christianity. We need to know the great doctrines of the faith. BUT as we learn the truth of the Scriptures, we need to let it grip our lives.

The problem with the Hebrew church was that they never really learned the ABCs. Verse 12 shows this. They ought to have grown to the place where they were discipling others, building the truth into other people and reproducing themselves. That is the ministry of multiplication! It should work like this:

Pete gets saved. He begins to go to a good Bible-teaching church. He begins to grow in his faith through the encouragement of the Body. Soon he has developed some stability, and he is ready to strike out a little with his own ministry. He shares the Gospel with two men at work, John and Steve. It happens that they trust Christ too. Pete asks them if they might like to have a little study of the Word one morning per week and look at the Gospel of John. They agree. In fact, Steve asks if maybe he could invite a friend in his department named Dave. Pete agrees, of course. Now remember, Pete (the first guy) is still a young Christian himself--and now he's got this ministry on his hands. But the quickening of God's truth--the success of a ministry isn't dependent on the cleverness, experience, or plans of man. It's our responsibility to carry out the Gospel, but it is God who does the work!

So the four of them have a little Bible Study for several weeks. Pete has been sharing weekly how it has been going at church. The folks there have been praying for him, and the elders and pastor have helped him in how and what to do in the small group. In six months or so, John and Steve are leading their own groups. Dave has just made a commitment to Christ, and is sharing the Gospel right and left. And the ministry of multiplication continues.

The only hindrance for it working like that, dear ones, is if you refuse to get off milk yourself. Too many Christians today are satisfied with

The point of this passage is: Don't become dull of hearing! Do not be satisfied with a little Christian growth to a certain point, and then just grow comfortable there. Strive after growth. The Kingdom of God is compared to a pearl of great price. Sell all you have to get it! Make growth in your own personal discipleship the most important thing in your life! Learn the Word of God, be involved in ministry, according to your spiritual gifts, develop a love for sound doctrine, love the saints.

If you are with us this morning, and you are not sure about whether you are yet really a Christian, let me share a little story with you from Dr. John MacArthur:

Some years ago, Dr. MacArthur was speaking at a youth conference on the subject of choosing the right life partner. After one session a young girl came up to talk. As they sat on the chapel steps, she began telling him that her boyfriend said that whatever a person does, in sex or in anything else, is all right as long as no one is hurt. After a little questioning Dr. MacArthur discovered that the girl's boyfriend was 21 and she was only 14. Dr. MacArthur says that, "When I briefly reminded her of what the Bible says about sex outside of marriage, she hung her head and said, 'I know that. You know what I need? I need to be saved.' She explained that she not only had been raised in a good church, but her father was a pastor. Dr. MacArthur replied, "Then you know how to be saved." "No," she said, "I don't. I have heard my father preach on it but I don't understand it."

Here was a perfect illustration of spiritual sluggishness. This girl had heard the Gospel all her life, but she had rejected Jesus Christ for so long that the Gospel now was foggy to her. She could no longer understand it. She thought her father's sermons were boring and made no sense. She had become totally indifferent to God's Word.

If you are not yet sure about your salvation, you can be. Speak to me after, or Bob or Mike, and simply put all your trust in Jesus Christ to pay for your sins. It is a matter of trust. And then determine to grow in Him and to keep growing!

The Terror of Apostasy
Hebrews 6:1-8

Introduction: There are some passages in Scripture that preachers never seem to handle. Some verses, some paragraphs, some chapters and maybe even some books, that preachers would just rather not have to deal with. And many times, they don't--particularly if they don't have a philosophy of preaching verse by verse through Bible books. The passage before us this morning is one such passage.

This section of the Book of Hebrews is one of the hardest to interpret in the Bible. There is little agreement among the commentators, and one must summon all the ability in honest interpretation that one has to deal fairly with this text. This section is the trump card of the Arminians. It is the silver bullet in the revolver of those who say that salvation can be found and then lost. It is the passage first turned to by those who believe that a true Christian can lose his/her salvation. This morning I intend to show you that the passage however, does not teach that doctrine. But rather it is a warning to the church at large. I hope to show you that it is intended for churches with professing Christians in them.

Basic to this notion, is the fact that we cannot see each other's true heart condition. We can evaluate each other by fruits, and encourage one another based upon what we see, but we do not really know for one another what the state of the heart truly is. Only you know that for yourself. It is a totally private matter.

Hebrews 6:1-3 We are going to take up the idea right where we left off last week. The writer to the Hebrews has told them that they OUGHT to have progressed in the faith. They OUGHT to be discipling others. But they have grown satisfied with a diet of milk only. He has rebuked them, and now he says again, "let us press on to maturity." DETERMINE that whatever happens in your life, you are GOING to keep following Jesus Christ.

Let's move on from the basics. For the young Hebrew Christian, there were basics about Messiah religion. Here he enumerates them, but does not re-instruct them about them.

1. He says let's press on from laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works. This is the most basic thing a person needs to know when they are considering Christ. He cannot please God by being good. He cannot please God by fulfilling some sort of religious obligations. This phrase probably refers to the whole Levitical economy. Yes, coming to Christ IS repentance from dead works, it is true that it is impossible to please God by doing good works, because apart from Christ, all our BEST works are as filthy rags (Is.64:6). But when we have learned this, we need to move on.
2. Also, faith towards God is a basic. It is a "bridge doctrine" between Judaism and Christianity. It is necessary to simply trust in what the Lord says as being true, and to place your complete trust in Him.

3. While baptism is a basic concept for Christians, this next reference probably does not mean Christian baptism. It is better translated (as the NASB has it) "instructions about washings." The "washings" were refer to the Old Testament purifications of the priest in the entrance into his office. Priests would wash all day long because of defilement. ✓
4. "Laying on of hands" does not refer to the practice in the book of Acts, but rather to the conferral of the sins of Israel on the scapegoat. It was an identification with the offerings that were brought in the Levitical economy.
- 5,6 The last two items mentioned, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgement were both Old Testament concepts as well as New Testament ones. They are basics. We need to accept them and moce on.

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson points out that the only true measure of so terrible judgement as eternal judgement is what Christ performed on the cross, when He cried out, "My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Verse three tells us that the author's intent in this letter IS to press on in their instruction. He has a POSITIVE philosophy of ministry. But again, the people have to be hearing him. They need to get shaken up and realize that in their midst, there are some who really MIGHT fall away, or even, some who have.

And, notice the little phrase, "if God permits." It is almost a cliché today. Yet we NEED to have an overall submission to God's providential governing of our lives. It is not cliché-ick only. It is a good Bible concept (Cf. James 4:13-17).

Hebrews 6:4-6 The Hebrews being addressed here had five great advantages:

1. They had been enlightened. First of all we should notice that this passage makes no reference at all to salvation. There is no mention of justification, sanctification, the new birth or regeneration. None of the normal New Testament terminology for salvation is used. In fact, no term used here (to my knowledge), is ever used elsewhere in the N. T. FOR salvation. The enlightenment spoken of here has to do with intellectual perception of spiritual and biblical truth.
2. They had tasted of the heavenly gift. They had seen and themselves tasted of the heavenly gift, that is, Christ. This great gift, however, was not received. It was not feasted upon, but only tasted, sampled. It was not accepted or lived, only examined. In John 4 Jesus talks about drinking the living water that He offers. Those who drank it--not sipped it or just tasted it, but drank it--would be saved. One of the pre-salvation ministries of the Holy Spirit is that of giving the unsaved a taste of the blessings of salvation. But tasting is not eating.
3. They had partaken of the Holy Spirit. This verse refers to anyone who has been where the Holy Spirit is ministering. It is possible to have an association with the Holy Spirit, to share in what He does, and not be saved. The Bible never alludes to Christians being ASSOCIATED with the Holy Spirit. which is what the Greek word (metachos) implies. It speaks

of the Holy Spirit being within them. The writer says that those who fall away, even though they had a close association with the Holy Spirit, were not OF the Holy Spirit.

4. They had tasted the Word of God. Again, these readers are spoken of as having tasted something of God. In this case, His Word. These people had been taught the Word of God. They probably came regularly to the assembly of the Christians, and maybe even listened and thought carefully about what they heard. They maybe took it all in, possibly with enthusiasm and appreciation. But they could not say with Jeremiah,

"Thy words were found and I ate them, and Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart." (Jer.15:16)

They tasted, but they did not eat, just like the nation to whom Jeremiah spoke. Herod is another example (Mark 6:20).

5. They had tasted of the powers of the age to come. These people who fall away maybe even have tasted of supernatural Holy Spirit power. They saw miracles, they saw people marvelously regenerated, they saw all kinds of incredible things! But it was to no avail, because what they saw was not mixed with faith in their hearts. They had come so far, and had turned back.

One of the great tragic figures in American history is Benedict Arnold. If you travel to Saratoga, New York, you will see there a monument to that battle and the names of the Generals who fought for the American cause: Gates, Schuyler, Morgan and then a blank niche in the obelisk. General Benedict Arnold fought there too, with some valiant success. But he was a traitor. GENERAL BENEDICT ARNOLD--GREAT AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY GENERAL...and traitor. Judas Iscariot: GREAT APOSTLE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST...and son of perdition.

Some Bible interpreters have said that these verses describe the possibility of a Christian losing his salvation. But I think they grossly underestimate a man's ability to deceive others and himself. We cannot see each other's hearts. I cannot pronounce over any of you an absolutely infallible decree that this one is truly saved and this one is not. None of us has that kind of visibility. But I can say that if you flee to Christ, if you trust Him wholly, in the privacy of your heart, you are saved!

The only word I can think of to describe the activity of coming so far in following Christ, and then to turn back is that it is terrifying to me! It is the OPPORTUNITY for RECEIVING SALVATION that can be lost, not salvation itself. The more an individual says, "no" to Christ, the easier it becomes, until maybe they reach a point of no return. And those in churches can fall into this category.

I would point out TOO, that if this passage teaches that salvation can be lost; it also teaches that once lost, salvation can never be regained. It is professing believers who are as yet really unbelievers who are in danger of losing their salvation--in the sense of losing the opportunity to ever receive it. The unbelieving Jews were in great danger, because of their spiritual immaturity and sluggishness, of turning back to Judaism and of never being able to repent and come to Christ. They would be lost forever, because they had rejected, at the most vital

point in knowledge and conviction, the only gospel that could save them. Rejecting the Gospel does something else, the writer tells us: it makes a statement. When a person comes so far in his understanding of the Gospel, and then rejects it, he is actually then participating with those who said, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

The tenses of the Greek participles are significant. The aorist participle, "and then have fallen away", indicates a decisive moment of apostasy, the point of no return. The present participles, "crucify again", and "put to open shame," indicate the continuing state of those who once they have lapsed into apostasy, keep on crucifying Him and holding Him up to contempt. (Hughes)

A vaccination immunizes by giving a very mild case of the disease. A person who is exposed to the Gospel can get just enough of it to immunize himself against the real thing. The longer he continues to resist it, whether graciously or violently, the more he becomes immune to it. (MacArthur). This is how some people insulate themselves by merely GOING TO evangelical churches.

Hebrews 6:7,8 These verses then illustrate the point. All those who hear the Gospel are like the earth. The rain falls, the Gospel message is heard. The Gospel seed is planted and there is nourishment and growth. Some of the growth is beautiful and good and productive. There is nothing more exciting than to see the Gospel take root in someone new!

But some of the growth is false and unproductive. It came from the same seed and drank the same water, but it did not produce. It has rejected the life offered it and became good only for burning.

The greatest tragedy on earth is for those who have had so much light and yet are lost. I cannot help but feel we have an abundance of people in this category in America today, where the Gospel goes forth freely and without restraint, and so many hear it, and the churches are filled, and Christianity actually has the chance to become very sophisticated and high-tech. And yet seemingly so few church goers are healthy, productive and growing Christians.

Where are you on the spectrum? If you are not sure about where you stand with Christ, you can make it sure. "The only breath you can be sure of is the one you are taking right now" (S. Lewis Johnson).

This message is not for the world. It is for the church. If you come to this church and are confused about whether Christ is yours and you are His, then please do not let another day go by without knowing. There is no more important decision a person can make than to DECIDE to trust Christ completely.

And if you are sure of your salvation, then won't you DETERMINE right now to be serious about your Christian life and not stagnate? That is the only road to happiness for you.

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
Encouragement in God's Promises
Hebrews 6:9-12

Introduction: The story is told about the old southern man, who when contemplating "getting religion" said, "I don't want that kind of religion that I can get and not know it...because I might lose it, and not miss it!" (S. Lewis Johnson).

What a great description of the way we should all view our Christianity. The writer to the Hebrews is saying, "Take care! Don't let yourself grow stagnant for too long, or you might find that you have fallen away, and have grown hardened to Jesus Christ...and the opportunity for repentance has passed." We have shown that this writer is dealing with a church much like many today--a church which includes many true Christians, and then some who are not truly regenerate, but who think they are saved. In our passage this morning, he turns his attention to that part of the church who is truly saved, we would hope the vast majority.

And in this passage he is going to encourage them greatly, lift their spirits, show them WHY they have a real hope, and spur them on to a continued life of growth in Jesus Christ. I hope this message to you this morning does exactly the same thing.

Hebrews 6:9,10: After the warnings about possible apostasy, the writer tells them that he IS convinced that a genuine work of grace has occurred in their midst. It is not right, nor Biblical, for Christians to constantly live in fear about whether they are really going to heaven or not. I have no doubt it is possible that someone from our midst could very well apostasize from the faith. But I do not EXPECT it. There is real evidence that God is alive here. There is too much genuine spiritual activity, that shows the work of the Holy Spirit, for me to get too discouraged.

Those of us who come from a Reformed theological perspective, sometimes struggle with a little imbalance--that is, we know we can't lose salvation, but we're constantly afraid we haven't got it. This does not find grounds in the Book of Hebrews, anyway. Here, the writer says, "I am persuaded that you are GOING to move on; that you DO evidence salvation."

He has given the stern warning, because it is appropriate, and speaks to a terrifying possibility. BUT that is not where the message ends. He really thinks they are predominantly true Christians, and the way he can tell is how they minister to each other. Dear ones, when I begin to worry about someone slipping, it is not when they tell me they are struggling with a certain problem--it is not when they tell me they have a hard time getting something out of their Quiet Time every morning--it is not because they don't have all the same convictions that I do on a doctrinal issue even. I begin to worry about them when they tell me, or evidence it in their life, that they could really care less about their brothers and sisters in Christ--when they withdraw from the Body of Christ, and are consistently uninvolved over a long period of time.

Because in the mind of this writer, at least, one of the things that accompanies salvation is a love for the saints (all Christians).

Verse 10 is interpreted by many Roman Catholic scholars as teaching that we can merit God's favor by doing good works--that we can lay a claim upon God, by deserving a reward from Him for doing works of love for each other (Hughes). BUT that is not what this verse is saying at all. As Calvin notes, the author here is not discussing the CAUSE of our salvation--it is the RESULT of our salvation!

By way of application, does your life evidence salvation? I am not trying to lay a guilt trip on you. But as you evaluate your own life, has Christ so worked in you that you have a desire for the betterment of your brothers and sisters in Christ. Do you minister to someone in our Body?

Notice that verse 10 almost ANTICIPATES what I know some of you may be thinking right now..."I've tried and gotten burned." "I've tried and failed." "I've tried and didn't get much out of it myself."

Notice the text does not stop with the words, "in having ministered." It says, "and in still ministering..." These readers ministry was unbroken to each other, and I assume, to those who visited them from outside their church family. They were hanging in there. They were basically concerned with one another's welfare, and if they failed at ministering to one another, they picked themselves up off the floor and tried again. Admittedly, they needed to depend wholly on Christ's love and empowerment to DO IT. I do not mean to imply that they were super-Christians who never got discouraged with each other. But they had the right perspective. In those days, many their times their very survival depended on whether they were faithful to each other in ministering-- they couldn't afford the luxury of all the selfishness we allow ourselves sometimes today. Their Christianity had to be so pronounced that to US it seems downright RADICAL--for them, ministering to and STILL MINISTERING TO the saints was the NORMAL Christian life. As the writer to the Hebrews looks at these people, whoever he is, he finds great lifting up in this evidence of true salvation in their midst.

Hebrews 6:11,12: The translation here "we desire" does not do justice to the Greek verb. It is better translated "we long." It is with the feeling and concern of a father for his children that the author LONGS FOR diligence in spiritual things for his people, not just the authority of a teacher. My job, and the job of your other elders, is to long for your growth, and to do everything we can to stimulate you in it. YOUR job is to mature.

Up at the spa, there are a few men who work out who are crippled. To watch them struggle even to get ON the exercise bike, or to get dressed, or to work out on a weight machine is touching. They have a hard time of it, but they hang in there. Don't you feel pity for someone when you see that they are disabled in some way? But many Christians have that same disablement spiritually. They may be perfect specimens of physical fitness, but are crippled spiritually.

These verses are speaking to you. If you are a Christian, DILIGENTLY apply yourself to the things of the Lord--to your Quiet Time, to the ministry of the saints, to your family. If you are not yet a Christian, DILIGENTLY SEEK the Lord! If you are a Christian, your perception on a daily basis of the HOPE that is yours, your ASSURANCE in Christ, is

intimately tied up with your diligence in the faith. If you are lazy in the faith, do not expect to draw much daily encouragement from your faith. If you are not yet a Christian, KNOW that salvation is an instantaneous act of faith--it should not be postponed. When a person DOES become a Christian, the Lord gives them an assurance of hope--and as we grow in Christ, that assurance becomes more and more profound.

Verse 12 makes a connection between being sluggish, and imitating the faith of older Christians (cf. I Cor. 11:1; Heb. 13:7). We should be looking around us to see how older Christians grow in Christ. This of course implies the great responsibility of the elders in a church to lead exemplary lives. And it is primarily (here) the 1) FAITH and 2) PATIENCE of older Christians that we should take note of. I have several ministers and older Christians around the country that I have consciously attached myself to, and I watch how they grow. They have struggles. They have to trust Christ in the midst of troubles and crises. And it is how they trust the Lord, and wait on Him that I watch.

On this word "sluggish" John MacArthur makes a good comment:

There is a time for carefulness and deliberation, but not when you know the right thing to do, and have no guarantee of how long you will have the opportunity to do it.

I think this applies to both Christians and non-Christians. Now is the time to flee to Christ. Now is the time to get back on track with Christ--not tomorrow. or next week.

Dear ones, we need to LOOK LIKE those (being imitators of) who, by hanging in there over the long haul, make the promises of God their own--that's what it means to inherit them. We may encounter severe trials. We may have to deal with real afflictions. But will we believe and endure in the assurance that our hope in the Lord's promises will not be disappointed? Or will we turn back?

Does this sound like a pep talk? It should...Never let yourself grow dull of hearing to someone when he tells you to follow Christ! Do not grow bitter. Do not grow lazy in the faith. And do not turn back! AND, if you ARE in one of these states, GET OUT OF IT. Press on to maturity.

Applications from this passage:

1. Are you diligent in your Quiet Time? Become so.
2. Are you diligent in your ministry to your family in Christ? Become so.
3. When you develop a doubt about one aspect of the faith or another, don't deny it. Deal with it. The Scripture can surely measure up to our doubts.
4. Keep your priorities straight. The "things that accompany salvation" are vastly more valuable than concentrating in your life on the things of this world.
5. Become someone who is captivated by the promises of Scripture. Let THESE be your hope and sustenance.
6. Be patient with your own growth, and with the growth of others.
7. Learn to endure hard times IN THE LORD.

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
Encouragement in God's Promises (Pt. 2)
Hebrews 6: 13-20

Introduction: Sometimes I feel that I cannot blame the cynics in the world for scoffing at the kind of Christianity they sometimes see. It seems like it's almost every week these days that the news media hits us with some story about an evangelist who had a television campaign in some large city to raise money for missions of some kind--only to hear the next week that he had been indicted for fraud, or embezzlement. Or maybe you hear about the fundamentalist preacher who was caught with six acres of marijuana crop. Or how about the country of South Africa, with all its Reformed churches--supposedly a Christian country, and still just as racist as this country was a hundred years ago...I can half-way sympathize with their (the cynics) cat-calls, "You can't trust anybody, anymore!"

And yet the Christian knows that God is still trustworthy. He does not change. When He makes a promise, He keeps it. And that is the idea in these last verses of Hebrews, chapter six. We have been told (6:12) to imitate, or act like those who "through faith and patience inherit the promises." Now the author is going to give us an example of someone like that...

Hebrews 6:13-15

The Hebrew readers who recognized the truth of the Gospel, who had even seen miracles performed by the Apostles, were still afraid to let go completely of Judaism. They hesitated to completely cast themselves on Christ, for fear that He might not be able to save them, that something would go wrong. And so, the Holy Spirit encourages them and assures them that God will do just as He says.

Has God forsaken the Jews? No. He has offered in Christ all that any Jew could want. All that ANY man or woman could want--eternal life, free of charge. Abraham had to wait on the Lord--and I do not believe that the promises to Abraham are yet completely fulfilled until Christ comes.

When the Lord made the actual covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15, he had Abraham cut some specified animals in half and set the halves opposite each other. After Abraham fell into a deep sleep, the Lord spoke to him about His promise, and then, in the form of a smoking oven and a flaming torch, passed between the halves Himself. Ordinarily when such a covenant was made, both parties would walk between the pieces, to symbolize their mutual obligations to fulfill the conditions agreed upon. But Abraham had no part in determining the conditions of this covenant or in the ceremony that sealed it. The fact that only God walked between the pieces signified that the total responsibility for fulfilling the covenant was His! Abraham was not a PARTY to the covenant, but rather a WITNESS to it and a vehicle for its fulfillment. The covenant revolved around him, but its conditions and obligations were God's alone. The covenant was really made between God and Himself! It did not depend on anyone's faithfulness but His own! This is the beauty of God's sovereign love. God owes Himself the fulfillment of His plan...why would anyone want to take that away from God and make the blessing of the world or the blessing of an individual in salvation dependent on man? (MacArthur)

When it comes to God's promises, what are you trusting Him for today? Are His promises real to you, or are they vague religious abstractions, that we sort of talk about on Sundays? They are the words of His mouth, ^{His promises,} and we should be meditating on them all the time. We should be excited about what God is doing today and will do in the future.

This means that even when troubles come into our lives, we are still waiting on the Lord. Even if you should get sick, or lose a close loved one or go bankrupt, or, God forbid, there should be a nuclear war...none of these things can separate us from the love of God, or from the sure fulfillment of His promises.

In Charles Dickens' classic Great Expectations, the young boy Pip helps a desparate convict while being pursued. The man promises to repay the boy, and the boy of course, forgets quickly the promise. But years later, it has turned out that the convict was in fact an independently wealthy man, and had brought Pip as a young man into great wealth--in fact, he had been providing secretly for the boy secretly for much of his youth. We should have "great expectations" of our Heavenly Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He cares for us. He has not forgotten His promises to us.

Hebrews 6:16-18

Today, we sign contracts and shake hands over mutual agreements. In ancient days men spoke oaths to finalize certain agreements. Can you see in verse 17 that God wants His people to KNOW that He doesn't intend to forget or change His mind on a promise.

When a person becomes a Christian, he is in fact fleeing to Christ. He is holding onto the hem of the Lord's cloak, as it were, and seeking refuge in a new hope. It is THAT DRAMATIC. And the hope that we have in Christ is not harmed by the trials we may encounter while we wait for God to fulfill His promises. God wants us to know that HE IS IMMUTABLE--that He does not change. Therefore His purposes do not change. Therefore, since God has promised that all who come to Him through His Son will be saved, it is impossible for anyone who trusts in Christ NOT to be saved or to LOSE salvation once it is attained.

On this particular issue, do you see what is at stake, dear ones? God does not, yea, cannot lie. In the opening of his letter to Titus, Paul reminds his young friend of,

"the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago" (Titus 1:2)

In Paul's time, the promises of God about eternal life, Messiah, etc. were ancient--yet they were still intact, and still worthy of our putting our full trust in them.

It would be counterproductive for Dartmouth Bible Church if even one of you leaves this place this morning without some encouragement at least in re-establishing these things in your minds. You may have left all kinds of things behind when you became a Christian. For some it costs their families. For others it could cost part of their business. For others, their reputation. But the Lord wants you to focus on His being the Covenant-Keeper!

Hebrews 6: 19-20

The hope that we have, and that we tell people about, will come under fire in the world. I remember a line from a song by the music group Emerson, Lake and Palmer in about 1970:

"Can you believe, God makes you breathe?
Why did He lose, six million Jews?"

The world is full of skepticism. It is full of scoffing at what we lay our hope in.

A letter to the Editor in the Standard-Times this past week said that if Christians are going to be so arrogant as to say that they are going to heaven and no one else is, then we should give in to those here, today, who believe ONLY in today.

When a person becomes a Christian, they have an anchor of the soul. This is great language. Calvin says something encouraging:

"The anchor is cast down into the sea, for it has the earth as its bottom; but our hope rests upwards and soars aloft, for in the world it finds nothing on which to stand, nor ought it to cleave to created things, but to rest on God alone. As the cable also by which the anchor is suspended joins the vessel with the earth through a long and dark intermediate space, so the truth of God is abond to connect us with Himself, so that no distance of place and no darkness can prevent us from cleaving to Him. Thus when united to God, though we must struggle with continual storms, we are yet beyond the peril of shipwreck."

The hope that we have is the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is ours for certain, if we have trusted in Him. He is immovable in His purpose to save us, and now we have a return to the subject of Christ's High priesthood, which has been the underlying theme from all the way back in Hebrews 3:1.

Jesus' entering within the veil signifies His entering the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctum of the Old Testament Temple, where the sacrifice of atonement was made. Under the Old Covenant it was made yearly by the High Priest. Under the New Covenant it has been made once for all time by Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Our anchored soul is, in God's mind, already secure within the veil, secure within His eternal sanctuary. When Jesus entered the heavenly Holy of Holies, He did not leave the sacrifice and leave, as did the Aaronic High Priests...but "He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb.1:3). He remains there now, and will be there forever. Such absolute security is almost incomprehensible! Not only are our souls anchored within the impregnable, inviolable heavenly sanctuary, but our Savior, Jesus Christ, stands guard over them as well! How can the Christian's security be described as anything BUT eternal!?

We can surely trust God and His Savior Jesus Christ with our souls! That is good cause to come all the way to salvation and to enjoy its security, and to keep pressing on in the faith once we have found it!

lesson 14, Nov 11, 1984

Christ $\frac{1}{3}$ Melchizedek
Heb. 7: 1-10

manuscript lost

lesson 14, Nov 11, 1984

Christ $\frac{1}{3}$ Melchizedek
Heb. 7: 1-10

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EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
The Power of an Indestructible Life
Hebrews 7:11-19

Introduction: I am persuaded that every man and woman have three basic needs. Everyone has the need of a sense of self-worth. Everyone has the need for intimacy with other people. And most importantly, everyone is BORN with the need for intimacy with God. From a theological standpoint, this is the great perplexity in the human condition--and I am utterly persuaded that it is not only theological, but that man's desperate need to know God bears out psychologically, socially, medically and in many other ways. It is because of man's basic separation FROM God by what the Bible calls "sin," that he is faced with all the rest of his problems.

But in about the year A.D.30, a carpenter from the town of Nazareth in Roman occupied Galilee, laid down his plane and saw and hammer, and began a ministry which would last three years, the conclusion of which would culminate in His execution, burial and resurrection. He proclaimed Himself Messiah, and authenticated that claim by many infallible proofs, not the least of which being countless verifications from Old Testament Scripture. And, by the grace of God shown forth in the person and work of this man Jesus Christ, the human situation has undergone a radical transformation (Hughes). Now admittedly, this picture of the reconciliation of mankind, the potential reconciliation of any and every man, woman and child who will simply place their trust in the plan--this picture is simple. It is so simple that the simplest minded can understand it. It is so simple that it is universally understandable and applicable. This is the cause of stumbling though with many, who seem to feel that for a theology to be correct it must be vastly complex. They would feel that for a theology, a view of the human condition, to be comprehensive, it must be ratified or even devised by some sort of coalition of the greatest minds on earth. The Apostle Paul deals with this suggestion in I Corinthians 1 and 2:

"For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ--the power of God and the wisdom of God." (I Corinthians 1:21-24)

So the basic problem of knowing God is solved in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and it is the mutual conviction that we have that this is true which draws us together here this morning and every Sunday morning. But some Christians seem to look at Jesus Christ only as a means to salvation and personal happiness. If they believe, they are saved, and are fairly happy with their circumstances, they consider their lives fulfilled. They are looking for happiness and security. They find these in Christ, and are satisfied. Others see their lives as a continuing, growing relationship to God, through study of and obedience to God's Word. This view of the Christian life is much more mature than the first. But THE KEY TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS DRAWING NEAR TO GOD! The fullest expression of faith, is to enter into the presence of God in His heavenly Holy of Holies, and to fellowship with Him. That is something that Judaism was limited in enabling men to do, and Biblical Christianity can do completely. That "drawing near to God" is what our author is concerned with today in Heb.7.

Hebrews 7:11-19 THE OFFICE OF CHRIST GIVES A NEW PRIESTHOOD

This section of chapter seven is showing that the Melchizedekian priesthood, which Jesus Christ holds, surpasses and in fact supercedes the Levitical priesthood. Two thousand years ago it was impossible to come to perfection under the Jewish system, and it is still impossible. While we support the Jewish people, and appreciate their heritage, we must not slip into the thinking that God will in some way slip them into the Kingdom BECAUSE they are Jews. A Jew has two thirds of the Bible in his possession, but he still needs to receive Jesus-Messiah as his savior. Even if a Jew is orthodox, that is, he holds to the inspiration and authority of his Scriptures, he still must be saved by faith alone.

Although we do not think about our Christianity too often in the terms given in Hebrews 7, this is really the superstructure of our faith. These truths about the offices of Christ are what make Dartmouth Bible Church, Calvary Bible Church, Hixville Church, Elim Baptist, etc. distinctive in our area. If there were some way to do it, we should have Hebrews 7 painted onto our church sign. Sometimes we need to remind ourselves of what makes us different from the great mass of Protestant churches in America today--it is that we have a perfect high-priest, who, by virtue of His righteousness, brings us to perfection as we stand before God.

This perfection that we have grants us permanent forgiveness. The Old Testament sacrifices did not remove sin, they covered it over. There was a degree of forgiveness, but it was never comprehensive.

The story is told of the young woman who ran up alot of bills and charged far beyond what she was able to pay. She was in debt over her head and saw no way to get out. She was in trouble and the situation looked hopeless. Then a young man came along and fell deeply in love with her. After some months, he proposed. She also loved him very much, but felt that she should tell him about her debts before she agreed to marry him. When told, he said, "Don't worry. I'll pay all your debts. Just leave them to me." Before the wedding, he gave her an engagement ring, and reassured her many times that he would take care of her debts. She trusted him implicitly and knew that he was a person of his word. She had every reason to be confident and hopeful. But she was not yet actually free of her debts, and, consequently, could not be at peace about them. Finally, they were married, and he paid her debts. Not only that, but he told her that he was wealthy beyond her wildest dreams and gave her a joint checking account with himself. She would never again need to be concerned about debts. From that time on, she was secure in the riches of the one she loved and who loved her. That is how much better off a person is under the New Covenant than under the Old. In Christ, we are freed from all sin's debts, and we live forever in the riches of the One we love, and Who loves us! (MacArthur)

Notice in verse twelve it says there has been a change of law. To say this in the first century was radical. With the priesthood of Aaron done away with, so is the bondage of the Law.

"For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4)

The Jew was bound by the Old Testament in its civil, ceremonial and moral aspects. This has all passed and is fulfilled in Christ. The moral Law however, reflects God's nature and character. It was wrong three thousand years ago to commit adultery, to murder, to steal and to lie--all of these are still just as wrong. But in Christ we are really bound by a higher Law--His Law. Christians, though free from the curse of the Law, should never view themselves as free to go about and sin, just because we are saved by grace. Christians should be the most moral and upstanding people on earth, and that morality should be lit up with the love of Christ and never with self righteousness!

Notice in verse 15 the word "another." The Greek language has two words for "another." The word "allos" means "another"--that is, an additional one of the same kind. The word used in verse 15 though, is "heteros," which means another of a different kind. The first shows a difference in quantity, the second, a difference in quality. When I traded in my Dodge Dart for my Dodge Aspen, I was getting another automobile that was "allos." But if I traded the Dart for a VW bug, I would be getting another automobile that was "heteros," of a different kind and a different quality.

In Christ we do not have another priest just like those who ministered in the Tabernacle and the Temple. He is "heteros", of a completely different kind and order. Under the Old Covenant there were many priests, and they were all "allos." Under the New Covenant, there is but one priest and He is "heteros."

Also in verse 15, this priest is spoken of as arising according to the likeness of Melchizedek. The phrase could be translated, because it is in the middle voice in Greek as, "another priest arises by Himself." It is possible that this is a reference to the virgin birth. As God, Jesus raised Himself up by giving birth to Himself, so to speak. No priest under Aaron could make such a claim.

Verse 16 has an exciting phrase in it: "...according to the power of an indestructible life," which is what I have entitled this message. It is not religion that makes us different from non-Christians. It is not that we do certain things and don't do others. It is that we have been granted access directly to God, by the power of the living Jesus Christ. Jesus' death on the cross was not something which He merely allowed to happen--it was something that He performed! As man, he could die--but as God His life was (and is) indestructible. Jesus is our priest, and He is an infinitely powerful priest. His very life is what makes us breathe, and makes us able to work and enjoy life. That same life enables us, by His great mercy and grace, to come before God as His children, and to pray and to live a godly life! Oh, how I hope that you grasp the preciousness and greatness of these verses!

At the outset of this message, I suggested that mankind's plight was characterized by a simple truth--that man has a basic need to know God--to be intimate with Him. In this priest-king, Jesus Christ, man not only can know God, but can draw near to Him. That is why, dear ones, we should never be satisfied JUST TO BE Christians. We must grow adept at drawing near to God as a lifestyle--in prayer, in listening to Him through His Word, in obeying the proddings of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives...We should be more and more motivated by our access to God, by the great hope that we have, to please Him and to glorify Him. Let us decorate our doctrine with lives which are pleasing to Him!

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
A Guarantee of a Better Covenant
Hebrews 7:20-28

Introduction: How good is your word? When you say you are going to do something, do you do it? When you say you are going to be somewhere, are you there as you said you would be? Is your reputation such that your friends in Christ (or your non-Christian friends) can depend on you to carry out what you say? All of us have been disappointed at one time or another by people close to us who have not kept their word--and probably all of us have been the offender at one time or another, in breaking our word. As Christians--as people who profess to know the living God PERSONALLY, our word should be the most dependable thing in the human race! If we are reflecting the character of Christ, then this will come through--DEPENDABILITY--and it will be something which is growing in your life. I might add, there is no real escape in never committing yourself to people. Some feel that since they KNOW they are not dependable, they simply will exclude themselves from the mainstream of the Body of Christ. That is no answer--it only grieves the Holy Spirit.

We have been looking at a letter written to Hebrew-Christians who were not sure that Jesus Christ was who he said he was, and were not sure whether what was said about him was true. They were not yet convinced as to the dependability of His word or office. Jesus claimed to fulfill in every way all of the Old Testament. And they were sitting there going, "Unh-hunh." "How are we going to be acceptable to God without the sacrificial system and without the priests?" But the bottom line of the whole thing, is that if a man turns back from Christ, there's nothing better to go back to. In fact, it's all just mud! Turning back from Christ, and saying that the previous system of living was better is a tragic delusion! So, we need to realize that what Jesus said about Himself and our relationship to Him IS DEPENDABLE. His ministry will not simply disappear. You will not wake up some morning and discover that the priesthood of Christ on your behalf has evaporated! (You may wake up some morning and discover your faith was not real...but that won't be because Biblical Christianity is false). If ever for one instant our exalted Lord would cease to exercise His priesthood, then He would be a breaker of His promise and of His holy oath. But He never will!

Someone may say "Well, what about if I lose my salvation? That is a distinct possibility as I was taught at another church!" My friend, you were never taught that from the Book of Hebrews--because for that to happen, Christ's priesthood must fail in its function, and the covenant be broken, and His word would then become UNdependable. THAT is how serious an error that doctrine is!

Christ's Priesthood is Permanent (Hebrews 7:20-24)

God never said that the priesthood under Aaron would last forever. But He DID say that the priesthood under Messiah would be forever. In fact, God never suggested to Aaron or anyone else that that priesthood would be anything BUT temporary. But you know it is...you get started on one way of doing things, and it's hard to change, right? You start driving Chrysler products, and it's hard to get off them. You start eating at Burger-King, and it's hard to switch over to Big Macs. You sit under the Levitical priesthood for two thousand years and it's hard to change your thinking...

With an oath, Christ became a priest for us. Here in verse 21 is the second quote from Psalm 110:4. God cannot lie! Christ is in that office for good!

Notice the words in verse 22: "...Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant." Guaranteeing is something very close to my experience right now...On Friday Renée and I closed on our house (for which we praise the Lord, and again say to YOU we couldn't have done it without your love for us!) But it was a little scary--guaranteeing that for the next 30 years we will covenant with the Bank to pay them each month and fulfill the contractual obligations. The word "guarantee" or, "surety", is a legal word. It has legal ramifications.

A beautiful illustration of guaranteeing is found in Genesis. When Jacob's sons were preparing to go to Egypt for a second time to get grain for their starving families, Judah reminded his father that the Egyptian ruler (who, unknown to them, was Joseph) told them that they could not expect to get more food unless they brought their youngest brother Benjamin with them to Egypt. Only after Judah nobly offered to be the security for Benjamin did his father reluctantly agree (Gen.43:9). After receiving more food from Joseph, they were stopped on their way home because of Joseph's concealing his own silver cup in Benjamin's sack of food. Dismayed at what had happened, and grieved at what the loss of Benjamin would do to his father, Judah again offered to be a guarantee for his brother. After a lengthy explanation to Joseph of his concern Judah said, "Now, therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers" (Gen44:33). Judah made the second promise of surety so he could uphold the first. He was willing to uphold to any length the pledge to his father that Benjamin would return home safely. Judah illustrated the idea of Christ's being the guarantee for the New Covenant...By the way, what tribe did Christ arise from (vs.14)?

In 1978 I applied for my first loan. The bank said I needed a co-signer. My father-in-law calmly and cheerfully signed the paper as a guarantee on my loan.

Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant, and in this has provided eternal life. But He does more than mediate the covenant; He also guarantees it. All of God's promises in the New Testament (Covenant) are guaranteed to us by Jesus Himself. This is the message we need to be communicating to the world today. It is our main message. Without it, we're just practicing religion!

Jesus' priesthood is forever--it is permanent--it will not grow old or obsolete--because He is unchangeable and lives forever, so His ministry to us will do the same.

The Unfinished Work of Christ (Hebrews 7:25)

Jesus Christ saves sinners totally and completely and forever. That is what His priesthood means to you and me. It saved men in the first century when they were dying for their faith by being tied up in animal skins and thrown to lions. It saved men unto eternal life during the Reformation, when the established church persecuted people for even owning a Bible. It saved men in the 1800s in the American Civil War, when thousands of soldiers received Christ while in the trenches. And it saves men today. It is a permanent priesthood.

In the New Covenant, we have a better hope. Verse 19 says that it is through that better hope that we are able to draw near to Christ. It is by virtue of being in Christ, by being one of His children, that we have access and proximity to the living God. He delights to make intercession for you--did you know that? Today, right now, He hasn't forgotten you. Whatever you are dealing with right now, Jesus Christ is interceding for you with the Father--that is, if you are a Christian.

Last week I asked you if you are continuing to draw near to God. That is the great warning of this letter--are you growing in Christ, or are you stagnant? Those saved are those who continue to draw near to God. The King James has it the best where it says He saves "to the uttermost." Jesus' priesthood is no half-way measure.

Jesus is able to save people. The Old Testament priests may have been willing to help people with sin, but were completely unable to effect change.

When I was in college, and a very young Christian, my pastor started taking me to visit a young man named Jeffrey James, who was in the county hospital. Jeffrey was himself a new Christian, but was paralyzed from the neck down. He had casts on both arms and legs in an attempt to keep the bones from curling. I wanted so badly to help him--I was heart-broken for Jeffrey. But there was absolutely nothing I could do to help him...Jesus is not only willing to help us, HE IS ABLE!

Jesus Christ has finished the work for His people of paying for their sins--but He has not yet finished the work of praying for them. Why would anyone want to pray to someone else, when Jesus makes it a full-time occupation RIGHT NOW, in praying for those who trust Him? Your God is not just vaguely interested in you--He is thinking about you right now--He is burdened for you! And in His magnificent power, He is able to see your salvation through to the end...

Christ's Finished Work (Hebrews 7:26-28)

Verse 28, at the end, sums up this chapter. Jesus Christ is not just a priest, He is a Son, made perfect by His life, and remains as such, forever.

One commentator describes these verses as a hymn to the High Priest...as though an outburst of the joy of humanity which has at last found the high priest qualified to understand its weaknesses and to come to its aid: so far above us and so near to us; Himself in need of no cleansing and able to cleanse and expiate all our guilt...(Teodorico, in Hughes).

There are two applications I would like you to take with you, at least. First, your high priest is able and willing to see your salvation through to the end. And second, you should reflect His character in being in the same way, a dependable person. Let's make our Christianity something attractive to those around us--not something odious!

If you are unsure IF Christ is your high priest--you can be. It is for you to decide for Christ--to commit your needs to Him, to trust Him to save you from your sins--not by your good works, for they will never be enough. Trust Christ, and you will find Him both a man and a God of His word!

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
The Newness of the New Covenant
Hebrews 8:1-13

Introduction: One of the great problems we face in life is growing old. We are concerned with it in our possessions--our cars, houses, plumbing, wiring, etc. And we are concerned about it in our persons. Oldness is something everyone must come to grips with, and it is a part of life. But I would like to cheer you this morning with some news about something that never grows old--that is God's plan for His people.

When I first became a Christian, I was overwhelmed by a sense of newness about my life. I was not really very old in years (only 19), but I had experienced a number of things that made me feel old and wasted. When the Lord Jesus Christ came into my life, He made it all new. The first verse I memorized in fact, was 2 Corinthians 5:17,

"Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

And though I have known the Lord for almost 13 years now, I still am excited about the freshness of Biblical Christianity. It doesn't wear out. It doesn't ever get boring--because its author Jesus Christ is ALWAYS NEW! Oldness is a characteristic of a fallen creation, not an attribute of God! I can see that in a man like the preacher Vance Havner who well into his eighties now, is still preaching, and whose illustrations and sense of humor are some of the keenest and most up to date I have heard. That is a reflection of the newness of Christ!

Who God is and what He does is always NEW. The writer C. S. Lewis tapped into this so clearly in his book for children (which is read at least as often by adults), "The Magician's Nephew." In that book Lewis narrates in fictional form how the great Lion Aslan created the world of Narnia. A fresher, more exciting allegory about God's creating the world one could not ask for!

I would like you to dwell on this point about the newness of Christ, as we begin to look at a very theological point in Hebrews: the New Covenant. Think with me on the unchangableness of God's love in Christ, and on how great His love for men is in sending His Son to initiate and carry out the plan of His love for men of all nations!

Hebrews 8:1-6 The MAIN POINT really of this whole Book, is that you and I, if we are Christians, HAVE A HIGH PRIEST WHO IS RIGHT NOW sitting at the right hand of the Father. That priest is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. But think on this: Christ's present priestly ministry for you and me (if we are Christians) depends upon His being a mediator. And His mediatorship depends upon the New Covenant, which is dealt with in the second half of chapter eight. The New Covenant deals with the forgiveness of sins and it was for Jews (Luke 20:22, "you") and for non-Jews (Matt. 26:26 "many"). Only the spiritual aspects of the New Covenant are quoted in the N.T. because that is the part of the Covenant that is now in force.

Now, the Levitical priests never sat down--did you know that? (Heb.10:11) Because their job was never done, because the sacrifices for sin they were offering never were permanently effective. But do you see that when Jesus Christ offered His sacrifice, He sat down! His work was done. His

last words on the cross were, "It is finished," or better translated, "PAID IN FULL." He has accomplished all that can be or needs to be accomplished. We can't add one thing to the work of Christ in paying for sin. That is why those who think they can work their way to heaven are so tragically deceived. It is absurd to think that the work of Christ needs anything added to it.

It is possible that the idea of Jesus sitting at the right hand of God would make them think of the Sanhedrin, which was the Jewish ruling council of seventy elders at the time. This group had both civil and religious authority and acted administratively as well as judicially. Even under Roman rule, the Sanhedrin was allowed considerable power--seen by its role in Jesus final arrest and crucifixion. When the members of this quasi-supreme court sat down in judgement of a situation, a scribe sat down on each side of the presiding judge. The scribe on the left was responsible for writing down condemnations. The one on the right was responsible for writing down acquittals. Jesus said He came into the world, not to condemn but to save (John 3:17). As High Priest He now sits in the place, not only of honor, but of mercy! He sits there making intercession--making acquittals, as it were, for His own!

Even more amazing is that, as believers, we will one day be invited to sit down at that same throne..."He who overcomes, I grant him to sit down with me on my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on His throne"(Revelation 3:21).
(MacArthur)

These things were a reminder of those new Christians who were now maybe deprived of the Temple services in Jerusalem that they did not need to fear losing out on what was going on in the Temple--in the temporary, symbolic Holy of Holies...You do not need to fear losing out on what is going on back in the churches of your religious upbringing, with any formalities, high church rituals, elaborate ceremonies etc. If you have truly received Christ, then you are involved intimately with what is real in heaven--taken before the throne of grace in the real Holy of Holies!

A tragic but beautiful story comes to mind from the Book of Acts in regard to Jesus' sitting at God's right hand. Just before Stephen was taken out of Jerusalem to be stoned to death for preaching so powerfully before the Sanhedrin, "he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55). As far as redemption is concerned, Jesus is seated, because He rests from the finished work of redemption. But when one of His own falls into trouble, He stands up, because He takes the position of action. His power and His energy are immediately activated in behalf of His beloved. He is seated as our Redeemer, but is standing as our helper! (MacArthur)

This, by the way, is why I always struggle a little bit when I hear someone tell me that Jesus appeared to them. He is in heaven--He rules from His throne!

Notice please verse 6. Jesus Christ offers something to men, the greatness and depths of which we cannot begin to fathom! It is better than religion. It is better than the Old Testament system. His ministry which He offers to you and me is MORE EXCELLENT, He mediates a better arrangement, and He offers better promises! Can you tie into that?

We do not NEED too many physical reminders, because as Christians we are present already in heaven with Christ! Do you dwell there? Do you make the throne of grace your favorite place? Or is your favorite place in front of the tube, or on the sports field, or some place else? You see, heaven should be more real to us than North Dartmouth or New Bedford! That is the quality of the ministry that the Lord Jesus has for us... because He is the High Priest of the New Covenant--One who mediates a BETTER COVENANT---and it does not grow old, and it does not wear out, and He loves us just as much today as He did before the foundations of the world when He predestined us to be His children--and He will love us just as much 10 Billion years from now...

Hebrews 8:7-13 There is something exciting in these verses! After living under the Mosaic system all their lives, these Hebrew Christians must have had bulging eyes as they read this letter, or heard it, for the first time. As they heard it, and this chapter, they were hearing words from Jeremiah 31 APPLIED TO THEM! The ancient promises for a new Covenant that would replace the Old, were being energized for the first time in the first century. They continue with power today, and they shall come to full fruition, I believe, during the millenium, when Israel will herself, as a nation, experience the New Covenant.

A will is a type of covenant and illustrates beautifully God's covenants with His children. Though many people may be involved in its provisions, a will is written by one party --the one whose will it is. A beneficiary has no part in determining the benefits! He can only accept or reject--he cannot change what the will provides for him. The New Covenant in Christ, the Messiah, is based SOLELY ON GOD'S SOVEREIGN TERMS. "I will effect a new covenant," the Lord told Jeremiah.

By the way, the term "The New Testament" really means "The New Covenant!" The Book is named after the transaction that God has brought into effect!

Verses 10-12 spell out the provisions of this covenant. They are what make Christianity ever-new. We don't have to wear religion on our sleeve. It is alive in our hearts! I do not have to wear a collar for you to know what my job is. The calling is real in my heart. On the Lord's Table Sunday, we wait on the Spirit of God to move men and women to share, out of what God is doing in their hearts! If Christ is ours, WE ARE GOD'S PEOPLE! The least of us to the greatest of us knows God personally!

Christian morality is not something we have to watchdog and badger each other about, because we are in the process of having God's laws engraved onto our hearts. We don't have to continually THROW GOD'S COMMANDS AT EACH OTHER because the Holy Spirit is at work burdening each of us who are truly saved with the necessity of holiness. We don't have to be legalists about various practices, because if we are seeking Christ consciously every day, He will effect in our hearts the burning desire to please Him and not to grieve Him!

Now if you are human, you have much sin about you, in God's sight. But the premier feature of Biblical Christianity--(and THIS SHOULD BE WHAT "WE ARE SELLING" HERE AT DARTMOUTH BIBLE CHURCH...)--is that the Lord says He will be merciful and remember our sins no more! Why would anyone in their right minds reject such a thing!!??? *Because they don't BELIEVE in Him! Do you?*

Let it be yours--dwell at the right hand of God through the mediation of Your high priest, Jesus Christ. Let the New Covenant consume your praise!

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
Christmas is the Beginning of the New Covenant
Hebrews 8:8-13

Introduction: Every December it seems, preachers around the country rail out against the materialism and secularism that has become "Christmas" in modern society. They point out the toy industry, with copious references to whatever evil toys happen to be on the market that year, or they finger adult toys and the electronic craze we are under; or they may even point out that "Santa" is really "Satan" by juggling the letters. But the biggest thing that we preachers try so hard to grasp onto, in all the distractions, is something we like to call, "the real meaning of Christmas." I am not above my preaching colleagues either! I want to tell you this morning what I think the real meaning of Christmas is--and what is the ONLY meaning of the holiday, that has any lasting value. WHAT IS THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS? THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS IS THAT IT IS THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW COVENANT.

Many people are not yet aware though, that there is even an OLD Covenant. Jews know it. But really few people know the real difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament--NOT BECAUSE it is hard to figure out, but JUST BECAUSE not many people care to read their Bibles anymore. When Joseph and Mary of Nazareth gave birth to a son, and called Him Immanuel, they were ushering in the end of some two thousand years in God's program for man--the Old Dispensation. And they were watching before their eyes the birth of the second stage of God's program, the New Dispensation, which when this one ends life on earth will be totally changed. Not to brag, but I really like the Christmas card my wife chose this year to send to our out of town friends. It says,

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He worked in a carpenter shop and was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He did none of the things one usually associates with greatness. Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today He is the central figure of the human race. All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the kings that ever reigned put together, have not affected the life of man on this earth as much as that one Solitary Life.

And as the little Lord Jesus lay there in that feeding trough (Mary didn't have a bassinette, or probably any Lysol...), the course of mankind was changing. Christmas is the beginning of the New Covenant, an arrangement with man where He cannot do anything out of religious obligation which will please God--but where he is beckoned simply to receive the free gift of eternal life by trusting completely in Christ to make the payment for sin.

The New Covenant Reflects God's Sovereign Love - Isaiah 59:21 (about 700 B.C.)

In spite of the reoccurring wickedness in Israel, God was determined that He would plan a day when His people would love Him. His Spirit was upon the people in this prophecy, and His Word will be inescapable. This does not make God out to be a "divine rapist," but shows that His love cannot be thwarted. Sin keeps men from loving God. But His love is greater than man's inclination to sin.

When Jesus of Nazareth was born, it had been some four hundred years since a bona fide prophet of Jehovah had been heard in Israel. But God had not forgotten His people. And I do not believe that He has forgotten them yet.

The New Covenant was Prophesied Within the Old Covenant - Jeremiah 31:31-34

This is the passage which is quoted in Hebrews 8. Hebrews quotes it to show that in the Church age, we have the beginning of the age of the New Covenant. During the millenium, when the Lord Jesus Christ physically rules on earth for a thousand years, Israel will realize too the complete fulfillment of the New Covenant that Jesus ushered in.

Jeremiah points out that the day is coming when evangelism will no longer be necessary. The knowledge of God will be universal. This is one thing which sets this Covenant in the future. In no time in the history of man has the personal knowledge of God been universal. But it IS what we are trying to get folks to see today. KNOWING THE LORD IS WHAT CHRISTIANITY IS ALL ABOUT. You can know about God. You can know about Jesus Christ, and the Christmas story and the Easter story and the rest of the facts. But unless you know Him personally and have an ongoing Biblical relationship with Him, you do not really know Him in the right sense.

What does it mean to know Him? According to Jeremiah's prophecy and to the writer to the Hebrews, it is first and foremost knowing in your heart that your sins are forgiven...When you know your sins are forgiven, you don't have to worry about guilt, you don't have to worry about how you stack up religiously to the person next to you. You are FREE from condemnation. And you can live near to God and have access to His precious fellowship all the time. That's what the New Covenant is all about. That's what Christmas is all about. As the old man Simeon held the eight day old Jesus in his arms, he saw this...He saw that there was now a light unto all men.

Jeremiah's own day, when he was given this prophecy in around the year 590-600 B.C., was a day of disruption and disaster in Israel. He was surrounded by an Israel who had contempt for the Old Covenant. They lived in such a way as to invite the curse of the Old Covenant, rather than to see even the Old Covenant's blessings. So, Jeremiah's prophecy was like a shaft of light penetrating the darkness of Israel's rebellion, and focused on a future time when God would be truly loved and obeyed (Hughes)

The New Covenant will begin with the Church Age - Ezekiel 36:24-28

The Book of Ezekiel is one of the most difficult in the Old Testament to interpret. But there is something really exciting about what God said He was going to do in the future. The prophecy was received by Ezekiel within ten or twenty years of Jeremiah's. And as you can see, it speaks of things which we care familiar with. It sounds remarkably like the new birth, does it not?

What is new about your life, Christian? Is your relationship with Christ something you are nourishing? Is it something that you value above all things? Is it something that you are renewing each day and each week?

Christmas should be a time when we remind ourselves that something NEW began in the world two thousand years ago. If we are going to celebrate Christmas shoulder to shoulder with non-Christians, we should not allow it to become a mockery. We should redouble our commitment to Quiet Time around Christmas time--instead of letting other commitments to people crowd out the Body of Christ around Christmas, we should be thinking,

"At Christmas the New Covenant began...(actually it was at the cross)...and Christmas should bring me back to the cross..."

and my life should be reflecting my gratitude to Jesus, and my love for Him AT THIS TIME OF YEAR."

Are we New Covenant Christians--do our lives communicate newness? Is there a freshness about us that says we have been with Jesus--He who does not grow old?

Let's make this the significance of Christmas. Let's not let religious or even secular distractions sap the life out of what should be a great spiritual time of year. And really, by virtue of the fantastic provisions of the New Covenant, there shouldn't be any time of year when we "put on the dog" spiritually...We should be BEING NEW all year long. This is not just the "Holy Season" for New Covenant Christians. But we can have a great time of rededication by remembering the coming of the Savior of the world!!!

Sometimes I think Satan must get a real kick out of how he has masterfully distracted the world from Christmas's meaning.

The columnist George Will put it well this week in Newsweek:

"...Four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves and a shopper in a foul mood...Batten down the hatches. Casualties of a seasonal sort are mounting and Americans are at each other's throats in ways that are a sure sign that we are about to celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace...Christmas doesn't come from a store...Christmas means a little bit more" Newsweek, 12/17/84.

Are we different from the world. Are we participants in the New Covenant--the New Arrangement between God and men? Does your daily lifestyle and devotion to Christ show you, yourself that you are a New Covenant Christian?

Maybe this talk of a new relationship with God is new to you. If you haven't yet been grafted into the New Covenant, you can! And you can't put it on your MasterCard. It is free. The free gift of eternal life can be yours just by committing yourself, and depending fully on Christ to be YOUR Savior. Then Christmas will be for you the beginning of new life!

Silent Night! Holy Night!

*Radiant beams from Thy holy face,
with the dawn of redeeming grace.*

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
The Means of Worship
Hebrews 9:1-14

Introduction: In 1647 the English Presbyterians formulated a catechism for use with their children, and they called it the Westminster Catechism. The very first question in that Catechism reads, "What is the chief end of man?" And the answer reads, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." I like that. It is true. And it is the definition of worship--"to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." Can there be a more important task for a man or a woman to undertake? Of all the things that people spend their time doing, and some people are very very busy; is there something MORE IMPORTANT than giving praise to the Lord, and enjoying Him? That, after all is why we are here this morning. We are not here to act religious! We're here to glorify God and to enjoy Him. He is after all, ENJOYABLE! And I am persuaded that that is an underlying theme in the Book of Hebrews. God takes pleasure in those who call on His Name fervently and out of a pure conscience. As Christians all over the world call out to God in song and prayer and testimony this morning, I believe that the Living God is delighted. He is alive. He is fresh. He is ever new. And He is all powerful--and THAT GOD derives pleasure out of His people calling on Him and asking Him for things and praising Him. Can there be anything more enjoyable than to please your God in this way?

You may be tempted to think that we have already talked about what we are going to look at in Hebrews 9. But I hope to show you that what we read here is instructive of how we worship God. Genuine love of God will take care in how to worship. Genuine love of God expresses itself in acts of devotion to Christ.

If a husband is in love with his wife, he will find it no chore to bring her flowers once in a while. He will not find it burdensome to hug her and tell her that he really loves her. If a man really loves his children, he will not complain if he is asked to care for them sometimes. He will do things for them and with them on a regular basis. So, if a man loves God in his heart, he will strive to worship Him often and in the manner that God prescribes.

In the Old Testament the ways in which the people of God were instructed to worship God were clearly spelled out. There was a right way and there were a multitude of wrong ways. In our pluralistic society, we protect the right of all men to worship God however they see fit. That is a good thing in a secular society, but it is INAPPROPRIATE for the people of God to adopt that freedom. In the mind of God there is STILL a right way and a wrong way to worship Him. There is no confusion in God's mind or in the Bible as to how to worship Him. Hebrews 9 defines some of these things. But Jesus also tells us something about worship that I want to look at for a moment first:

"But an hour is coming and now is when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

Its not a one or the other proposition: spirit OR truth. Both are necessary. True worship of God is a spiritual thing. It is done by faith alone in Jesus Christ, and it deals with an invisible God. But He will be worshipped in TRUTH too. Not just in any old way that strikes man's fancy. And the Bible is the guidebook.

Hebrews 9:1-10 A Review of the Past

This section reviews the regulations and the furniture of Israel's tabernacle. Each item has significance to the Jew, and would still if it weren't for the fact that the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., and there hasn't been a Temple since. We do not have time this morning to expound each item, but I would like you to notice two things mentioned: the lampstand and the ark of the covenant.

The Lampstand: God's worship has always been arranged so as to teach us the necessity of light. In the tabernacle (which was the sacred tent), there was the lampstand. For us the light is the Word of God. Jesus Christ is the true light, John tells us (John 1:9), who is the light for every man in the world. GOD HAS NEVER ENCOURAGED IGNORANCE OF HIS NATURE OR HIS WILL! He does not delight in us NOT KNOWING about Him. He wants us to know much about Him. Ignorance is the mother of superstition and falsehood, NEVER the mother of devotion and pleasing God. The Lamb of God is the light of the world.

The Ark: This item has been made popular lately by the film Raiders of the Lost Ark, in which the lost ark of the covenant is found by the Nazi's, supposedly. It will not be found today, but it was very significant--it was a shadow of Christ, a type of Christ, some theologians call it. The ark contained the Law of God. Christ had God's Law in His heart. The ark was the main item of worship. So Christ is the center of all our worship. The ark had the blood of the atonement sprinkled on it. Christ poured out His own blood! The ark contained a pot of manna from heaven. Jesus said,

"I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

It ought to encourage us that as God made Aaron's rod bud; He made something dry to flourish--and this was in the ark: so also Jesus Christ makes life out of nothing when a person becomes a Christian. There is life where there was none--happiness where there was none!

But the main point of all of this is in verse 9. You can take Israel out of Egypt but you can't get Egypt out of Israel. The regulations of the system of worship under Moses were external, not internal in character. The conscience is man's knowledge of himself (Hughes), his moral consciousness (BAGD). It deals especially with the inner notion that someday I am going to have to give an account of my motives and actions. Every man has this--it evidences man's being more than just another animal, by the way. But as we all have grown up in sin, some people suppress it, deny it or sear it (I Tim.4:2) with growing acts of rebellion and sin. No man can rid himself of his conscience though. And no man can create for himself a clear conscience:

Benjamin Franklin was a Deist, and not much of student of Scripture. But he did want to better himself throughout his life. He started with the Ten Commandments. He made a list of the Commandments, and figured he would keep a running list of his faults, and as he conquered them he would strike them off of the list. The trouble was, he honestly admitted, the bottom of the list kept growing faster than the top of the list was shrinking! He had to admit that men were sinful and that the Ten Commandments were a good list of HOW men are sinful. (S. Lewis Johnson)

But our passage says that just by being religious, even by being very good at being religious, a man or a woman cannot clean their conscience. It takes a work of reformation--I like that word. In Greek it is "DIORTHOSIS" which is what is called a "hapax legomenon"--a single useage of a word in the Bible. F.F. Bruce suggests we translate this as "until a time of the New Order," since the coming of Christ "involved a complete reshaping of Israel's religion." (Hughes)

Hebrews 9:11-14 The Present and the Future

When Christ came He brought something completely new. If the blood of these animal sacrifices really did serve the purpose of cleansing people in an external sense, HOW MUCH MORE CAN CHRIST'S OWN BLOOD radically clean a man up ON THE INSIDE--and that is what we preach. It is what our commission is, to tell folks that they can know complete forgiveness. It is not for sale, it is not earnable. It is free.

I like this verse 11. Jesus is the high priest of the good things to come. Christianity is GOOD for people. It restores, it gives life, it makes a man know what JOY is and happiness. And when the Lord Jesus returns the earth will NEVER HAVE KNOWN such joy!

Our worship should reflect all these things! When we get together on Sunday mornings and Wednesday and Thursday nights, we should generally reflect real joy, if we are walking with Christ. I've been to some churches and Bible study groups where there was anything BUT joy! When a visitor comes here he or she should detect the joy of the Lord, because we should be wearing it! And we should attract visitors because of it! Jesus is our high priest of GOOD THINGS TO COME!

Verse 14 PROMISES us that the blood of Christ cleanses our consciences from dead works to serve, or worship the living God. We cannot EARN God's favor. If you are here this morning and maybe thinking that by coming God will chalk up a point for you--forget it! Its only through the blood of Christ taking away a man's sins by his trusting in it, that you can EVER worship God in reality!

Notice that the author calls God "the LIVING GOD." God really is! And He really takes how we come before Him seriously. Do we? Do we prepare ourselves for worship?

I was recently told that the hallmark feature of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship--that one thing that motivated them to get together on a national basis--is WORSHIP. That should be OUR great concern too!

I believe that if we took Sunday morning more seriously, if we took what God is doing in each other's lives more seriously, we would have an IN-CREDIBLE morning service every week! I enjoy our service as is, but if we would implement a few steps in preparation, it would be great.

1. Praying on Saturday for the Sunday service.
2. Avoiding the "Sunday morning syndrome" that the devil would have us constantly fall into--fights infamilies, impatience, kindness.
3. Being here regularly.
4. Planning in advance something to share.

The worship of God is to glorify Him in the Holy Spirit and in truth, and to enjoy Him forever. Jesus Christ has made that possible by His own sacrifice--Let's focus on His greatness and on His great love for us!

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
The Blood of the Covenant
Hebrews 9:15-22

Introduction: There is a hymn in our hymnbook, about 200 years old that I have seen quoted as an example of how grotesque Christianity is. It is the Hymn "There Is A Fountain" (No.192) written by the manic depressive William Cowper (notice that even manic depressives can be greatly used of God because this hymn is deeply moving!) Some non-Christians hear these old lines and scoff, saying, "How can you believe in such a bloody religion?"

But that is the most precious aspect of Christianity, isn't it? The blood of the Saviour poured out for you and for me...Christianity stands or falls on the shed blood of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. A sure first sign of a church going liberal is when there begins a DE-EMPHASIS on the shed blood of Christ. So when you evaluate different churches, do not ask first what kind of building do they have, or how good is their music or their youth programs...at least not first...FIRST ASK DO THEY PREACH THE BIBLE?.....DO THEY PREACH THE BLOOD?

Once there was this old preacher speaking on the text "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin." Suddenly he was interrupted by an atheist in the audience who asked, "How can blood cleanse sin?" For a moment the preacher was silent; then he countered, "How does water quench thirst?" "I don't know," replied the man, "but I know that it does." "Neither do I know exactly how the blood of Christ cleanses sin," answered the preacher, "But I am persuaded that it does!" Apparently this preacher was not familiar with Hebrews 9, which tells us about HOW THE BLOOD OF CHRIST CLEANSSES FROM SIN!

Hebrews 9:15

One of the most important areas of Bible doctrine is the doctrine of salvation. It is technically referred to as "soteriology," from the Greek word "sōzō," "to save." We might call it "SAVE-OLGY." What we are dealing with in this passage has to do with how a man can be saved. Can anything be more practical? We need so much to know all there is to know about soteriology--we need to be smart about WHY and HOW we are Christians.

Man's greatest need is to have someone mediate between himself and the Living God. He NEEDS a mediator because he is sinful, by position and by experience. So, he needs DESPARATELY, a perfect mediator to plead his case before a holy God. This is the first point a person must accept before they can become a Christian.

Verse 15 is a treasury of words which have to do with salvation: mediator, new covenant, death, redemption, called, eternal inheritance! And all put together, they speak of the work of Christ. Is that work real to you? Dear ones, when hard times come, whether they be in your family, in your job, in your finances, in your own emotional struggles, or whatever, THE DEATH OF CHRIST AND WHAT HIS WORK MEANS DOESN'T DIMINISH...IT IS STILL TRUE, AND REMEMBER: This book was written to people who struggled with living totally for Christ, and who were thinking of throwing in the towel. It wasn't written in a vacuum!

Hebrews 9:16-18 The Legal Aspects of Salvation

I would like you to think "will" where you read "covenant" or "testament" in these verses. CHRIST'S DEATH WAS NECESSARY! When a will is made, no benefits can be made to the beneficiaries of that will until after the death of the testator or will-maker. And God always deals with His people on the basis of covenants.

So, as you think about Jesus Christ dying on the cross for you this morning, remember that He died not only out of His love for you, but also because He had to fulfill certain legal responsibilities between Himself and the Father.

Notice the necessity of blood in verse 18. (It is appropriate that we encounter this word "inaugurated" at this time of year!) It means here to be ratified. Even before the old priestly sacrifices were begun, the arrangement (covenant) itself had to be inaugurated, or ratified by blood. That is because anything that sinful men are connected with must be cleansed with blood.

Hebrews 9: 19-22 Blood was the Basis for the Old Covenant

The importance of the blood of the sacrifice was that without it there could be no forgiveness. Ephesians 1:7 says,

In Him (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace...

Do you need forgiveness from God? You cannot earn it, and you cannot punish yourself and appropriate it that way, physically, emotionally or any other way. The toughest soldier needs God's forgiveness. The smartest engineer or doctor or lawyer needs God's forgiveness. The most powerful political figure in the country needs God's forgiveness. The richest person in the world needs God's forgiveness just as much as the low-life junkie in the street. ALL MEN AND WOMEN NEEDS GOD'S FORGIVENESS, and the great thing is that He has made arrangements for anyone to have it, freely! But only through the shedding of blood of the Savior and Lord Jesus Christ!

Today there are several denominations that have taken every reference to the blood of Christ out of their hymnals. What can we say to this? If they have rejected the blood of Christ, God has rejected them, for forgiveness of sins is ONLY BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST.

One time there was a visiting lecturer at Dallas Theological Seminary and He told about an interesting thing that happened to Him after He preached on the blood of Christ--A woman came up to him and said, "Oh, Pastor, I wish you wouldn't talk about the blood of Jesus Christ; it's so nauseating to ladies and gentlemen." The pastor said, "Yes ma'am, you're right," to which she replied, "Well, I'm so glad you agree." But then the pastor said, "Yes ma'am, but Jesus didn't die for ladies and gentlemen, He died for sinners. And the blood is not repulsive to sinners!"

Is the blood of Christ precious to you? I remember in the film "Martin Luther", numerous supposed relics are collected by the Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony. And one of them was supposedly a piece of cloth with a few drops of the blood of the Savior still on it. Well, I do not believe

that Freddie really had such an authentic cloth. But if he really did, that might be for me a relic worth treasuring! The blood of the Savior is a precious thing, not in a mystical way, but in a judicial way!

A word-study in the Old and New Testaments both reveals that the way the word "blood" is used is almost always not of life released, when the word refers to a sacrifice, but a death inflicted. Jesus had to taste death for us, in order for us to experience God's forgiveness. It was not easy for Him to do. But I believe that Jesus performed His death on the cross, not just allowed it to happen.

Does verse 20 sound familiar to you? Does it not sound like what Jesus said in Mark 14:24,

This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many.

Many people today in our land pride themselves on being supposedly self-sufficient. They don't feel that they really need anybody for much of anything. The feeling is that, well, "I don't want to put you out." "I don't want to have to depend on you for anything." A man or a woman MUST come to the place in their lives where they see that without depending on Christ to have made the sacrifice for them, they are without hope! But for you and for me, Jesus had to give Himself to a cruel Roman crucifixion, and pour out His precious blood (and I am sure that there were no objective-minded theologians standing at the foot of the cross, discussing the efficaciousness of His blood in theory!--in fact only John, and Mary, Jesus' mother were even around!)

Let us never lessen the importance of the blood of Christ in our lives. Let's not have our attendance drop on the first Sunday of the month when we have the Lord's Table--let's learn to adore the blood of Christ and praise the Lord every week for it!

If you have not yet discovered the application of Jesus' blood in your life, if all this seems fine theory to you, but you are unsure if it applies to you personally or not, please **KNOW THAT IF YOU PERSONALLY TRUST IN IT, AND DEPEND ON IT, that it does!** The Lord will not let you fall, and He does not grow weary of loving those who are His.

cf. MacArthur's comment, Arnold's notes, ZPEB article on "blood" (see Harris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*).

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
The Sufficiency of Christ's Sacrifice
Hebrews 9: 23-28

Introduction: It is delightful to see how the writer to the Hebrews dwells on the advocacy and intercession of Jesus Christ. If you are a true Christian, Jesus Christ is your REAL advocate with the Sovereign God of the universe. And if you are a true Christian, He intercedes for you perfectly, permanently and purely. I remind you of those two great verses in Hebrews 4 (15,16):

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. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.

We cannot add anything at all to the work of Christ. Being a good citizen, being a good parent, even being a good American doesn't add one bit of merit to your standing before God. Only Christ, as YOUR SUBSTITUTION, can make you acceptable to God, and in fact one of His loved children. There was a country song written by a Christian about 13 years ago, and it went like this:

You'll find my name in the telephone listing, my credit is better than fair. My daughter is running for sophomore princess, I'm making my son cut his hair. We found my mother a home you see, with folks of her status and age. She gave us the family Bible last year--we keep it the attic till the pages turn yellow, cause antiques are quite the rage! My mortgage is paid, and my Chevrolet, I seldom ever beat my wife. I can't understand why my name isn't there--written in your Book of Life!

The Book of Hebrews is telling us that Jesus has done it all! He has made an atonement that is sufficient for every man, woman and child that has ever lived. And it is efficient for every man, woman and child who believes! God is immeasurably satisfied with Jesus! But God is NOT satisfied with us--the notion that God accepts us as we are is utterly unbiblical. We must come before Him in the clothing of Christ's righteousness!

Hebrews 9:23-26

We are faced right off the bat this morning with a difficult verse. It is not difficult to understand the first part of verse 23, for we can understand how EVERYTHING on earth, anything that man touches needs to be cleansed with the blood of sacrifice--that is the point of the previous passage. But the interpreter is faced with the problem of explaining how the heavenly reality, where the pure presence of God dwells, can be conceived of requiring ANY kind of cleansing. (It is verses like this which keep many preachers from preaching in an expository, verse-by-verse fashion through Scripture.) This phrase brings up no less than five different interpretations. I am not completely comfortable with any of the five, but offer you this explanation: the shedding of blood and resultant exaltation of Him who is our fellow man and forerunner (Christ--2:14; 6:20) have opened the way for mankind into the shrine of God's presence. The ultimate effect of Jesus' shedding his blood in the new covenant, is the renewal of the universe, freed at last from all sin, and even the grief in knowledge of sin. So GREAT is the sacrifice of the Son of God,

AND SO MUCH BETTER THAN THE SACRIFICES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, that Jesus' atonement on the cross is said to extend even to heaven. In short, we cannot fathom what Jesus Christ underwent for us. We cannot begin to comprehend how great the love of God for us must be.

I Corinthians 2:9 alludes to a verse near the end of Isaiah's great prophecy (64:4),

...eyes has not seen and ear has not heard, and have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him.

Will you notice in verse 24 that Christianity is not primarily a physical religion. It is not a temple here that we worship in. I have never understood how Christians can call their church buildings "sanctuaries." This building is not the "house of God." Jesus didn't enter a holy place made with hands--as they did in the Old Testament. I have been in many churches where, after the service, you really feel like you have been to church. Most churches have much more ritual than Bible churches. Our spiritual reality is not so much HERE on Sunday mornings as it is in heaven 7 days a week. Now that may seem like an immensely arrogant thing to say, but that is what Hebrews 9 says! EVERY DAY OF YOUR LIFE is a day of worship! You and I should view every activity we undertake as part of our worship of God! When we get together here on Sunday, it is to praise God, hear the Word taught and to encourage one another.

Now please notice also that it is a glorious truth that Christ suffered once. (It is no less a glorious truth that He suffered BUT ONCE! (Plumer). The idea of a continual offering of Christ is a heretical doctrine, which for many centuries has contradicted this and many other Bible passages on the finished work of Christ. In fact to say that Jesus Christ is continually offered as a sacrifice because of his perpetual priesthood is a blasphemous understanding of the cross. My dear friends, this is why I cannot simply snuggle up to friends in the Roman Catholic Church. Can you see what is at stake here? For Roman Catholics, God's satisfaction regarding sin depends upon the weekly mass. That is why attending mass should be so important to Catholics.

No doubt some Catholics know Christ, but in holding to the doctrine of the perpetual offering of His sacrifice, they undermine the power and significance of Christ's one-time and only true sacrifice. This false doctrine is plainly reflected in the crucifix, the symbol of Roman Catholicism. Whether in pictures, in statues or wherever, the cross is rarely empty in Catholic representations--(this is by design!) To Catholics, Jesus is still being crucified! (MacArthur)

And people ask me, why can't you just overlook that little problem? In the Lord's Table, the Lord Jesus commanded His disciples to remember His death, not to try to redo it!

Hebrews 9:27,28

It is not wise for people to shun thoughts of death. It is often brought to our attention in Scripture, here by way of illustration. "There is a time to be born and there is a time to die" (Eccl.3:2). That time is appointed by God Himself. Death is not the result of the constitution of nature, but from the appointment of God. In the beginning of man's history, death was fixed as a penalty of transgression. It is still penal in the case of all who die in their sins--in their case it is the forerunner of eternal death. But in the case of Christians, death is

not inflicted in wrath by God. Christians fall asleep in Jesus. They die in the Lord.

As I mentioned, death is here mentioned by way of illustration. Jesus faced death and the resultant judgement for us. He has been sacrificed but once--and the exciting thing here is that the Bible says He is going to come again! I cannot stomach the liberal theologians' assertion that the Scriptures' teaching on the second coming of Christ is only figurative. What a purely DISHONEST interpretaion of the Scripture. Our writer viewed Christ's second coming as just as literal as His facing death and judgement, and just as literal as His first coming! When Jesus DOES come again, there will be no liberal theologians sitting around, hypothesizing about the mere second coming of Christ's teachings...

In a nutshell, what am I preaching this morning? I am preaching Christ crucified--I am talking about what the historical event of Jesus on the cross does for us! At the end of that eventful Passover week when Jesus was finishing His ministry, the Romans had prepared three crosses for three criminals. On two of the crosses, thieves were to hang. The third cross was for an insurrectionist named Barabbas, who had been found guilty of treason against the empire. But on the middle cross that day, hung not a violent, profane rebel, but the sinless Son of God. Barabbas went free not because he was innocent, but because Jesus took his place! Jesus was crucified NOT BECAUSE HE WAS GUILTY, but SO THAT He could take Barabbas's place, and the place of all the world!

Is this truth about the Savior precious to you? Is it just fine religious theory for a Sunday morning in January? Or is it the bedrock of your whole life? I hope that it is the latter--it is the one and only reason why I am here on this platform this morning, and the only reason why I am not lost. All of us in this room can know the grace of God simply by trusting in the one-time sacrifice of Christ for you, personally! Let that be your truth!

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
Sacrifice and Forgiveness
Hebrews 9:27-10:18

Introduction: It is very difficult to overcome prejudices. It is especially hard to overcome prejudices if they are learned early in life, and those prejudices which relate to religion are probably the hardest to eradicate from our lives of all. If you grew up in a nominally Protestant home, you may have adopted the viewpoint that religion is fine, kept in its proper place. If you grew up in an atheistic home, you may well have adopted the notion that religion is really for the weak-minded, and does not offer much relevant help for the progressive-minded. If you grew up in a Roman Catholic home, it is quite possible that your expectations of religion include either of the above, along with a highly formal outlook on the church, the clergy, and worship, along with a mystical view of baptism, the Lord's Table; coupled with some strong moral perceptions about things like abortion, the family, etc. Not all prejudices are bad. But we were all raised with certain ideas about what is right and what is wrong, some of which we will never discard. This is the reason our author to the Hebrews has labored so long and hard to show the all-sufficiency of the High Priesthood of Christ.

This sermon is something of a special message in the exposition of the Book of Hebrews. It is significant because Hebrews 10:18 ends the doctrinal section of this book. I think all of us would agree that there have been some deep truths presented in the first ten chapters; and starting with the next message, we will begin our study in the practical section of the Book. This section is also special to me in a way I think many of you will appreciate. For it was three years ago this month that my parents visited us in Dallas for the first time, and heard Dr. Edwin Blum expound this section. I believe it was the first time, and maybe the only time, that my father really heard the Gospel. Dr. Blum, I remember, entitled his message "The Need For A Sacrifice." Would you dwell on that point with me this morning, as we look at this last great section of doctrine in Hebrews?

Hebrews 9:27,28 There are certain facts (some scholars would call them philosophical suggestions: I call them facts because the Word of God teaches them)--that all men must face. All men must die. All men must face a judgement on their lives, at which one question will reign supreme: who will bear the sin. If a man or woman has not received Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, he will bear his own sin in a righteous and just judgement by God. If a man has trusted Christ in His heart, the sin is already paid up in full by Christ on the cross. The last fact men must face is the fact of the second coming of Christ. Secular psychology sometimes uses a belief in the second return of Christ as a test for relative sanity and rationality; that is, if you believe in a second return of Christ you must not be wholly rational or sane. But nevertheless, it is still a fact, as this last verse in chapter nine tells us. I believe in the second coming because that is what the Bible teaches, and I have come to trust the authority and inspiration of the Bible. It tells us that the second coming of Christ will be the final chapter in our salvation, that is our glorification. It is a precious truth, especially when we are waiting for him. 2 Timothy 4:8 also tells us,

...in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Needless to say, history abounds with stories of groups who were convinced that the second coming would appear in their time--stories of people selling all their possessions and standing on rooftops in white sheets. Indeed there are those today who seem to think they know when the second coming will be. I think this is the reason some amillennialists have almost grown to loathe the notion of an imminent return of Christ. I do not know when the Lord Jesus will return to earth. I am persuaded that it will happen, that the biblical language about his return is not merely metaphorical, and I want to be counted among those who eagerly await Him.

Hebrews 10:1-9 Dr. John MacArthur tells the story of an English village whose chapel had an arch on which was written: "We Preach Christ Crucified," (which is a reference to I Cor.2:2). For years godly men preached there and they presented a crucified Savior as the only means of salvation. But as the generation of godly preachers passed, a generation arose that considered the cross and its message antiquated and repulsive. They began to preach salvation by Christ's example rather than by His blood. They did not see the necessity of His sacrifice. After a while ivy crept up the arch and covered the word "Crucified," and only "We Preach Christ" was visible. Then the church decided that its message need not be confined to Christ and the Bible. So the preachers began to give discourses on social issues, politics, philosophy, moral rearmament, and whatever else happened to spark interest. The ivy on the arch continued to grow until it covered the third word. Then it simply read, "We Preach."

But we read in this passage that in His death, Jesus was the perfect sacrifice. We must first come to the place where we see that we NEED a sacrifice-- one who can pay for all of our sins and our sinful nature as well. And then we must see how excellent a sacrifice Jesus Christ's death really was. That's what remembering His death around the Lord's Table is all about!

Under the Old Covenant, the priests were busy all day long, from dawn to sunset, slaughtering and sacrificing animals. It is estimated that at Passover, as many as three hundred thousand lambs would be slain within a week. The slaughter would be so massive that blood would run out of the Temple ground through specially prepared channels into the Brook Kidron, which seemed to be running more with blood than with water. BUT NO MATTER HOW MANY SACRIFICES WERE MADE, OR HOW OFTEN, THEY FAILED IN THREE WAYS!

1. They could not bring access to God.
2. They could not remove sin.
3. They were only external.

I think this mirrors the plight of man today just as it always has. Men long for access to God, whether they admit it or not. We would LOVE to be able to not sin--no crime, no war, no greed, no injustice would all be effects of there being no sin, that no one would argue with. And it would be great if natural man could just change himself internally--by wishing on a star, or something, change the way we are by nature: selfish, lustful, hateful sometimes, etc.

Now there was never any real relationship between a person's sin and an animal sacrifice. The relationship was symbolic, typical of Christ to come. It is impossible for the blood of an amoral animal to bring forgiveness for a man's moral offense against God. Only Jesus Christ, the perfect union of humanity and deity, could satisfy God and purify man. Only His death could be the ultimate sacrifice.

Before Christ's death, no one could get closer to the good things of God, than the shadows of them. "Shadow" (Greek: skia) refers specifically to a pale shadow, as opposed to a sharp, high contrast one. But the very form (Greek: eikōn) is an exact replica. If they had photography back then, he possibly would have called this a photograph! The old system was a pale shadow--the new system is the actual substance, the very reality!

The author then uses two verses from Psalm 40 to illustrate what he is saying: The Lord is not interested in ritual, as if He could be appeased by burnt animals. He IS interested in a people who trust Him, and who trust in His Messiah, who is pleased to do His will.

Hebrews 10:10-18 Notice it is by God's will that we are sanctified, that is, made holy positionally. Nothing here is said of man's will. It is by the sovereign grace of God that men are made new, that people can have new life in Christ. It is by the literal sacrifice of the body of Christ, not some theologically liberal notion of example, that the plan of salvation comes about. And will you notice also that it is once for all? The plan of salvation is permanent. I cannot help but think that those of our brethren who teach that it is possible for a person, once having been truly saved, to ultimately lose that salvation, must never have been gripped by the wonder of the New Covenant. For one single soul to lose his salvation, would be to violate the covenantal relationship between Christ and His Church, and I believe, between Christ and His Father.

Verses 11 and 12 contrast the priests of the Old Covenant and Jesus the Final High Priest. Now did you know that Aaron did not live at the Tabernacle? When his day was finished, he would be off to his home, removed from the direct presence of God, off in the habitations of the tribe of Levi. But when Jesus made His sacrifice, he sat down at the right hand of God, which is a reference again to Psalm 110.

Jesus possessed the presence of God. And let me tell you this: He possessed it for you and for me! So, where is my home? It is not 48 Willow Street. I enjoy 48 Willow Street very much, but it is not my home! G. Campbell Morgan was one of the great British preachers of this century, and he once spoke of a contest in the London News, for the best definition of "My Home." Some of the entries read like this: "Home is the place where our stomachs get three square meals a day, and our hearts a thousand." Or, "Home is the place where we grumble the most and are treated the best." Or, "Home is the place where the great are small and the small are great." Morgan's definition was "Home is the only place where I feel at home." If you've travelled any, you've been in homes where people say, "make yourself at home." But if I was in your home for a stay, how would you feel if I raided your fridge? How would you feel if you had a nice fire in the fireplace and I took my shoes off and wiggled my toes by the fire? It would probably break all social conventions in your home, right? But Dr. Morgan mentions the Apostle Paul when he said "to be absent from the body is to be, (as he put it) AT HOME with the Lord." AND Dr. Morgan said that since he had been a Christian he had never felt at home down here. You know I feel that way! Since I have been converted I never feel at home down here. My home is in heaven.

My residence in heaven is not because I am a good person. It is not because I am particularly religious. It is not because I have some sort of esoteric knowledge about God. It is because by one sacrifice God has made perfect FOREVER those who are being sanctified, that is Christians. For how long? For five years? For twenty years? No. Forever. How long is forever? Long enough for me!

But the passage does not end here. In closing this great doctrinal section, the writer again mentions the New Covenant, from Jeremiah 31. This is no mere religion. It is not just something to make you look different on Sundays. It is God's laws written in our hearts and inscribed in our minds!

And the greatest feature of the New Covenant is the forgiveness we have in Christ. That is what makes me different from the non-Christian. If ever I bring across the idea that I am better, or more deserving, or smarter (in being able to figure out the truth) than another person, THEN I HAVE FAILED. The difference between the Christian and the non-Christian is simple. The Christian is forgiven, and his sins are remembered in the mind of God no more.

Are you forgiven. You may say, "Well, I hope so." Or you may say, "Well, I'm a church-goer." Or you may even say, "I believe that the Bible is correct." But if you have not yet PERSONALLY trusted in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for YOUR sins, then nothing else matters. If you haven't yet, will you? Nothing is more important. If you will, then Christ will forgive your sins and give you a new life in Him. He saves all those who draw near to Him in faith.

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
The Process of Receiving Christ
Hebrews 10:19-25

Introduction: When a preacher chooses expository preaching as his method of pulpit delivery, he is occasionally afforded the great joy of encountering a passage within the book he is preaching, that is clearly a Gospel passage. I ~~have~~ chosen to be an expository preacher, that is, to preach through Bible books, verse by verse; and this morning we encounter just such a marvelous opportunity to review certain things about the process of receiving Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior and Lord. If you are unsure of where you stand on this matter of personally knowing Christ, then this message is especially for you! And for those of you who have known the Lord for many years, I commend that line from the old Gospel hymn, "I Love to Tell the Story,"

I love to tell the story, for those who know it best
Seem hungering and thirsting, to hear it like the rest;
And when in scenes of glory I sing the new, new song,
'Twill be the old, old story, that I have loved so long.

When a person becomes a Christian in the biblical sense, he is not required to put his mind on the shelf. God does not demand faith without giving reasons that we should have faith in Him and His ways of doing things. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews, for example, piles truth upon truth and presents Jesus as the Jew's promised Messiah. He also shows that the New Covenant is far superior to the Old, that the old sacrifices were ineffective, that only the new sacrifice can really bring a person to God, and so forth (MacArthur). In short, this book is full of reasons--good, rational reasons why a man or a woman should turn to Christ, and should receive Christ personally.

It is fitting that we should begin the experiential or practical section of the book with a recital of what happens when a person truly believes in Jesus! Christian experience must begin with the personal experience of Christ. To know Christ is to be a forgiven sinner. To live the Christian life is to never lose sight of that fact!

Hebrews 10:19-21 These verses remind us of what the writer said back in Hebrews 4:14-16. He addresses his readers as his "brethren." Now whether he is referring to them as his Jewish brethren or as his Christian brethren is unclear, but what is clear is that he has affection for them. And he now reviews certain facts about biblical Christianity, with a view to encouragement.

First, the blood of Jesus gives us the confidence to approach God directly, and personally, in His own throne room. A non-Christian cannot do this since He does not have a sustaining relationship with the one who inaugurates that access. But a person who has truly trusted Christ in his heart, comes before God by the blood of Jesus. Any church which de-emphasizes the significance and efficaciousness of the power of Jesus' blood has departed from the faith. His blood cleanses totally. His blood cleanses once and for all. And His blood cleanses permanently.

Second, real Christianity is both new and living. Anything which we do as a church that detracts from the newness which Jesus brings to a person's life; or which has the effect of sapping the life out of a Christian's

experience, is not edifying. This is the great problem with many churches today. They have become institutionalized rather than spiritual. In a church where the Lord is at work in most of the people--that is, where most of the people are obedient to Him, most of the time--even committee meetings; even cleaning the church; even keeping the nursery are functions which are alive out of love for Christ. We need to keep our relationship with Jesus Christ alive and new. If it grows old--if the Christian life grows wearisome, it is not because the Lord has grown old!

The word "new" in verse 20 is the Greek word "prosphton" and it is used only here in the New Testament. Its original meaning was "freshly slaughtered." Jesus is the new way, the freshly slaughtered sacrifice, who opens the way to God! And when His flesh was torn, so was the veil that kept men from God. The blood of animals allowed only the high priest to enter the veil briefly, and then only once per year on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). Jesus' blood allows everyone who believes in Him to enter the veil permanently.

The third fact that the writer reminds us of, is the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ's high priesthood. There is one priest over us--there is only one priest over all the people of God in the whole world.

"For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus..." (I Timothy 2:5)

The notion that ministers of the Gospel should call themselves "priests" coupled with the idea that the best Christians that have lived can now intercede with God for us, is at best a confusion of biblical roles. It is at worst heresy.

Hebrews 10:22 This verse includes the first of three hortatory subjunctives in our passage. A hortatory subjunctive is a strong exhortation, a fervent plea to some action. It is saying, let us live closely to God in Christ, since the way is provided. But coming to God with, as the text says, "full assurance", requires commitment that is genuine. This is the fourth fact about coming to Christ which the author reviews. A man or a woman who comes to Christ must come to Him with a sincere heart. The Lord is not fooled by outward shows or religion the way men may be. He knows your hearts. BUT when you come to Him in sincerity, on HIS TERMS (that is, through Christ's merits alone), He will give you complete assurance that you are and will be saved.

He now describes what happens to a person when they come to Christ truly: their hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience. Do you not know many people, who even though they may be church-goers, and do all kinds of good works among men, they struggle with cleaning up their conscience (or maybe this is you...) The conscience condemns and reminds us of our guilt; and the guilt can't be removed until the sin is removed.

I remember in the months just before I became a Christian, I had a good friend named Amy who had just become a Christian. And I thought, well I can be religious too. So I started reading the New Testament in the first book: Matthew. I started in Matthew 1 and quit in about Matthew 5, because I thought this is all well and good, but I'm still the same on the inside. Becoming a Christian isn't just turning over a new leaf. It is receiving a new life! The Apostle John tells us why he wrote his Gospel:

"... these (things) have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31)

Many Bible teachers say that the last phrase in verse 22 has to do with Christian baptism. I do not believe that this is a reference to that ordinance directly. I believe that it has to do with how the Holy Spirit changes our lives. In the Old Testament the priests had to wash their whole bodies with water before they could perform the sacrifice, and this is an allusion to that rite. The truth here is that no man can come before God without being first cleansed and justified. Titus 3:5 speaks of the "washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." Ephesians 5:26 speaks metaphorically of "the washing of water with the word." When a person is first really hearing the Gospel, and if he responds to it--there is a cleansing action. This does not happen when a person is baptized outwardly. Being baptized outwardly is simply a soon-after testimony of an inward cleansing by Christ. It doesn't mean that you don't have any more problems. It doesn't mean that you won't ever sin again. It doesn't mean that you will never have doubts. And it doesn't mean that you are any better than anyone else. It does mean that if you have met Jesus personally, that you know in your heart that you are His, and that He will keep all His promises.

There was once a young boy whose dad left him on a downtown corner one morning and told him to wait there until he returned in about half an hour. But the father's car broke down and he could not get to a phone. (If you are concerned about the propriety of a father leaving his son alone on a street corner, then just think of this illustration as taking place in Mayberry, N.C.!)...Five hours went by before the father managed to get back, and he was worried that his son would be in a state of panic. But when the father got there, the boy was standing in front of the dime store, looking in the window and rocking back and forth on his heels. When the father saw him, he ran up to him and threw his arms around him and hugged him and kissed him. The father apologized, and said, "Weren't you worried? Did you think I was never coming back?!" The boy looked up and replied, "No, Dad. I knew you were coming. You said you would."

Hebrews 10:23-25 Jesus said, in John 8:31, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine." That is what verse 23 is all about! A true believer will be around in the end. It is very sad that many come to Christ, and say that they believe, and yet are gone so soon. Dear ones, let's hold tightly on to our profession of faith, no matter what storms may come, no matter what doubts may assail us. Because the basis for our faith is not imaginary: the Bible says, "He who promised is faithful." He will not desert you. If you receive Jesus into your life, and come to know Him personally, He will always be there for you. His answers to your prayers may seem to be a long time in coming sometimes. The waiting may be uncomfortable or even painful. BUT HE WILL ALWAYS DO JUST AS HE HAS SAID HE WILL DO. HE WHO PROMISED IS FAITHFUL.

The third hortatory subjunctive (the third "Let us") has to do with the proper effect of being a Christian. Verses 24 and 25 speak to those of us, once we have accepted Christ--and what should be a primary strategy for us.

We are to stimulate one another, and the first way to do that is to be WITH one another regularly. Now one of the things I sit up here day after day thinking about (and sometimes worrying about), is for each one of you, is this ministry a stimulation to you? I myself have been in churches where I was greatly stimulated to carry out and express the love of Christ to someone--where I was agitated to the point where I produced some truly good works. I have been in a church meeting on occasion when because of the meeting of the people, because of the sharing, the preaching, the singing or the prayer, I became really motivated to action. Does Dartmouth Bible Church do that for you? Does your coming, (I am speaking to Christians), so stir you up that there comes out of it in the next week after you were here, some visible, tangible expression of the love of Christ, some good work?

Now I know this verse 25 has been so often used to bang Christians over the head about regular and consistent church attendance. Coming to the assembly of the brethren should not be motivated out of a guilt trip, but rather out of a sincere affection and desire to be with the saints and to hear what God has been doing this past week. You should look forward to sitting under the same teaching, to singing the same songs and to agreeing with one another in prayer over various burdens. If you are not in that general condition, I want you to come talk to me... because that is what should be happening in your life, and if the ministries of this church themselves do not contribute to your feeling lifted up and motivated to DO something for Christ, then we maybe need to overhaul what we are doing. This is not an institution. It is a Body. This is not just a religious organization. It is an organism. And organisms which stop living, only decay.

When you come to church on Sundays, and you should come to church every Sunday-- it should be your goal to be part of a stimulating atmosphere for the sake of the encouragement of your brethren. If you harbor a grudge, or a resentment towards somebody, if you fall into apathy, if you succumb to insecurity ("I don't have anything to offer..."), you have failed to let verse 25 grip your life.

Let us draw near to God. Let us hold fast our confession. Let's be regularly considering how to stir one another up to real Christian action. He who promised is faithful, and He will help us carry out these things!

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
The Possibility of Apostasy
Hebrews 10:26-39

Introduction: Among the many duties of a faithful elder are encouragement, consolation in times of sorrow, friendship through the easy times, steadfastness in times of persecution or strife, stick-to-it-iveness in the day-to-day administrative duties of the church, availability at nearly all times for counsel, and finally, to be faithful as a giver of warnings as they appear in Scripture. The passage before us today is the last of the warning passages in the Book of Hebrews. The section is meant really as an encouragement, not as a discouragement! Because many times we would not face up to some harsh realities that the Bible speaks about, this is where a verse-by-verse exposition of the Scripture is useful--we might never chose to expound a passage like this one if we simply selected random passages to preach on week after week.

Many of the arguments that are hurled against the Christian faith today are based on a caricature of Christianity which is a distorted view of the real thing. The problem is that men often fail to distinguish between true Christians and false professing Christians. The Bible is very clear that THERE IS SUCH A THING as people who think they are Christians, but are not truly saved.

This is one thing I have found refreshing about coming to this part of the country--I have encountered a much higher proportion of people who clearly admit (or boast) that they are non-Christian. In the South, distinctions between Christian and non-Christian are a little less clear, where there are so many Protestant church-goers.

But, when the world sees a true Christian who is living like he should, and acting Christ-like, there is little they can say, although they may not believe Christianity is true, (Arnold).

The Book of Hebrews sets before us, in masterful fashion, what a true Christian is...

The Basic Warning (vss.26-31): The basic warning is found in these verses. Think about what this says for a moment...does this bother you? It should! It says that it is possible to come to a place where a person no longer is eligible to receive the benefits of the cross. This is serious business. But what is your interpretation of this idea? Is this passage saying that if we do not practice obedience in a certain area, that the benefits of the cross (payment of the penalty of sin) are withdrawn by the Lord? Is this verse in fact teaching that a person, once truly saved, can again court a particular sin, follow after it, and finally lose that salvation which was his? Before I answer that question, and tell you what I think this passage DOES mean, let me say, BY WAY OF APPLICATION:

I hope this shakes some of you up! I hope maybe some of the younger Christians in our midst will come to one of us and say, "Am I saved?" --Maybe even with some fear in your voice. Then we can re-examine the BASIS of your faith, why you believe you are a Christian and what keeps you a Christian.

Let me also say that I believe it is for this very reason of the possibility of a person making a false decision for Christ, before they really understand the Gospel, that I think we should be wary of bringing folks to a premature decision for Christ. I would rather deal with a person over a longer period of time, who is NOT a Christian, and knows it, than have someone make a premature decision for Christ, not realizing completely what the Gospel is, and then have to backtrack and unravel what was quite possibly a false profession of faith. This affects how we do evangelism.

Now if you are thinking along with what I am saying, you may be asking, "Well, you want to make the Gospel complex and something a person has to work for and on!" No. The Gospel in itself is marvelously simple--a person must see that before God he or she is a sinner. (Note: As J. I. Packer says, we are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners.) And then he or she must see that no amount of good works, or being a good person can remove the sin problem. Then he or she must hear about Jesus. Then they must, by faith alone, flee to Jesus to be their Savior. It is that simple.

What is not simple is that in texts like Hebrews 10:26,27 we must face up to the possibility of apostasy, turning away from Jesus Christ, even after the person has made an initial profession of faith. How we interpret that reality does, unfortunately divide the Church sometimes. But we are nonetheless faced with this reality. In the past year we have had one or two in our own little church who have qualified maybe, for the category of being apostate--it is tragic, but we must have a correct understanding on it.

Now my understanding of this section of Hebrews is not that this speaks of the true Christian. It speaks of the professing Christian--the person who says he is a Christian, may even manifest certain Christian-like qualities or ministries; but who is in his heart really unsaved. The passage is teaching this: If the sacrifice of Christ should be renounced, there remains no other available sacrifice which could shield an apostate from God's judgement by raging fire. A Christian (professing) who abandons the confidence he had at first puts himself on the side of God's enemies, and, as the writer has already said, in effect,

"crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace" (6:6).

The wilful sin that this passage speaks about is the wilful renouncing of Christ, after once having professed knowing Him. Judas Iscariot is the classic example. The bottom line is that those who pass this point, will find themselves without a Savior. Now I will try to plea with a person who has done this until they die, to REPENT and to truly trust Christ in their hearts--I do not know a man or a woman's heart. But let us not be surprised when it happens, because the Bible teaches that it will.

We must also face up to the fact that the Bible teaches that the wrath of God and His judgement, while totally just, is a terrifying thing. Verse 31 says it the best! Non-Christians may insulate themselves

with high technology and soothing, relativistic philosophies, and grandiose notions of the nobility of the "ascent of man." But these are a cocaine high for people today, the Bible shows us! Karl Marx said that religion is the opiate of the masses, but I say today we are seeing secular humanism as an opiate of the masses. Without a Savior (and there is only one qualified), men face a terrible judgement. Man's condition is desperate. Without a Savior he stands on the very brink, his whole life, of having to pay for his own sins, by his own choice. I cannot help but believe from this passage and others, that the person who renounces Christ, once having professed knowing Him will in some sad way face a greater judgement than the person who simply dies and has never heard the Gospel (verse 29).

Note finally that the sin of apostasy is an offense towards the whole Trinity. Verses 29-31 speak of the nature of what apostasy is really doing. It is a grievous thing.

Before we move on to the encouragement in the last verses of chapter 10, I would like to share with you some six causes of apostasy, by way of review (from MacArthur's comm.) There are a number of things which can strongly influence a person to forsake the Lord, that can stimulate his will to deny the Creator:

1. Persecution. What may drive a believer closer to the Lord will likely drive an unbeliever further from Him. Someone who in his heart is not saved, even if he says he is, will not have the strength or desire to pay a high price for something that means little to him. (Cf. Matt. 24:9, 10; 2 Tim. 3:12)
2. False Teachers. Persecution frightens unbelievers away from the truth, whereas false teachers can entice them away. 2 Tim. 4:3
3. Temptation. Sometimes the things of this world become more attractive and influential, and draw a person away from the truth. Cf. Luke 8:13; 2 Tim. 4:10. Also the character Susan in C.S. Lewis' "Chronicles" is an example.
4. Neglect. I was speaking with a Christian lately, and when I asked how they were doing spiritually (which is part of my job) they said, "Well, I haven't thought much about it lately." To make no positive decision for Christ is to decide against Him. Cf. Heb. 2:3.
5. Clinging to the Old. Holding on to the old religion, or simply the old life-style can eventually bring a person to apostasize. False religion can become so habitual, so much a part of our way of thinking and living, that to give it up seems unthinkable.
6. Forsaking Christian Fellowship. The best place for strong influence towards Christ is to be in the company of believers. The worst place to be is away from true believers. Cf. 10:25.

The Basic Encouragement (verses 32-39): Again, the point here this morning, is a loving and earnest appeal NOT to fall away! There are two things the recipients of this letter to the Hebrews were told to do as deterrents to apostasy: look back on their experience and look forward to their rewards.

- a. Looking back on the experience (32-34). Think of your battles in the faith in the past and how the Lord has never forsaken you. Think of how he answers prayer, fulfilled his promises to you, saw you through tough times, gave you the faith to hang in there. In short, review your history in the faith!

We see this principle practiced in patriotism, where veterans of various campaigns of the past get together from time to time and reminisce. They recall each other's acts of valor and steadfastness, and they remember how they help firm. There is something special about comrades and their past experiences together. I hope that in years to come, we will be able to look back on tough times we have had together and say, "We hung in there!"

(But if we are not having any tough times together, then we are either sleepy spiritually, or not enough on the cutting edge of the Body of Christ).

- b. The second deterrent to apostasy is the prospect of rewards for those who believe. Let us not too glibly say we don't want any rewards! To receive a reward from the hand of the Sovereign Savior is not something to be lightly cast off. And one thing which is highly treasured by the Lord is when we display confidence in Him.

In about the year 150, there was a man named Polycarp who was the pastor of the Christian church in Smyrna (mentioned in Rev.2). Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John, and lived to be 86. In his 86th year, he was being pursued in a great persecution of Christians--he was apprehended, and put to the stake. He was given one last chance to perform an act of worship to Caesar--and he said, "Eighty and six years have I served my King who has saved me--and He has never once forsaken me. How can I then now deny my Master who bought me?" So they burned this man. But he had great confidence in the Lord. He could look back on how the Lord had been so good to him, and look forward to future rewards.

Conclusion: Knowledge of the Gospel is essential. Suffering for the Gospel is possible. Serving others, especially God's people, in the name of the Gospel is fine. But only faith will bring salvation, and the persevering of the soul!

A true Christian is one who has received Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior and seeks to follow Christ in his life. A true believer has a changed heart and a new nature that gives him desire for spiritual realities. But a false Christian is one who has not truly received Christ and has no real desire to follow Him because his heart has never been changed by the supernatural new birth that comes from God.

Are you true or false? Do you have Christ or church? Have you experienced religion or regeneration? Are you trusting in Christ ALONE for salvation or are you trusting in your own good works?

And for true Christians, let's determine to persevere. We must never stop believing in Christ. We must continue to push on in Him, even when tough times come.

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
What Christian Faith Is
Hebrews 11:1-3

Introduction: Last week we undertook to explain what is probably one of the least preached sections in the Bible. This week, we shall look at what is one of the MOST preached-over sections!

A sixth grade gym teacher was illustrating how to win a long-distance dash by having his students look out across the schoolyard. He said, "pick out a tree on the horizon and run straight for it. If you zig-zag in your running, you'll lose; but as long as you keep your eyes glued to the tree, you'll run straight for it." Likewise, the author of Hebrews tells us to look straight at Jesus in our Christian lives, which is really like a race! Christ is both the example, and the goal we are to run to. Fixing our eyes on Him will assure our running straight to Him! How we DO THAT, is by the exercise of faith.

We begin today a fairly long chapter, mostly about various men of old ("presbuteroi" vs.2 puts it), who exercised a certain CONFIDENCE in the loving care of Jehovah God. Our writer introduces the section, really, with verse 10:29:

"But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the persevering of the soul."

In the end, there is only one significant difference between Christians and non-Christians. It is the matter of faith. WHY men chose to disbelieve the record of Scripture is one of the great absurdities and tragedies of human history. Christianity is not some esoteric, secret way to God. It is open to all who will believe on it, and THAT BELIEF is the only requirement! It is as C.S. Lewis has put it, "Christ just doesn't offer something for nothing--He offers everything for nothing!" And yet still most people will chose, either passively, or actively, to disbelieve what the Bible says about their sin dilemma, and God's solution to it--Jesus Christ as the Savior.

The Principle of Faith (verse 1)

This little verse is a pause between what the writer has said before--that professing Christians who throw in the towel will eventually prove their own falseness in the faith, and that we should always persevere--and what comes after--examples of men who DID persevere, who DID hang in there with the Lord. It is the principle of faith, and is not meant so much, I do not believe, as a theological definition.

In the New Testament, and especially in the Book of Hebrews, the word "faith" is intimately tied up with the word "hope." We cannot talk about real faith, without talking about a hope in future blessing and in present care by the Lord. That is the reason for the account of the PAST "heroes" of the faith--to build us up and to show us that we can hope in God's lovingkindness in the here and now, and in His faithfulness about His promises to us for the future. Now, how do you use the word "hope?" You may say things like,

"I hope it doesn't rain today." WHY? Because you've got something at stake, maybe--like your laundry out on the line, or a ball game you very much want to play in...

Or you may say, "I hope my car lasts another 50,000 miles," because you don't expect to be ready to buy a new one until then.

Or you may say, "I hope my son/daughter will want to go to college," because you have high HOPES for their well-being in an ever-increasingly competitive job market.

Or you may say, "I HOPE the Celtics win the championship this year," (because NEXT YEAR is the year of the Dallas Mavericks!)

The point is you hope for what means something to you, and you place a stake in the future, that there is SOME PROSPECT of it working out for you (unless you're a Texas Rangers fan...)

This verse one tells us that faith HAS THE EFFECT of giving us a confidence of the things we are depending on happening in the future. The word "assurance" or "confidence" is also translated "Title" or "deed." Our faith, our dependence that God is true and faithful, is our title, or deed to certain spiritual realities, which we are persuaded are true. No other man on earth has that confidence--it is unique to Christians.

This is why I am always uncomfortable when someone is trusting in their own good works, or nobility or even religiosity to please God. He is impressed with none of these things: He wants only our reliance on His Word!

The verse also says that faith is the conviction of things not seen, or rather, the invisible. Now modern man is pretty sophisticated--he's pretty smart after all, and technology is pretty impressive. You can't put one over on ol' modern 1985 scholar. We say we talk to a God who we can't see--He's invisible. We say we are waiting for a visible return of a self-proclaimed Hebrew prophet that lived 2,000 years ago, and we can't even produce His Body to prove that He existed! We say we're going to a place we call "heaven" when the most sophisticated telescopes on planet Earth can fathom no terminus to the Universe...We say Jesus Christ changes lives invisibly, when we still look just the same as before our supposed conversion. How can we say all these irrational things (seemingly)? Because faith is the conviction of things unseen. You see, more than the occultists, more than those who play with magic, more than those who watch Leonard Nimoy's "In Search Of," we are practitioners of the supernatural. If you have been around this church very long, you are really here for only one reason, THAT IS BECAUSE YOU HAVE DECIDED THAT WHEN WE WORSHIP GOD, HE HERES US--you practice some faith every Sunday morning, when you pray, sing praises, and wait on God in the Holy Spirit to speak to you through His Word! You are supernaturalists! May you never stop being so...

I like the way C.S. Lewis describes faith (Mere Christianity, pp.123,124):

Faith is the art of holding on to things that your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods. We need to teach our moods where to get off! Until you can do this, you can never be a sound Christian, or even a sound atheist, but just a creature dithering to and fro, with its beliefs really dependent on the weather and the state of its digestion! Consequently, one must train the habit of faith.

Now as a side issue, I believe that faith itself is a gift of God. I have such a respect for the depth and thoroughness of the sinfulness of man, that I do not think that man can conjure up saving faith from within his sinful nature. Hence, we have verses like,

"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the Word of Christ."
(Romans 10:17)

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." (Ephesians 2:8)

But we are still charged with taking men the Gospel, and pleading with them to rely on it with all their hearts!

The Power of Faith (verses 2,3)

In these two verses the writer gives us a past benefit that faith had with some men, and a present value of Christian faith. Verse two shows that Christian faith is powerful in winning God's acceptance. In fact it is the ONLY WAY of winning God's acceptance. The Living God and His Son Jesus Christ are impressed by only one human endeavor, really: the casting of oneself on His mercy and grace. Men that the world has come to revere: Abel, Noah, Moses, David and many others are important ONLY because they came to a place in their lives where they TRUSTED in God's care and love, and in His payment for their sin, through a Messiah yet to come (for them). And they continued exercising faith all their lives--they became MEN OF FAITH. Sure they had setbacks, discouragements, defeats, bouts with their own sin...But in the end they were found to be those who did not shrink back to destruction, "but of those who have faith to the persevering of the soul." Will you be that kind of person? Are you trusting in the Living God in Christ for anything today? What are you exercising reliance on Him for? Do you need Him? Is your life characterized by depending on Him and His strength? Or are you one of those who still hold out the HOPE that you will make it on your own, thank you. Are you the one who says, "I don't need any bleeding charity!" Or are you the one who says, "Lord please give me the bleeding charity!!!"

Now verse three is most interesting--it is the foundation for a conviction in the divine creation of the world. Do you see what the text says? It says that by faith we UNDERSTAND...Christian faith is, as I am teaching it, and as does any Bible teacher that I respect, RATIONAL. The world is full of non-rational philosophy, though. Sometimes, people go to desperate lengths to reject God, and their proofs are full of illogic and non-rational presupposition.

Such nonrational philosophy is perfectly illustrated in the book Catch-22, which centers on a squadron of World War II American fliers stationed on the fictitious island of Pianos in the Mediterranean. Their job was to fly extremely dangerous missions over southern Europe, and they had to complete 25 missions before being eligible for transfer. One of the men, Yosarian, was especially anxious to get out. But when he had completed his 25th mission, the new commanding officer raised the number to 30, and then to 40, 45, 50 and so on. Insanity became the only justification for transfer. But if a flyer turned himself in for being insane in order to get out of flying the missions, that was evidence he was sane. It became clear to the flyers that they were playing a sadistic game, with no way out. So Yosarian decided to build a raft and float to Sweden--no matter that a whole continent was between him and Sweden, or that the ocean currents would have

taken him anywhere but there. Despite the impossibility of accomplishing what he intended, he could not be dissuaded. He had devised a hopeless escape from a hopeless situation, and insisted on his right to pursue it. He jumped headlong into the absurd.

This nonrational philosophy is the course of many today, I am absolutely persuaded. They are looking for meaning and sense and reality, often while denying that there can be any such things.

But as we get back to Hebrews 11:3, we see, through the practice of Christian faith, first at salvation, and then after in the Christian life, that God has created the universe, and has ordered it. He made the universe with great exactness, and true science, I believe, seeks to understand that divinely framed exactness, as engineered by the Living God.

Creation was simply by His Word. God spoke, and out of nothing came everything material, and with such order and design and magnificence, that it is absurd that man should miss it! That is how powerful His Word (Greek: "Rhēma") is. That is how powerful your God is, if you are a born-again Christian. Do not miss it. It is in becoming a saved sinner (I always cringe when I hear evangelists call out "Sinners!" --we are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are ALL sinners!) THAT we can understand that God is not distant and removed from the universe, the way the deists have said. He is NEAR, He is powerfully involved--Jesus Christ upholding all things by the word of His power, (Hebrews 1:3).

Conclusion: No matter how sophisticated we get, let us never cease from a simple reliance on the merciful and powerful Lord, Jesus Christ. Are you in a struggle these days? Are you tempted by the ways of the world? Are you having a hard time at home? Are you surrounded by people at work who think little of Christians? Are you discouraged, maybe even, by your brothers and sisters in Christ sometimes? HOLD FAST YOUR CONFESSION!

An Christian speaker of many years ago told the beautiful story of two little boys he once visited in a London hospital.

The cots were side by side. One boy had a dangerous fever. The other had been struck by a truck and his body was badly mangled. The second one said to the first, "Say, Willie, I was down to the mission Sunday School and they told me about Jesus. I believe that if you will ask Jesus, He will help you. They said that if we believe in Him and pray to God, then when we die He will come and take us with Him to heaven." Willie replied, "But what if I'm asleep when he comes, and I can't ask Him?" His friend said, "Just hold up your hand, that's what we did in Sunday School. I guess Jesus sees it." Since Willie was too weak to hold up his arm, the other boy propped it up for him with a pillow. During the night Willie died, but when the nurse found him the next morning, his arm was still propped up. We can be sure that the Lord saw his arm, because the Lord sees faith and the Lord accepts faith. It is the only way to be approved and accepted by Him--not on being a good or even a religious person. By faith the Christian sees what the learned will never discover on their own. (MacArthur's Comm.)

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
Able and Enoch, Worshipping and Walking with God
Hebrews 11:4-6

Introduction: It is of the highest importance that every person who thinks he or she is a Christian learn for himself whether his faith is that which the Bible says is necessary for salvation. Saving faith is quite beyond a mere assent to the revealed will of God. It is more than a faith that the events of the Bible are true events. It is more than the faith that miracles occur today. It is even more than having a confidence that God will do what the Bible says He will do. And we need to understand this matter of what saving faith really is, and that is on the heart of the writer to the Hebrews, as that is the purpose of this chapter, to illustrate saving faith, and to SHOW HOW IT APPLIES IN THE LIVES OF REAL PEOPLE.

All through this New Testament book, the author has been exhorting, probing, warning, and encouraging his readers to ALSO DEVELOP a faith which is STABLE: a faith which does not perish after a time, like that of the stoney ground hearers in Luke 8:13. It is in your and my interest that we spend some time examining the nature of our own faith, in light of the faith of saved men of old. That is the course we shall take in the next several expositions from Hebrews.

Hebrews 11:4

Faith makes a life out of things that are invisible (Owen). We do what we do as Christians, NOT because we can see or hear the Lord with the physical senses, but because we are persuaded that He has rescued us from the penalty of sin, by relying on the testimony of Scripture. We live our whole lives on the principle that God accepts our worship and service in the righteousness given to us in Jesus Christ. We draw great HOPE from the prospect that certain exciting things are going to happen in the future, and we shall be on the right side at that time! And in this quiet confidence, we are united with believers of all ages, all the way back to the beginning of the human race!

Now you will notice that Adam and Eve are not mentioned here in this list. I do not know whether Adam and Eve were saved or not. The fact that they are not mentioned here, and their first two children ARE mentioned, is of some significance, I think. But also there are many other Christians who are NOT mentioned in this chapter also. But the contrast between Cain and Able IS dealt with, and we must examine it. NOTE FIRST that the writer assumes their historicity, that is, that they did exist. They do not appear to resemble the primitive beings of evolutionist fantasy, nor does the text give us any reason to ASSUME that they are part of the climb from Primeval Slime, to amoeba, to man. They are simply assumed to have been WHO the Scripture SAYS they were.

What is the difference between the sacrifice that Cain offered and that which Able offered? We must go back to Genesis 4:1-16 for the full account of these men. What was wrong with Cain's sacrifice? He and his brother both came to the same altar. Both came to the Living God. Both came at the right time and both came to sacrifice. What was wrong with Cain's sacrifice? He was certainly religious and sincere, but he did not sacrifice God's way. Cain, in his natural and rational mind, reasoned that one way was as good as another. He chose to believe that they TYPE of sacrifice was unimportant, but the important thing is the sincerity of the heart.

Cain was rejected and Able was accepted because Able had the right kind of sacrifice AND a sincere heart! There is only one way to worship God that is acceptable to God and that is through the shedding of blood.

"...without shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness." Heb.9:22

True saving faith has the right approach and attitude. But it also has the right and correct facts. There is (contra our relativistic society) a right and a wrong way in spiritual matters. There is only one way of salvation and that is appropriated through relying PERSONALLY on the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and His work for sin. Able was not justified by being a good person, or by being better than Cain. He was not justified by God because he was smarter than Cain. He was justified (declared righteous) by his faith, and by his correct sacrifice (worship) which showed his faith by his works. As Christians we must do things God's way, or not at all. Able gave what God wanted. Cain gave what Cain wanted. Able acknowledged his sin, Cain did not. Cain's sacrifice is the first expression of false religion.

From time to time I speak with a young Christian who tells me of some friend or family member who is very sincere in their religion. They do not worship just as we do, they tell me, but God cuts them slack and accepts their approach just like he does ours. Fine. But if their approach, I point out, is not through a personal trust in the shed blood of the High Priest Jesus Christ; if it is through being a good person, or through the intercession of their church or religion, then it is false religion.

We need to be sure that every element of the ministry at Dartmouth Bible Church is according to God's will. If there is something we are doing which compromises Scripture then we need to jetison it. If there is some element of worship or carrying on the ministry that the Bible prescribes, and we are NOT doing it yet, then we need to adopt it. Let's keep our eyes and hearts open ON OURSELVES, and what we are doing here. This is one reason why I am so concerned with the approach of our charismatic brethren. If their theology of worship is CORRECT, then dear ones, we are missing out on much. This is why I have made, and continue to make, a careful study of their assertions. It is important that we worship God in the right way, and that we have all that he intends for us. Let me say here, that I do not think their theology is altogether correct, but some of it is naive. It is not, by any means, generally, WRONG as we would evaluate the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science. etc. But it is, I believe, in part erroneous. There is error in some of it.

Able still speaks to us today. He says three things. Man comes to God by faith, not by works. 2) Man must accept and obey God's revelation above his own reason and self-will; 3) sin is severely punished.

Hebrews 11:5

In Genesis 5:18-24 we read about a man named Enoch. He is also referred to in the New Testament book of Jude (14,15), where his prophesy is summarized. Enoch's life was in general a very pleasing thing to God. Can you imagine walking with God for three hundred years? The Hebrew here is interesting. It says in Genesis 5:18, simply that after walking with God in an intimate relationship ("living with God"), "then, he was not." The word is 'enénnu, and it just means he was there one minute and gone the next. In effect, God just beamed him up. This is the only man in

the Scripture, other than the prophet Elijah who had this happen to him. But we know from the New Testament that on the last day, the Lord shall bring this about for Christians of all time. We call it "the rapture." And it is a blessed hope!

A little girl in Sunday School told the story of Enoch her way. She said, "Enoch was a man who learned to walk with God, and they used to take long walks together. One day they walked so far that God said, 'Look, Enoch, its too far for you to go back; just come on home with me.' So Enoch just walked on home with God!

God becomes the intimate companion of all who walk by faith. What is involved in walking with God? There are several things...(S.L.Johnson)

1. Progress, under divine direction. When you walk with God by faith, seeking to obey His will, you WILL grow. He will never cause you to stagnate.
2. Divine agreement. You will begin to love to do things God's way, and to love His Word. It will slowly become your very food, and you will WANT to do His will.
3. Mutual trust and a perfect confidence--even when circumstances point the other way. This is why so many old saints die so gracefully.
4. You get to KNOW God. He is not a stranger. He will fascinate you and energize your life. Abraham was the friend of God, and God said (Genesis 18:17), "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?"
5. Keeping in step with God. At one point Peter stepped out in front of God, when he sliced off the ear of the high priest's servant in the Garden. At another time Peter fell behind the step of God when he denied Jesus. We need to move when He moves. We need to stop when He stops.
6. To walk with God is to walk in a place of honor. After a professional football game you can always see the people crowd around the winning players and want to walk with them! There is no greater honor than to walk with God in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit.
7. Walking with God involves reward. There is no finer reward than to see someone begin to walk with Jesus because of your ministry! And there are so many other rewards! (Heb.11:6)

The greatest blessing there is for a wife, is to have a husband who walks with God. The greatest blessing there is for a child is to have a Mom and a Dad who walk with God. The blessings spill off! Enoch as a neighbor walked with God. Enoch as a citizen, walked with God. Enoch as a worker, walked with God. What we are told about Enoch is a complete biography of him--it is to the point--he walked with God.

God is the one person who will never fail us. He will always love us, and he will always give us infallible advice. Why do we not walk with Him closer--why do we not make it a priority to maintain our walk? I have never understood Christians who merely dabble in spiritual things--what can be more absurd than to make walking with the living God an occasional excursion, when He wants to walk with us every hour of every day. You may grow bored with Christians, but you will never grow bored with God. You may get tired or weary of church, but you will never grow weary of Christ!

Hebrews 11:6

As we said at the beginning of this message, it is of the highest importance that we learn for ourselves what is the true nature of our faith. We must understand the substance of saving faith, and practice it.

Your goal as a Christian should be in a nutshell, one thing: to please God.

"...walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord"(Ephesians 5:8b-10).

The first step in coming to God, is to believe that He is--not as you might imagine Him to be--but as He has revealed Himself to be in the pages of the Bible. Then you must seek Him, and believe that He will respond positively to your seeking Him.

God wants to be approached. God wants to be sought after. God wants to grant blessings and blessings and more blessings, and all the fruit of the Spirit to you. But we must worship Him on His terms, and by His methods. We must strive to walk with Him even though sin brings us down sometimes, and even though the world is many times set against our walking with Him, and even though the devil is doing everything He can to interfere.

When you come here on Sundays, do you worship Him. Do you walk with Him during the week. All of everything we do here at Dartmouth Bible Church is designed to help you and your family in those things. Let's be ever seeking to worship God and to walk with Him consistently!

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

Noah: Responding to the Word of God by Faith
Hebrews 11:7

Introduction: Other than Jesus Christ, the man we are going to look at this morning is probably the most famous man in the Bible. Some folks have heard of Abraham, many have heard of Moses and Paul, but probably no one has never heard of Noah and the Ark.

Noah is famous because he was a naval architect. He is famous because he survived "The Day After" a world-wide catastrophe. He is famous because he allegedly left a massive ship on top of a mountain. He is famous because he had three sons with funny names. But the most significant thing is that Noah was a man controlled by the future (SLJohnson). Now Noah shares the same quality with all the "heroes" of this chapter: he trusted that what God said was true, even if God didn't provide all the documentation on the spot! But Noah is also unique because of the task before him. Hebrews 11:7 summarizes what we find in Genesis 6:13-22.

Genesis 6:9 tells us that, "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God." Noah worshipped God faithfully as Abel had. And Noah walked with God faithfully as Enoch had. He also worked for God faithfully, because he was a man controlled by the future. Its one thing to make alot of bold claims about the future--but true faith always has actions to support its claim. We can have the most articulate, the most complex and the most brilliant doctrinal statement in the area--but if our lives do not reflect what we SAY we believe in, then what we SAY is pretty much words.

A sports announcer once interviewed a pro football player right before he was scheduled to play in the Super Bowl. He asked the lineman what he thought his chances were in the upcoming game. He replied, "I know that if we do just as the coach says, we will win." The team had absolute faith in the coach's wisdom and judgement. But the PLAYERS also knew that winning depended on their doing what he told them to do (MacArthur).

Noah's faith was unique. It was unique because of his absolute trust in God and because of his unhesitating and persistent obedience for 120 years in an undertaking that, from the human perspective, looked totally absurd and absolutely impossible. DO WE HAVE A WILLINGNESS TO TAKE ON PROJECTS FOR GOD, IN KEEPING WITH THE REVEALED WILL OF GOD IN THE BIBLE, WHICH REALLY STRETCH OUR FAITH? Or are we too comfortable in our Christianit. Our whole lives need to be energized by the hope of the future--I get excited when I see a Christian who is NOT SATISFIED with just going to church BEING his Christianity. I saw alot of radical projects undertaken by Christians in Virginia and in Texas:

1. Individuals willing to go on short or long-term missionary trips.
2. Christians reaching out to people they didn't know, to try to befriend them or win them to Christ.
3. A group of upper/middle class north Dallas churches planting a church in lower class, black West Dallas.
4. Christian families taking unwed, pregnant NON-CHRISTIAN girls into their home for months, loving them, taking care of them, and encouraging them.

All these people, like Noah, are controlled by the future. They are not just concerned with the here and now, but with doing work for the Lord now, in whatever it takes to obey the Word of God. Are we willing to obey the Scripture? Are we willing to trust God to work through us as individuals?

Hebrews 11:7 says that Noah was warned by God about things that were as yet invisible. God is still warning the world about the future. Do we live in light of the fact that the world must yet face the judgement of God? We are rescued out, by the free gift of God in Jesus Christ, but **HOW SERIOUSLY DO WE TAKE** the impending coming of Christ? Jesus said,

For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the Ark. And they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. (Matt.24:37-39)

Do we take seriously what God says will surely happen in the end--or do we just go about, "business as usual?" Are we a people controlled by the future?

Now as to the Ark itself, I think this is one of the most interesting ships in naval history--and I might say at this point, I am absolutely persuaded that there was an Ark, and that it held the animals brought by God, and Noah's family of eight. One of the greatest practical acts of faith in all history must have been the first gopher tree that Noah cut down! He had nothing to go on but God's Word, but for him that was more than sufficient. God gave him the blueprints and Noah set to work.

One of the objections to the biblical account of the flood concerns Noah getting all the animals INTO the Ark. But a close examination of the dimensions of the ark, as given by the Bible, shed considerable light on this problem. The ark was approximately 437½ feet long, by 43.75 feet high, with a beam of 72.92 feet (considering a conservative estimate of the length of a cubit (17.5 inches)). Since the ark had three decks, it had a total deck area of almost 96,000 ft.² and a total volume of approximately 1,396,000 cubic feet, and a gross tonnage of about 13,960 tons. The carrying capacity of the ark would, therefore, be equal to 522 standard railroad stock cars, each of which can carry 240 sheep. So, the arks capacity in sheep would be at least 125,000 sheep. If there are approximately 17,600 currently known species of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, and you take 2 of each, that is 35,200 animals of varying sizes, plus 5 each of clean animals, say half the species, or 8,800 x 5= 44,000, for a grand total of 79,000 animals on the ark. It is by no means inconceivable for the ark to house what the Bible says it housed, with still sufficient room for food stores... (Whitcomb and Morris, Genesis Flood, quoted in Josh McDowell, Answers to Tough Questions).

Noah restructured his whole life around the conviction that what God had told him was going to happen, **WAS GOING TO HAPPEN**. He practiced radical discipleship and obedience!

The ark is also a beautiful picture of the salvation offered to all in Jesus Christ. The ark was easily large enough to hold all the animals necessary to assure each species' survival. It had plenty of room for every person who wanted to come to God for safety. In the same way, Jesus' blood is more than sufficient to atone for all the sins ever committed since the Fall of Man. Jesus declared absolutely that no one who ever comes to Him will be cast out (John 6:37).

It is isgnificant that on the ark there was one door. There is only one way to salvation. God did not have to provide one door for this group of animals, another for that, and a personel door for the people. One door was sufficient. One way to God is sufficient. It is NOT A SECRET WAY, discovered only by wisdom, intelligence, or incantations. It is a wide-open door, freely accesible by faith alone.

It is significant that all those who came into the ark were invited by God. God is sovereign in salvation. People say to me from time to time that they believe in the free-will of man. I beleive that the only thing that is free about man's fallen nature, is his freedom to sin and to rebel against God. Man does not come to God of his own design. He does not invite himself into the Body of Christ because his own will has somehow escaped the effects of sin. All people who are in Christ, are there because God has foreknown them in His great love and mercy.

It is also significant, I believe, that Genesis 7:16 says that after all were in the ark, the Lord shut the door. He is the doorkeeper of salvation, None slipped out and down the gangplank into the raging waters. Whom God saves, stay saved.

Hebrews 11:7 says that in preparing the ark, Noah condemned the world. We have no reason to believe that Noah went around being obnoxious in his manner, or that he was a negative/critical personality. There is no indication that he was unneighborly, arrogant and didn't like people. It was his actions in themselves that condemned folks.

We should be characterized by being a people who are so active in our faith that it condemns the world, dead in its tracks. We should be so full of good and good works, that the world cannot stand us! The world's wickedness is complete. It is manifest all around us, and we are all too often lulled to sleep by it! We should be practitioners of the "Jesus Ethic":

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will keep burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:19-21).

The last two summers I really enjoyed the booth we had at the Whaling City Festival. Other than the Full Gospel Busniessmen's Fellowship, we were the only evangelical group out there. And while we have as yet seen no visible fruit from those two weekends of labor, we shared the Gospel with many people. Our very being there was a testimony that men need a Savior, and without one they will perish and be judged.

Some of you know that in the past year I have had an ongoing relationship with an older lady named Beverly who used to talk to me periodically about religion, philosophy, psychology, writing and so forth. I was invariably kind, never (to my remembrance) short with her or rude, ~~but~~ in the probably 10 hours or so that I have spent with her, had never been granted by her a real opportunity to give her the plan of salvation. But she knew something of where I stood, and my one-time reference of her as a non-Christian bred a growing anger in her towards me, and about six weeks ago, she came by and told me, essentially, that she couldn't stand me any longer, because of what I stand for. My creed is a rebuke (silent though it was) to her worldly way of thinking. I tried very hard to show her the love of Christ. But the radical nature of the testimony of the Word of God just made her cover her ears and close her heart to the invitation of Christ.

We need to expect this. If we are walking with Jesus Christ, as Christians. If we are obedient to the Word of God; and if we are practicing our faith--if we are in fact a people controlled by the future, we should expect the world to react against us mostly, and some, in whom the Holy Spirit is working will flee to Christ by our testimony.

We also need to not be ashamed of the Gospel. It saves. It is powerful. We need to not do as so many Protestant churches have done in the last few decades, water down our message so it is less offensive to the ears of the world. We need to NOT COMPOUND the offensiveness of the Gospel message BY BEING OFFENSIVE OURSELVES. But we need to realize that the Gospel, LIKE THE STORY OF NOAH, demonstrates the simultaneousness of judgement and salvation (Hughes). The eight persons in the ark were saved through water (I Peter 3:20), but it was in the midst of a world-wide judgement on the wickedness of man. Those who will not have God as Savior, will meet Him as Judge. Those who reject the Savior will meet Him in the end as their righteous judge.

Noah's faith was for him his righteousness. He acted on what the Lord said. God gave him a special promise (Genesis 9:13), and He marked it with the rainbow, the first one. God made a covenant with Noah that never again would He destroy the earth by a world-wide flood. It was a promise for patience and grace by the Lord, because surely the world would again grow wicked--Noah and family still had the seeds of sin in them! So when you see a rainbow today, know that it says "God keeps His promises."

Are we relying on the promises of God? Are you a person who banks your whole life on the Bible? That is the kind of faith which pleases God. It is the ONLY kind of faith which pleases God.

If you are as yet unsure of your relationship with God, you can know for sure that Jesus is your Savior. Simply ask Him to be, and trust on the Word of God that He is. This is all it takes to become a Christian. It is by faith, not by being good or being a church-goer...He always keeps His promises!

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
Abraham and the Life of Faith
Hebrews 11:8-19

Introduction: You may remember in the early 1960s there was a television program on called, "The Big Picture." It was a ½ hour publicity and documentary show about all the things being done around the world by the U.S. Army. I grew up with that phrase, "The Big Picture." My Dad often tried to impress me with the need to look at "the big picture," that is, to view a situation in the context of the larger turn of events. "The Big Picture" is a World War II term, and my Dad used the term just this week when I was talking to him on the phone about a book I am reading. I am reading a detailed history of the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium in 1944, which my father was a part of. And he said to me, as I was in the midst of being engrossed in the details of that two week battle, "You must remember, it was only an isolated event. Its only part of "the big picture."

This morning we are going to look at "the big picture" from a spiritual standpoint. This section in Hebrews 11 reviews the life of the first Hebrew, Abraham. And the idea in the section is to GET US TO LOOK AT THE BIG PICTURE. We can get bogged down with many hindrances in the Christian life. We can lose our perspective. We can grow depressed over things which really make little difference in the long run. I once heard of a good Bible-teaching church which underwent a tragic split over a controversy between two members about which one would play the piano at the morning service when more traditional music was used, and which one would play for the evening service, where more contemporary music was used. And this was allowed to split the Body right down the middle over a period of time! As well, many Christians have been sidetracked in their Christian experience by some petty difference with another believer. Or sometimes SIGNIFICANT PROBLEMS arise, where a person's marriage falls apart, or a child is lost, or a career is ruined...and these major problems shake apart a person's commitment to Christ, where they come to say, "My faith wasn't real after all."

We need to learn to view our lives, and to RUN our lives, in light of the BIG PICTURE. So, what IS the big picture?

Hebrews 11:8-10: Now if I were to ask you who the most often mentioned people in the New Testament are, you would probably answer "Jesus Christ," of course, and then you would mention Paul and Peter and John the Baptist. But how many people think of ABRAHAM as an important New Testament name? In fact, Abraham is one of the most significant men in ALL Western history. He is the founder of Judaism. Three times in the Scripture he is called, "the friend of God." He is great in Mohammedism--his name is mentioned 188 times in the Koran. And as I have stated, his name is the fourth most often mentioned in the New Testament. But so what? Why should we know anything about him, other than to have that answer ready for when we play "Bible Trivia?"

The answer is because Abraham lived his life in light of the "big picture." This involved following an invisible person! God called him (Genesis 12:1-4) and he immediately obeyed God's instructions, though God gave him no map, no itinerary and no schedule. He just promised him that HE, God, would go with him.

Now Abraham is not so significant because he had the call of God on him, but because of what the call of God revealed about his heart!

The call of God doesn't MAKE character, it REVEALS character (SLJohnson).

Its like the guy who was engaged to a girl and he took her to a movie one night, and during the film, a prankster yelled out in the theatre, "Fire!" Well the guy freaked out, and made a bee-line for the door and was halfway down the block, when he realised there was no fire, and he had left his fiancé sitting in her seat. He went back to the theatre, sat down next to the girl, who was calmly watching the film, and sort of sank into the seat. And it was their last date. The cry of "fire" didn't MAKE him a coward--it REVEALED it! (SLJ)

The character that Abraham's call from God revealed, was that he was a man willing to trust God with his life--he was a man of great reliance that what God said was true--he was a man controlled by the future--he was a man of faith. His faith wasn't evidenced because on his driver's license it SAID, "Abraham, Man of Faith." His faith was evidenced, because he OBEYED GOD! As soon as he understood what God was saying, he started packing. It was instant obedience. He didn't know WHERE God would lead him, but He knew THAT God was leading him. Our guide for knowing God's will is the Bible. I know you may grow weary of my asking you this question...but it reveals TO YOU, YOUR HEART: Are you willing to obey God in your life? Are you willing to bring your life into keeping with whatever the Bible asks of you? Are we a people of the Book? Is our character that of instant obedience? Or are we a people who merely dabble in Christian things?

God called Abraham to a land inhabited by another people. He promised to give him the land, to his descendents that is. And Abraham lived the rest of his life in light of God's promise. AND, he involved his family in the promise. He didn't take a passive attitude, and say, "well, Isaac and Jacob, this is MY religion, but you go out and find your own." God's promises were available to Abraham's son and grandson as well, and they AS WELL trusted in it.

Abraham HAD such a dynamic faith, because he was convinced there was a "BIG PICTURE." He was living in tents, but he expected God to call him onto His city.

Now what is the longest you have ever lived in a tent? A night? 2 nights? A week? 2 weeks? A year? How would you like to move out and live the rest of your life in a tent? Even in Abraham's day, tents were generally considered temporary dwellings! And if there is one thing that a tent DOES NOT HAVE, its foundations!

What would a city designed, drafted up, speced out and BUILT by God look like? Now the language here is figurative, given to describe in earthly terms a heavenly reality--but it testifies to the fact that God will have His people WITH HIM!

Now God has called US to make a pilgrimmage too. When a person comes to Jesus Christ, God demands of him a pilgrimmage from his old pattern of living to a new kind of life, just as Abraham's pilgrimmage led him AWAY from paganism and unbelief, and toward a new land with new values and goals!

The force that makes us want to hold onto the old life is something called "worldliness." Worldliness may be an act, but primarily, it is an ATTITUDE. It is WANTING to do things that are sinful, or selfish or worthless, whether we actually do them or not! It is inwardly longing to live like the rest of the world. It is not as much what we do, as what we want to do. Sometimes we avoid certain sins only because we are afraid of the consequences. Other times we might succeed in avoiding some sin because of what people might think. Other times it may be out of a self-righteous satisfaction in resisting ("I don't smoke, cuss or chew--and I don;t go with the girls who do!")--ALL OF THESE CAN OCCUR WHILE STILL HAVING A STRONG DESIRE FOR SIN!

Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (I Jn.2:15)

Abraham pictures separation, being set apart for God. Being set apart from worldliness. As we grow in Christ our desire for the things of the world diminishes. Material possessions, social position, professional standing, all become slowly not quite important as they once were. We need to be a people committed to excellence in what we do, because what we do should be done as to the Lord...But it is when we become consumed by things below, that we live and die with every little thing that goes wrong or seems to last too long, or is not successful, or goes unappreciated. We need to tap into the "big picture."

Hebrews 11:11,12: The Genesis account gives little indication that Sarah showed much faith in God. But she was with Abraham, and stayed with him his whole life, and unlike Job's wife, did not undercut her husband's faith. The text in these verses would probably be better translated, "Sarah, in association with Abraham, received ability to lay down seed..." because of the Greek pronoun, "autē," meaning, and its being in the dative case.

Can you imagine all those years when a traveller would pass by Abraham's house, and say, "What's your name?" And he would say, "Exalted Father," since that's what Abram meant. And they would say, "How many children do you have?" And he would say, "None." And then he changed his name one day, because God changed it for him, and he would tell his people, (for he had many in his employ), "I would like you to call me 'Father of a multitude' from now on." And I would have loved to be in the lunch room and listen to his employees-- "Well, Abram has finally flipped out..." What ridicule there must have been for this old man. But he stuck by God's promise...He did not stray from believing that God would keep his covenant with him.

Are we a church which relays on the covenant-keeping God. During our sharing times, how often do we thank the Lord PUBLICLY for that fact that He has kept His promises. How convinced are we of this?

Hebrews 11:13-16: I hope that we are growing into being happy Christians. Are you happy? If we tie into the "big picture" and can look beyond just what you are dealing with today, you will be able to see, as the patriarchs did, that God is not ashamed to be called your God, and He has prepared a city for you. God is delighted by our trusting Him. He wants to be sought out as Savior and Lord. He wants to be depended on for your eternal destiny. BUT I am convinced He wants to be brought

into the detailed operations of your life. Have you ever thought about asking the Lord to give you direction about where to take a vacation this year? Have you ever thought to ask the Lord to guide you as you look for another car? Have you ever asked the Lord to provide you with a parking place in a crowded part of town? Now I am not saying that we should make demands on God, or ask out of selfish motives...But God desires to be treated as if He is Lord of your whole life! We should be living here and now, as if we were citizens of another country, with our hopes and loyalties and motivations tied up in the progress of THAT nation. Heavenly values MAY coincide with American values, but they may not. Heavenly values MAY coincide with New Bedford or Dartmouth values, but they might not. Heavenly values MAY coincide with your ethnic values, or your professional values...but they might not! Where is your loyalty placed? Are we distracted by the detail problems? Do we lose sight of the forest for all the individual trees? Do we forget what our mission and goals should be, because we happen to have different personalities in our church, or because someone in your family is struggling with some problem. The Lord has never promised that we would not have problems in going from Ur to Canaan.

Folks, I want us to be a people who have our priorities straight. The most important thing in your life should be the care and nurture of your own soul. That means you are under the sound of the Word of God regularly and you are developing your own Quiet Time with the Lord. Second is the care and love of your family. Your job should not come before the Lord or your family. Next is your job, because without it, men, you can't provide for your family. Next is your service in the Body of Christ. You need to have SOME ministry in the Body. Sometimes Christians content themselves merely to dabble in Christian activity. There needs to be involvement with the people of God, and it should be a high priority. After that comes duty to extended family members, community involvement, social responsibility and recreation activities. Will you ask the Lord to show you how to "prioritize" your life? Are you willing for Him to be Lord of your life? He IS the Lord--there is nothing tentative about that--but will you recognize it by giving Him obedience?

Hebrews 11:17-19: Now the last thing about Abraham, is that he was willing to render to God the most precious thing in his life. To some this is their children. To some it is their spouse. To some it is their property. To some it is something less tangible, like their self-respect or their community standing.

There is a principle underlying these verses. It is that Abraham was convinced that God would always have his best interests at heart. Even if it cost him his son, in whom, seemingly, God's own promise rested. Job said, "Though He slay me, yet will I praise Him."

Note also that Abraham's faith was rational. "He considered that God was able..." As we face crises, and the genuine character of our faith is revealed, do we consider that God is able? Or do we live on the precipice of disaster--are we people who FEEL like the bottom might fall out of our lives at any moment? Are we confident or are we confused? Do we live in desparation? Or do we live as descendents of Abraham?

When I lived in Virginia, there was a businessman named Artie Levin. Artie Levin owned and operated a chain of health spas, and Mr. Levin was Jewish. My pastor used to jog with Artie Levin often, and Dr. Arnold and Artie Levin would have long conversations about the Jewish faith, and what made a person Jewish. I often heard Dr. Arnold say, "I am more Jewish than Artie Levin." He said that because of the truth of these verses, and because of verses like Galatians 3:29,

. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Dear ones, are we living lives ruled by faith. Are we following the invisible God in obedience? Are we a people controlled by the future?

We may never have a beautiful building. We may never all drive late model BMWs and Cadillacs. We may never be the largest church in southern New England. But let's keep our eyes focused on the "city which has foundations. Let's not be sidetracked by week to week squabbles. Let's not be distracted by even life's BIGGEST problems when they come. Let's be a people who "consider that God is able."

If you are with us this morning and you are wondering what all this "big picture" talk is about...and you are not sure that Jesus Christ IS your personal Savior and Lord, you can be sure. You can know all the promises of Scripture and be in reality a child of Abraham, just by faith. Will you trust Him?

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
The Strength of Confidence in Faith
Hebrews 11:20-22

Introduction: John Wayne, at age 71, sometimes had difficult moments watching his old movies. "It's kind of irritating to see I was a good-looking 40 year-old and suddenly I look over and see this 71 year-old... I'm not squawking...I just want to be around for a long time."

Death is a topic that is approached from many different angles. Some people are fascinated by it (I think this is one reason why we see so much of it in the media)...some people are fascinated by the eluding of it...some people think about it in strictly clinical terms: "The Physiology of Dying"...and some people refuse to think about it at all, because it is too terrifying.

In fact, Seneca the pagan philosopher said, "Only Christians and idiots are not afraid to die."

Woody Allen said, "It's not that I'm afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens."

And finally, we know many people probably, who resign themselves to the futility of dying without hope and adopt the philosophy of "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die..."

Dr. David Banner, (the Incredible Hulk) was talking to a cancer victim in the comics, and told this story. "A man being chased by a tiger came to a cliff. In desperation he jumped and grabbed a solitary limb. Below him, a second tiger roared, waiting for his fall. Above him, the first tiger lashed out, barely missing its prey. As the branch suddenly began to pull away from the cliff, the helpless man noticed on the cliff in a patch of soil a single bright red strawberry on a lonely plant. He reached out, grabbed the fruit, and ate it. And oh, it tasted SO GOOD!"

But Christians DO have a unique approach to death, generally. And I wish to encourage you about that matter this morning. The three patriarchs mentioned in our passage this morning illustrate the power of faith in facing death. Christians do not have to despair about their own deaths. We do not have to become cynical in life, because deep down we are nurturing a great fear of death. Isaac, Jacob and Joseph were real men, with real struggles. Their lives are recorded in the Book of Genesis, and you do not have to read too far in the accounts of their lives to discover that they were just like you and I, with inconsistencies, selfishness, insecurities and sometimes real family struggles. But the author to the Hebrews mentions them in the gallery of heroes of the faith, as points of ENCOURAGEMENT TO BELIEVERS, to press on in the faith, and not to be discouraged by death, or by NOT seeing all the promises of God consummated in their own day...

The Confidence of Isaac (Heb.11:20)

Even though there had been no small strife in the family of Isaac, when he died (Genesis 35:29), his sons Esau and Jacob buried him together. He had blessed them both, with different blessings, but both received inheritance and honor nonetheless. In the end, he was God's man, and had learned that as in life God could be trusted, so He could be trusted in death.

The Scripture does not cover up the blemishes on the lives of the believers that it records for us. Isaac's family did have mistrust within it. They had sibling rivalries, partiality, favoritism, deceit and improper role-play between husband and wife. But BY THE GRACE OF GOD, they hung in there as God's people until the end drew near for Isaac. They lived with their family problems, and never let those problems bring them so low that they said, "This following Yahweh stuff is baloney after all." Isaac's wife knew that the promises of God about the future of Abraham's people would pass through Jacob, not Esau. And I cannot imagine that Isaac did NOT know it. And because of all the mistrust and scheming that went on, there was sorrow and trouble in that family. BUT, at the end of his days, Isaac was still trusting the Lord.

I am always encouraged by being around an old Christian, who while 75, 80 or 90, and struggling with old age, STILL LOVES THE LORD JESUS.

I heard a preacher once say that he sleeps under an electric blanket during winter. On cold mornings he turns it off a while before he intends to get up, to make it easier to LEAVE that cozy bed. Perhaps God lets us deteriorate physically, in our late years, so that we will be more willing to leave our ailing bodies for the unexplored future He sets before us.

The Confidence of Jacob (Heb.11:21)

Jacob's life was like his father's in many ways--it was up and down spiritually. Sometimes he walked by faith and sometimes he stumbled by sight (MacArthur).

Unlike his father, Jacob did not try to circumvent God's plan for his heirs. Joseph, though younger than all of his brothers except Benjamin, was the chosen son to bless, just as Jacob himself, though younger, was chosen above Esau. In fact, Joseph received a double blessing, in that his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were both blessed; although again the younger son, Ephraim, received the greater blessing (48:19). As he was dying, Jacob blessed his son Joseph through his two grandsons.

"Then Israel (Jacob's new name) said to Joseph, 'Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers. And I will give you one portion more than your brothers' " (48:21,22)

In fact in Hebrews 11, the rest of Joseph's brothers aren't even mentioned. Once again what was never possessed (the Promised Land), was passed on in faith, and Jacob died as a man of faith.

Dear ones, the greatest thing we can do for our children, is to pass on to them the promises of God. It is YOUR responsibility to do this. It is not Dartmouth Bible Church's responsibility or any other church's responsibility to teach your children about Christ. It is YOUR CALLING, if you are a parent, to show the life of Christ to your children.

So often, second generation Christians, children of Christians who are saved as adults, just have no fire in their Christian lives. Somehow they never gain the sense of vision, the passion to know Christ, the desire to know God well and to love Him. There is often little private prayer life and no zeal to tell others about the Savior in second generation Christians. They may know alot of Bible facts, and maybe even some Bible doctrine. But so often parents fail to communicate to their kids

that they themselves LOVE JESUS...that Jesus just doesn't simply exist, but that He is full of life, and worth devoting every energy to get to know. I have been with parents, especially in working with youth full time for over three years, that are quick to blame society, or rock and roll or drugs or sexual permissiveness in schools or ANYTHING ELSE, other than their own lukewarmness in the faith, when their kids look at their faith, and say, "Ennhh..."

If I never own a better car, and never grow anymore professionally, and never have any more children, or never live in Padanaram, and never excel in much else, Lord, let me model for my kids a fervent love for you--let them see that while I have problems, I do love you--let them, when they reach those crises in their teen years, let them flee in their hearts to you. May I have children who are Christians, who want to be like Jesus Christ, who want to know Him and the power of His resurrection in every area of their lives!

The Confidence of Joseph (Heb.11:22)

Joseph was a man of commerce, and we can see this even at the end of his life (about which the Scripture records much). He had spent all of his adult life in Egypt. Though a fourth-generation heir of the promise, he could not even claimed to have sojourned in the Promised Land, much less to have inherited it. It had been some 200 years since God had made the initial covenant with Abraham. Jacob had been carried back to Canaan after he died, and Joseph would be satisfied if only his bones could be buried there. If he could not inherit the land, and least the land could "inherit" him. It was not until the exodus (over 400 years later) that Joseph's bones were actually taken to Canaan, but his heart and his hope had always been there. HE HAD TO LOOK AHEAD TO SEE THE PROMISE! He had to face death with the confidence that, "to live is Christ, to die is gain" (Phil.1:21).

Corrie Ten Boom was a girl when her first realization of death came after a visit to the home of a neighbor who had died. It impressed her that someday her parents would die. Corrie's father comforted her. "Corrie, when you and I go to Amsterdam, when do I give you your train ticket?" Corrie answered, "Why, just before we get on the train." "Exactly," responded her father, "and our wise Father in heaven knows when we are going to need things too. Don't run out ahead of Him, Corrie. When the time comes that some of us will have to die, you will look to the Lord, and find the strength in your heart you need--just in time."

Many years ago, the ship known as the Empress of Ireland went down with 130 Salvation Army officers on board, along with many other passengers. Only 21 of those Christian workers' lives were spared--a small number. Of the 109 who drowned, none had on a life preserver! Many of the survivors told how those brave people, seeing THAT THERE WERE NOT ENOUGH life-preservers, took off their own and strapped them on to others, saying, "I know Jesus, so I can die better than you can. Their supreme sacrifice and faithful words set a beautiful example which for many years inspired the Salvation Army to carry on for the Lord. Millions came to see that born-again individuals can face death fearlessly.

With Christ as your Savior you can do the same, just as the patriarchs could! Death for non-Christians is a frightening prospect, but for us it is the passing shadow only!

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
The Role of Faith in Decision Making
Hebrews 11:23-29

Introduction: Life is made up of decisions. Some are big ones and some are of lesser significance, but nevertheless our lives are full of decisions every day. The course and quality of our lives are determined much more by our decisions than by our circumstances. So, it does us well to think about HOW we make decisions as Christians. My suggestion to you this morning is that you can NOTE THE MATURITY of a Christian BY THE DECISIONS he makes. Holiness is making the right decisions...carnality is making the wrong ones.

This morning we are going to look at the man Moses. He is more prominent in the mind of the writer to the Hebrews than any of the afore-mentioned heroes except Abraham, and he led a fascinating life. The Old Testament book which deals with his life the most is the Book of Exodus. And, as the passage in Hebrews tells us, his life is characterized by faith. He had his struggles, though. Like any man he had times of doubt--even when GOD told him he would be used to deliver Israel, he wasn't so sure... But his life is a story of faith that God will provide what is needed, and that His promises are worth holding on to.

In looking at Moses, let's think about how his faith affected the way that he made decisions. Let's dwell on how trusting in the Lord on a daily basis has an impact on whether we decide to do this, or to do that, or not to do anything at all, but to wait...

Verse 23

In this verse Moses' parents are mentioned. Do you know their names? They were Amram and Jochebed, and these two took a great risk in secretly keeping their infant son, despite Pharaoh's cruel command--this is a real evidence of faith in itself. But their faith was still more severely tested when it became impossible for them to conceal him any longer in their home, and they adopted the plan of placing him in a specially prepared basket among the reeds by the bank of the river--apparently they believed that God would in some way protect heir child.

Now all of this required some tough decision making. It shows that Amram and Jochebed were willing to take a great set of risks on behalf of their son. They were confident that God would protect their child, and they DECIDED to entrust little Moses to the Lord. Do we entrust our children to the Lord? There is an element of child rearing of faith. We must first of all depend upon the Lord to save them. We may teach them the Bible. We may have family devotions regularly, and we may even model a good Christian life before them. But ultimately, we must be waiting on the Lord and continually asking Him to save them by His own sovereign grace. SECOND, we must not become over-protective.

One result of overprotecting children may be that young adults are unprepared for the risks that face them when they're on their own. Naiveté is a great danger in today's world. (J. Bayly)

Of course I am not advocating that we make decisions regarding our kids which are foolish, half-baked or dangerous. But sometimes we must make a decision about little Johnny which has a real element of risk--and because of some circumstance, we must make that decision, and entrust the matter to the Lord, prayerfully.

Verse 24-26

Now it must have taken a real step of faith for Moses to turn his back, as an adult, on the prestige of being called Pharaoh's grandson. Notice it is the "being called" that, that he rejected. We are never told he rejected those who had cared for him all those years. But the title of prestige is what he rejected. Craving the symbols of accomplishment are a sign of being a DRIVEN man, not of faith and humble dependence on the Lord. I can remember as an engineer wanting a bigger desk...and wanting my desk next to a window. In the company I was in, desk size was closely monitored. But it was just a prestige symbol. Moses cast all of that off. IN FACT, he CHOSE the hard life of becoming again, a Hebrew, the whole nation of which were slaves. It was an act of faith on his part, and the decision surely cost him much. It must have been very hard to take off the fine clothing of a favored heir, and put on the homespun of a subjected nation of workers. It must have been hard to walk and carry the burdens of others, when you used to ride about in a fine chariot. CAN WE RELATE TO THIS? It may be hard for us. But to suffer reproach for the cause of Christ is not unknown in other areas of the world.

Missionary Ken Ashcroft, who ministers to Eastern European refugees in refugee camps in Rome, Italy, wrote about a Rumanian man he met two months ago. The man said he had come to the Gospel meeting that day, "because of a vow I had made to God. In Rumania I was a school teacher of mathematics. This meant that in the eyes of the state, I was an atheist, since atheism is taught in all the schools there, and therefore I must teach the children that there is no God. This was a very hard thing for me to do, because I DID BELIEVE that there is a God. But I needed the job and the money, in order to maintain my family, so I continued to hide my convictions. Close to our home, a Baptist family had been our neighbors for a long time. The husband had died some time ago and now the widow had died and I helped at the burial of this Baptist friend. However, I was seen by someone who knew me and the next day I was taken by the Police and interrogated, severely beaten and threatened that if I had contact anymore with Baptist groups then I would lose my job. I was very unhappy at my teaching post after this, and I knew that it would be impossible to carry on teaching children that there is no God. So I decided to flee the country. I fled across the high mountains, and at times almost fell into the ravines below. Many times I cried unto God in prayer. One night on top of a mountain, I went into a little wooden shack and there on my knees, I vowed that if I arrived in the free West I would attend a place of worship and honor Him...and now I am thrilled to be able to attend church here and to listen to the preaching of God's Word.

What pleasures there are in sin, are passing only, sometimes very fleeting. But Oh how people decide after those, rather than after what God has promised in the future. It is interesting that the writer to the Hebrews says Moses chose the reproaches of Messiah. I take this to say, therefore that Moses clearly KNEW about Messiah, though at this point there was no Scripture. God's promises do not fail, even when there is no printed page!

As we make decisions for holiness, it is to the Lord's honor and to our own good. It may take a step of faith for you to obey God. But make that decision! Only you know what goes on in your private world. Are

you making decisions which honor the Lord? As you trust the Lord, he will honor you in the decisions you make which are in accordance with his Word. The rewards in the future from the hand of the Lord are not to be taken lightly, and they are real!

Verses 27-29

Moses was under a lot of pressure as he left Egypt. He was not afraid of Pharaoh. But he trusted that God had something better for him. The prospects of desert living could not have been very appealing! There were organizational pressures, psychological pressures, logistical pressures...and on and on. But the greatest pressure was fear. It is often a tool of the devil. We are afraid of being thought different, of losing our job, reputation or popularity. We are afraid of criticism, often from people we do not even respect. Even though Moses was surely tempted to fear, he did not. THERE WAS A BETTER WAY! He chose, and rationally decided to trust the Lord with his future. Fear HAD worked on Abraham successfully on a couple of occasions that we know about. Aaron became afraid of the people while Moses was on Mt. Sinai, and yielded to their insistence on making a golden calf. Ten of the twelve spies sent into Canaan gave a negative and exaggerated report about the dangers of the inhabitants, and therefore the Israelites became afraid. Gideon's army was afraid and so 22,000 were discharged. The disciples were afraid of the storm at sea and were rebuked by Jesus for their lack of faith. Peter was afraid of criticism and arrest, and he denied Jesus three times.

Fear is a great pressure and all of us are tempted at times to bend when standing for the Lord requires us to say or do something that is unpopular or dangerous. BUT TRUE FAITH DOES NOT FOLD UNDER THE WORLD'S PRESSURE! Moses CHOSE to focus his sights on God, and on His working. You face that decision too.

It was by faith that Moses decided to accept God's provision for his own salvation (verse 28). This is the Gospel. It may seem ludicrous at first to think that if I depend on the blood atonement of another man, performed two millennia ago, I can go to heaven when I die. But by faith I have trusted in that fact. Moses did too.

It also must have been terrifying to walk on the Red Sea's bottom, with the water raging all around, but at that point at least the nation trusted in the might of God, and in His care. The Egyptians didn't, and all took a nice long bath.

One point that is important in making decisions as a Christian: each of these heroes of the faith had a word from God to act on. They did not make a step of faith based on something about God which they imagined. They had a word from God to go on.

Many times today I hear Christians undertaking radical endeavors. Sometimes they are based on the Bible. Sometimes, I cannot see how they are based on anything BUT imagination, or a Bible verse taken out of context. But there is much Scripture truth which should radically affect our lives and the decisions we make: how we spend our time; how we spend our money; how we chose a career; or a job change; or how we raise our kids, or relate to some other family member. Are we willing to take godly risks, for the purpose of obeying God's Word?

Let's ask the Lord how we can better obey Him, and leave the outworkings to Him. Let's USE OUR FAITH in the way that we make the decisions we face: both the little ones, and the big ones!

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
The Faith of the Rest
Hebrews 11:30-40

Introduction: One of our major goals in Dartmouth Bible Church is to bring each individual along in his or her faith, so that each is mature in the Lord and can weather troubles with the strength of the Lord. It is NOT unheard of for a person to make a profession of faith, then to seemingly grow some, but at some future point to encounter a severe trial, temptation or doubt, and then to jettison his faith, and either to go "on the shelf," or at the worst, to prove he never was saved to begin with.

The Book of Hebrews was written to encourage a struggling community of believers NOT to let that happen. There can be no MORE relevant message for us--we have seen this happen here even in the midst of expounding this book, and we need to pay close attention to the words before us.

Hebrews 11 is the gallery of men and two women who were known to have NOT thrown in the towel. They faced hardship for their faith, but they kept depending on the Lord to take them THROUGH the difficulties. Today is our seventh and final message in this chapter, and we will look at the "rest" of the people mentioned by the writer to the Hebrew Christians.

Hebrews 11:30,31 These two verses are connected because they deal with the same event. They illustrate the faith of the people of Israel to deliver them from their enemy, and the faith of "one of the enemy," who sought out the Lord's grace, in spite of her alien status.

Now the story of Jericho is fascinating. It is the account of a military campaign, where there was an overwhelming victor, but where the victory was won without any combat.

During excavations at the ancient site of Jericho from 1930 to 1936, archaeologist Garstang found something so startling that a statement of what was found was prepared and signed by himself and two other members of the team. Garstang said, "As to the main fact, there remains no doubt: the walls fell outwards so completely, that the attackers would be able to clamber up and over the ruins into the city." Why so unusual? Because the walls of cities do not fall outwards, they fall inwards. And yet in Joshua 6:20 we read, "The wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city every man straight ahead, and they took the city." The walls were made to fall outward! (Josh McDowell, Evidence..., p.69)

It is exciting what faith can accomplish! Surely there must have been hesitation in the minds of some. But as the people marched around Jericho for seven days, according to what the Lord prescribed, the Lord's promised result occurred. **WHEN WE DO AS GOD SAYS, WE CAN EXPECT THE PROMISED RESULT.**

Now I am not a pacifist, because I believe we need to be responsible with the freedom the Lord has given us. But I have wondered what it would be like, if we were a truly Christian nation, to as a nation simply depend upon the Lord to protect us...If we were a nation given over to trusting our national security to the sovereign God of the Bible, and we could take the \$300 Billion defense budget and do something wise with it, what uses might we find for \$300 billion?

It was by faith that Israel saw the promises of God begin to unfold before them.

Rahab is a very interesting figure too. She is one of only two women mentioned in this chapter, and the only one who operates independent of a husband--we can understand why...she was a prostitute before her conversion, and yet marvelously experienced God's grace as those around her were destroyed. She would seem an unlikely candidate for the hall of fame here in Hebrews 11 for several reasons beyond her profession: She was a Gentile, and a Canaanite at that. She was, in fact, an Amorite, a race that God had long before marked for destruction (Gen.15:16). Yet that is how God's grace works! His mercy is open TO ALL who will receive it, and His grace has always been wider than Israel, even in Old Testament times. Rahab had no more light than any other inhabitant of Jericho; yet she believed. But the rest were MORE THAN SIMPLY UNBELIEVING. Verse 31 describes them as "disobedient." Unbelief is ultimately classed as a sin of disobedience. No man or woman who reject God's way of salvation can ever claim to be without excuse. But to those who approach God on HIS TERMS, whatever their background, can receive His forgiveness and mercy, as did Rahab. In fact, her life really becomes quite a trophy of God's grace, as she becomes the great-grandmother of King David, and is not left out of the geneology of Jesus Christ Himself as given by Matthew!

Hebrews 11:32-38 Verse 32 opens up the final section of this great chapter--There are many other people in the Old Testament that we should study about, whose lives offer us amazing stories of dependence on the Lord--All people who lived lives of normalcy just like us! None of them are praise because they held certain offices: prophets, a judge, a king--they are commended for what they accomplished by faith!

Gideon: Gideon was a Judge and a military leader, and mustered an army of 32,000 soldiers to fight the Midianites and the Amalekites. But due to fear, God whittled the army down to 300 troops, and to keep Israel from thinking the coming victory was by her own power. Only a fool would have attempted such a courageous approach to battle apart from God's direction and power. But, from the perspective of faith, only a fool would NOT attempt such a thing when he HAS God's direction and power!

Barak: Barak is unknown in Scripture outside the brief account in Judges 4 and 5, and here in Hebrews 12:32. Barak believed God's promise of victory, and apparently was not concerned that a woman would get the credit for slaying the enemy's commander, Sisera. You remember Sisera--he had a tent peg driven through his temples by Jael the wife of Heber (Lesson: Men--don't visit another man's wife when her husband isn't home!).

Samson is usually NOT remembered for his faith but for his physical strength and personal gullibility. "The Incredible Hulk" was in many ways immature and self-centered, and unable to cope with the miraculous power that God had given him. YET HE WAS A MAN OF FAITH. Although he struggled often with various temptations, even in his sad death, he still trusted the Lord. We are inclined to judge Samson by his weaknesses, but GOD commends him for his faith.

Jephthah preceded Samson as a Judge in Israel, and he was responsible to subdue the Ammonites, one of Israel's many enemies. Despite his foolish vow (Judges 11:30,31), Jephthah's trust was in the Lord, and his power was from the Lord. Even people of faith make mistakes!

David stands out as one of the great men of the Old Testament because his faith began in early life, and continued through all his life. As you read the accounts of his life, excepting those periods when he struggled (the Bible never seeks to cover up!), you see that usually it never occurred to David NOT to trust the Lord. Like the other heroes of the faith, but God called him, "a man after my heart, who will do all my will," (Acts 13:22).

Samuel and the prophets are mentioned as they were constantly fighting for the Lord against idolatry and immorality. It was usually not easy for these men, and even though they were not soldiers, they had many victories in the Lord, because they believed Him--their faith was courageous, and they learned to WAIT on the Lord.

Verses 33 through 38 mention numerous acts of faith accomplished by believers in history: NOT ALL OF THEM ASKED FOR BY THESE PEOPLE. They did not doubt that their God was able to turn events in a supernatural way. And the text does not even mention by name men like Daniel, Jeremiah, Elijah, Hezekiah, etc.

History since the time of Christ also displays for us the accomplishments of men willing to trust the Lord for great things. Athanasius, Polycarp, Luther, Calvin, the Anabaptists...

Do you know the name Squanto? Squanto was an Indian who befriended the English settlers at Plymouth during the first two years of the colony. He had been to England in previous years (an amazing story in itself), and had come to embrace the Pilgrims' faith. He was on a foraging party on the Cape when he came down with disease, and died there. He is buried somewhere in the Barnstable-Yarmouth area. His faith cost him much in the eyes of his own countrymen. And he died quite probably through contracting an Englishman's sickness for which he had no immunity. But as he died, he expressed a hope that the Englishman's God would accept him because he had embraced Christ in his heart.

Verses 39, 40 These verses testify again that true faith has the courage to count on salvation. These faithful saints had to live in hope. They knew very little about the nature, or the times or the means of God's salvation. BUT THEY KNEW it was real!

The ultimate promise was of a redeemer, the Messiah.

"As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ was indicating, as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow" (I Peter 1:10,11).

All of these, from Enoch through the prophets, had courageous faith, which counts, without reservation, on final salvation. Many of them never received the land. Sometimes they had earthly victory; sometimes they did not. Sometimes their faith saved them from death; sometimes it BROUGHT them death. NO MATTER. They knew that God "had provided something better."

Not until the time of Christianity, could their salvation be completed. Until Jesus' atoning work on the cross was accomplished, no salvation was complete, no matter how great the faith a believer had. THEIR SALVATION WAS BASED ON WHAT CHRIST WOULD DO--ours is based on what He has done!

How much LESS faith we often have, in spite of our much greater light!

"Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (John 20:29).

So what should our goals be having looked at this long chapter, which is given to us to ILLUSTRATE the persevering Christian?

1. To DETERMINE to depend on the Lord, no matter what trials you encounter. This includes external trials which come UPON you, and internal trials which come from within you.
2. To make it a habit to review the lives of past believers; to become acquainted with their struggles and victories, and to see that God was and IS always faithful to those who love Him. A little history can be tremendously rewarding and encouraging!
3. To DECIDE to foster the strength of our faith by Bible reading and meditating, consistent prayer lives and personal ministry, WHEN WE LIVE THROUGH RELATIVELY TROUBLE FREE YEARS.
4. To REALIZE that though trials come in varying degrees of difficulty, and are sometimes quite gruesome, God is always bigger than the difficulty, and can and will see you through it!

If you have not yet come to the place in your life, where you have exercised a personal dependence on Christ--where you have never yet asked Him in faith to save you, you can this morning. We do not generally give altar calls at Dartmouth Bible Church--but the invitation to receive Christ is ALWAYS before you. You do not have to wait. It is DANGEROUS to wait. Do you know Christ? Is He yours in the privacy of your own heart? Ask Him to come into your life, and forgive you of your sins. He will, and you will be numbered among the saints, without cost--freely by His grace!

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
Looking Unto Jesus
Hebrews 12:1-3

Introduction: We have come a long way in this Letter to the Hebrew Christians. We have expounded so far eleven chapters and 249 verses. We have two chapters to go and 54 verses (17.8% of the book!) The THEME of the book, is to press on. Have you been a Christian for two months? Press on in the faith. Have you been following Jesus for a year now? Press on in the faith. Have you been living the Christian life for five years? Press on in the faith. Have you professed Christ for forty years now? Don't turn back. Press on in the faith. Keep growing. Keep trusting in your great high priest. I cannot help but wonder if you are hearing these words in Hebrews...in the months we have been in this book, we have lost several people whose faith has been shipwrecked. We have also won a number to Christ, for which I am very thankful.

It is, from my perspective, easy to begin in the faith. It takes no work and no toil to become a Christian. Salvation is the free gift of God. Becoming a Christian just involves surrendering one's pride to the Lord Jesus Christ, and receiving forgiveness. But having begun, the trick is to finish! And that's what this book is about! Are you going to finish your life following Jesus? No matter what troubles you face in the coming years, will you still be a disciple of Jesus Christ? I hope, pray and trust that you will.

Hebrews 12:1 The New Testament uses many figures to describe the Christian life. In 2 Tim.2:3 and Ephesians 6:11 the Christian life is compared to warfare. Also in Ephesians 6 the Christian life is compared to a wrestling match, and in I Cor.9:26 to a prize fight. In Romans 1 and in Galatians 6 it is likened to slavery. In 2 Tim.2:6, Paul compares it to a farming operation. In many places in Scripture the relationship between the Lord and His own is drawn out as the relationship between a father and His child. And also, and most beautifully, the relationship between a believer and the Lord is likened to a marriage. We are the bride and Jesus Christ is the groom! In the passage before us, the Christian life is compared to a race.

The new birth gets us to the starting line, but that is not the end of the race! How silly it would seem for an olympic runner to go through all the trials leading up to the olympic competition in his event, and then to prance up to the starting line thinking he had already won. It is true that those who are truly saved WILL persevere and finish the race. But there are some who will not persevere, even though they make an initial profession of faith in Christ, and will sadly show that they themselves were deceived about the condition of their hearts. Church History has many examples.

Chapter 12 looks back to chapter 11 and the long list of believers who persevered, many under great temptation to throw in the towel. We are surrounded, as it were, by the testimony of many normal people who have hung in there--who have felt the same doubts, the same temptations, the same enticements from the world as you and I have.

Some commentators feel that this first verse is a picture of a stadium. All these heroes of the faith stand there, having persevered under their trials, and now WE are in the arena! THEY found God faithful. Will we?

You are in the event now, in 1985. The things that God did in Enoch's life He is able to do today! The things that He did in Gideon's day He is able to perform just as well here in 1985. God is the god of today! (13:8) Therefore we should be stirred to persevere and to press on. Are you determined to press on in the Lord, or are you considering the possibility of pulling up in the race, and falling down?

Now there are several mandates given to us about how to run this race:

1. Keep the weight down. The word encumbrance ("ogkon") can also be translated weight. A runner doesn't weigh 350 pounds. He keeps the excess encumbrances to a minimum. Notice it isn't necessarily talking about sins, per se. There are things we do which are not in themselves sin, but which impede our growth in Christ:

- a. Television. How much time do we spend in front of the tube? How much time, comparatively, do we spend IN God's Word? (read poem, "The Bible and the T.V. Guide").
- b. Smoking.
- c. Alcohol.
- d. Excess calorie intake.
- e. Gardening.
- f. Golf.
- g. Association with Christians only.

2. Keep the limbs free. We can become entangled by sin, too. I don't know how many Christian lives I've seen sidetracked by some sin which the person or family nurtured. The image here is that a runner dresses for his competition. Did you see the film "Chariots of Fire"? Did those baggy running clothes look funny to you? (They don't "look" like athletes--they "look" more like someone who ran out of the house in the morning to pick up the paper and then ran back in! -S.L. Johnson) But, the runner dresses in such a way as to minimize the entanglements. Christians: we should not run the race of the Christian life as if we were sprinters who come up to the starting line, wearing a big bath robe and combat boots! We need absolute freedom of movement!

By the way, the race is not a dash! It is a marathon. And as marathon runners we need to pace ourselves. It is easy to begin the Christian life. Will we finish it as Jesus' disciples? I am excited to see a new Christian's new-found enthusiasm for the Word, for witnessing and for fellowship. But even more deeply encouraging to me, is to see a person who has been a Christian for several years, STILL READING HIS BIBLE, and still talking about the things of the Lord--whose heart has not grown cold!--who, even though the novelty of the Christian life has worn off (although the newness of life in Christ should NEVER wear off!), is still in love with the Lord Jesus!

The word in verse 1 for race, is the Greek word "agōna" from which we get the word "agony." A race is not a thing of passive luxury, but is demanding, sometimes grueling and agonizing, and requires our utmost in self-discipline, determination and perseverance, (MacArthur). God warned Israel in Amos 6:1,

Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure in the mountain of Samaria.

God's people are not called to lie around on beds of ease. We are to run a race that is strenuous and continuous.

Now I have never been a runner. My legs are too short for me to do any good at it. But I will never forget the agony and the joy of one race I ran as a ninth grader trying to make the freshman football team at a very, very competitive high school. The first cut had been made (about half the guys trying out). Uniforms and equipment were passed out to those who were chosen, which was about fifty guys. The rest of us were severely dejected, and as we walked back to the locker room, an assistant coach announced that they would hold a supplementary competition, as they still had five more uniforms and sets of gear. There were still about fifty guys who wanted to play football. The competition would not be in normal sprints or three on three drills or anything we had been doing. It would be a crab race! And we all lined up for 100 yards of crab running! And I gave it all I had, and I won. No award ever felt so good as that number 76 I put on that afternoon.

The Christian life involves work. It involves determination. It involves discipline and casting aside whatever impedes your absolute freedom of movement. If you are struggling with an aspect of your life, your routine, your relationships and it is keeping you in some way from growing in Christ, cast it off! (But make sure you screen it through the Scriptures: sometimes I have heard people say that their marriage impedes their growth in Christ, so they cast THAT off! (I Cor. 7:12-16).

Hebrews 12:2 Another mandate in running the race, is the manner in which we do it: keeping the eyes forward! We need to fix our eyes on Jesus; to be looking unto Him! Don't look at your fellow Christians, stumbling around. Don't get too enamored with any one great Christian teacher--he will surely disappoint you! But Jesus will never disappoint you!

Notice that Jesus is described as the Author (or, originator) of our faith. You did not originate your Christian faith--God did! He is also the perfecter or finisher of our faith. Paul said to the Philippians,

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus (1:6).

As you depend on the Lord each day and each week, He will do His work in you. He will help you run this race. As you encounter each high hurdle he will give you the strength and wherewithal to deal with it.

The GOAL of the race is the prize. For Jesus Himself, the prize was the joy of accomplishing the salvation of His beloved. He knew what the goal of His race was, and He endured the cross in light of it! What are the goals of your life? Have you thought about it? What is the purpose and what are you shooting for? I would encourage you to sit down this week, and ask yourself, what are my goals? And pray over them to make sure they are pleasing to the Lord and in His will. You must fix your eyes on Jesus and endure whatever comes along. Are you a short-spurt Christian, or are you "in for the distance?"

Hebrews 12:3 Now I know that sometimes we grow weary in the Christian life. We have periods when we are motivated by nothing more than pure duty. Sometimes it seems the Word is dry and our prayer lives sterile. Sometimes we get tired of the same old Christians with their same old problems and habits and idiosyncrasies, don't we? Other times, we grow weary of certain long-term trials: sickness, being married to a non-Christian, disability, poverty, oppression, misunderstanding, waiting on someone to get saved...

When you grow weary, consider Jesus. The word "consider" means to "give deep meditation to." Our sufferings are but a drop in the bucket compared to Christ, and He offers us the same resources to deal with ours as He had available to deal with His, though they were so much greater.

When you grow weary, is it your strategy to pull away from your life (maybe with your spouse) and take stock. Do you deal with weariness by taking a sabbath rest and meditating on the path which Jesus had to take? I think each of you here should make time in your lives to do this periodically, particularly when you grow weary of the Christian life. I would like to hear,

"My wife and I, or my husband and I are going on a little retreat to spend the weekend with the Lord, and to reassess where we are"-to seek Him together, or by yourself or with a close friend if you are single.

Instead though, too often Christians chose to let their weariness grow into discouragement. They do not communicate with their spouses ("Its too much trouble"), they do not communicate with the leaders in the Body of Christ, and they communicate all too infrequently with the Lord, about their true state...This only leads to shipwreck.

When you are weary and on the verge of losing heart, consider Jesus! He understands. He will help you every moment of that day. He will give you wisdom. He endured outright HOSTILITY against His body. He knows how you feel.

Is He your refuge? Have you trusted Him as the refuge and rescuer from trouble and from your own sinfulness? He is always willing and ready to respond to the person who comes to depend on Him. Your pride is no consolation when the Lord Jesus Christ is available to meet your needs! Seek Him, and He will always prove faithful to help you keep pressing on.

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
Divine Discipline
Hebrews 12:4-13

Introduction: One of my earliest childhood memories comes from when I was around six years old. I had gone down to the A&P grocery store with my Mom, and while she was in one part of the store I was cruising around in a small toy section. I had found a smart looking toy six shooter and felt it needed liberating from its useless spot in that aisle, and stuck it in my pocket. When I got home, I was out around the side of the house, playing with the new toy, when around the corner comes my Mom. "Where did you get the pistol," she says. "Er..uh..er....," says I. Moms have a sixth sense it seems for detecting falsehood (at least my Mom does), and she immediately surmised from whence I had obtained the weapon. Up I marched to my room (it was close to the time of my Dad's arrival home from work). When he came home, he (apparently) was briefed on the situation, and I could hear him coming up the stairs. Needless to say I wasn't in the most casual frame of mind. He came into my room asked me if the story was accurate, and then said something, which at the time was terrifying (but now seems cliché-ick): "This is going to hurt me more than it does you." Off came his belt and over his knee I went for (something like) 10 lashes I have never forgotten. But I truly believe that it did hurt him alot, because I shall never forget the tears in his eyes. After quite a while of wailing, I developed a slight cough, and soon my Dad came back upstairs with a glass of water for me. The scene that followed of his explaining to me the discipline was one of the tenderest of my early childhood, and the effect was that I have never stolen anything since, and I harbored not a bit of anger at my Dad for the correction.

Our heavenly Father also corrects us. And as the writer to the Hebrews will point out to us this morning, the reason the Lord disciplines Christians is not out of malice or an arbitrary anger, but because He loves His children. It doesn't matter how sophisticated we are as modern Americans. It is of no consequence how much technology we surround ourselves with or how fancy our vocabulary becomes--as human beings, still possessed of a sin nature, we need correction from God, from time to time. And if we ignore it, the discipline becomes increasingly severe. The writer to the Hebrews is burdened that his readers press on in the faith, and not stagnate. He has told them to keep looking unto Jesus. Jesus Christ endured great hostility, as an example for us to press on! He underwent discipline from the Lord to make a way for us to get to heaven, and to be able to have eternal life. In like fashion the Lord disciplines us to keep us on the track with Him.

The following verses give us a) the FACT of divine discipline (vss.4-6); b) the NEED of divine discipline (vss.7-10); and c) the ENCOURAGEMENT of divine discipline (vss.11-13).

The FACT of Divine Discipline (vss.4-6): I like what one of my favorite commentators on Hebrews says about verse 4,

"Let us be duly thankful for exemption from the trials of bloody persecution" (William Plumer, Commentary...).

But if persecution should come into your life, because of your taking a stand for Christ, you have the assurance that "no temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the

temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it" (I Cor. 10:13).

None of the suffering Hebrew Christians had endured what Jesus had endured. None had yet given his life for the Gospel. On the contrary, some of their suffering was deserved and intended for their spiritual discipline and reproof.

Because of his lust for Bathsheba, and the resulting adultery and murder, God severely punished David. Most other kings of that day did this sort of thing, and worse...But no matter what any culture tolerates, none of God's people HAS A PEROGATIVE TO SIN. In fact, those who are especially blessed and enlightened (as David was) have even less justification for sinning. So God disciplined David, not out of wrath, but out of love for His child.

Its easy to grow sleepy in our Christian lives. Its easy to lull into inattention about what is going on in our spiritual lives, and to be distracted by all the activities of day to day life. Non-Christians are hardly awake at all, but even Christians can forget things we have learned in the past about how God deals with us. The writer reminds us here that the discipline of the Lord is a fact. The Lord Jesus will bring discipline into your life as a matter of course.

And how do we react to divine discipline? If you are not walking with the Lord, and just sort of frumping along in your Christian growth, the Lord will do something to get your attention. He may touch your family in some way--a child may go wayward, or, the health of a family member may fail. Your employment may be touched. Your emotional stability may fail you.

C.S. Lewis likened God's use of adversity to walking a dog. If the dog gets its leash wrapped around a pole and tries to continue running forward, he will only tighten the leash more. Both the dog and the owner are after the same end: forward motion; but the owner must resist the dog by pulling him opposite the direction he wants to go. The master, sharing the same intention but understanding better than the dog where he really wants to go, takes an action precisely opposite to that of the dog's will. It is in this way that God uses discipline.

Verses 5 and 6 include a quote from Proverbs 3:11 and 12. The Book of Proverbs has so much practical wisdom in it. If you are in business in some way, I would encourage you to make a study of Proverbs with a view to extracting its wisdom as relates to the business world. Here, the quote reminds us that as Christians we are members of God's family. And God deals with us as with family. When He disciplines us, even for something serious, He does not put us out of the family. We discipline our own children, not to disown them, but to correct them! By the way, I hope you do discipline your children, and you don't let them get away with wrong, by just saying, "Now No, No, Johnny..."

When the Duke of Windsor was asked what impressed him most in America, he replied, "the way in which American parents obey their children."

A practical offshoot of this passage is that as God deals with us, so we should deal with our kids.

"Do not hold back discipline from the child, although you beat him with the rod He will not die. You shall beat him with the rod and deliver his soul from Sheol" (Prov.23:13,14).

Child abuse is a grievous sin, but child neglect is no less devastating.

The NEED for Divine Discipline (Verses 7-10): When divine discipline comes into our lives it is to spur us on to endure for the Lord, and to bring Him glory.

When chastisement comes into your life, and punishment comes into your life in the sense of discipline from the Lord, do you react by saying, "God, I deserve every bit?" If you do, you give Him glory, because you're saying, "God, I know that because You are holy, You had to do what You had to do." But when you question God's discipline, you are stealing from His glory by impuning His right to punish sin. God is a righteous God and will react to sin. "Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap." MacArthur.

But divine discipline proves our sonship with the Lord. All men are subject to God's punishment, but only His children receive His discipline! This is really the point of this passage--Jesus has brought us into the family of the Lord by His priesthood and His sacrifice. So, now we are subject also to the conditions of BEING IN GOD'S FAMILY. We can expect the discipline characteristic of being the Lord's children.

If you have never detected divine discipline in your life, and you have been a Christian for a while--I think you should ask yourself, "Am I really a Christian?" If adversity comes into your life, stop, and think, "Am I drifting from the Lord in some area of my life?"

We should want to benefit from our Father's discipline as much as possible! A child who knows his father loves him or her, also knows he can expect to "catch it" when he gets out of line. The more we are subject to the "Father of spirits" we have a fuller, more abundant life--less drowsy, and less dulled by the world, and more alive and happy.

Folks, we have great need of discipline from our Lord Jesus! And we should also draw real encouragement from the fact of His discipline of His own...

The ENCOURAGEMENT of Divine Discipline (Verses 11-13): Parents may or may not discipline with reason, direction and fairness. Sometimes we do it right and other times (hopefully few and far between) we discipline arbitrarily. But God ALWAYS disciplines for our good, "that we might share His holiness." Holiness is a word we need to re-introduce into our vocablulary. It is used more often nowadays sarcastically... It means to be set apart and like Christ. And divine discipline does great good for us, when we respond to it properly.

Now nobody likes discipline, divine or otherwise. The effort, the anguish, as with a runner is not a pleasure. But afterwards comes the payoff. Christians should be characterized by a future-mindset: we are working towards a future goal, not just living for today. And how much of your weekly efforts are directed towards eternal matters, and how much

for temporal matters which do NOT really matter?

So, the encouragement is to get strong again. Are you under divine discipline right now? Is the Lord trying to get your attention about some matter in your life? Better to respond now to the gentle proddings of the Holy Spirit, than to require a more severe jostling because of a hardened heart.

Look forward to a better day, and draw strength from the surety of its coming. You must live in the here and now, in 1985. You must fight your battles now, in your family life, on the job, in the Body, in your neighborhoods and in our world. But we can draw great motivation from the assurance that this is not all there is. This life is not an end unto itself, as many secular humanists would tell us. There is a future.

Whatever area of your life is "out of joint" (vs.13), respond to the Lord in that area. Paul said that the Lord told him that "My strength is perfected in weakness." Move on for the Lord. Press on for Him, and remember that discipline is needful from time to time to keep our hearts in love with Jesus Christ and not with this present world.

A boy's boat went out of reach on pond one day, and started floating away. A man on the side started throwing rocks at the boat and the boy became afraid at what might happen. But then he realized that the rocks were going over the boat and making ripples. Finally, the boat was pushed back to the shore and into the boy's hands. Many times when we stray away from God it appears that He is throwing rocks at us. But really He is using the ripples to bring us back to Him.

Are you His child? If you are not yet, you can be. It costs nothing, in fact you cannot purchase that family status. It is a free gift. It is had just by trusting Christ in your heart as YOUR Savior.

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
Falling Short of the Grace of God
Hebrews 12:14-17

Introduction: Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse once said about this book which we have been studying, "The Epistle to the Hebrews is written to the Hebrews to teach the Hebrews that they should no longer be Hebrews." The recipients of this letter were in danger of becoming just Hebrews again. They had each made an initial decision to follow Christ, but after a certain amount of time had passed, they had begun to think that maybe the former life was not so bad after all. I can almost hear them saying, "It was better when we had a nice temple to worship in. It was better when the people I worshipped with were professional type people; respectable in Israel! --instead of all these slaves and lower class people ...and fishermen! It was better when I was a member of an accepted religion, rather than constantly having to defend this Christianity against misunderstanding, scoffing, and charges of being part of a cult. It was better when I was at peace with my family." And so, some of them were contemplating desertion from Jesus Christ. Some of them were contemplating returning to Judaism.

But returning to Judaism for the Hebrews would not have been returning to the true God, because the 1st century Judaism which they grew up with was not the pure Judaism, the Jehovah-worship that the Old Testament taught. It was a religion distorted by several centuries of decay and liberalizing changes in the system.

I have met more than one or two Christians who have contemplated the same thing today. Discouragement, weariness, boredom or even persecution come, and the Christian can begin to whisper to himself, "Maybe that old life wasn't so bad after all--I mean, I wasn't killing people. I wasn't a child-molester. I didn't rob banks...In fact, I'm quite tired of trying to live a holy life. What do I get for my efforts any way?" With these thoughts, we approach the passage of Scripture before us this morning.

Hebrews 12:14

The writer to the Hebrews is a pastor. He longs to see in his people a certain quality of life which pleases the Lord--it is called Christlikeness. Christlikeness does not smell of religion! It testifies of belonging to, and knowing Jesus Christ.

It is characteristic of young people to want to look like their heroes. Fifty years ago the Hitler Youth, the "brown-shirts", all wanted to look like, talk like and act like Adolf Hitler. When I was 16 I wanted to look like Jack Cassidy, the bass-player for the Jefferson Airplane. Today kids want to look like Cyndi Lauper, Sting, David Lee Roth, Bruce Springsteen or Tina Turner. But when you meet someone who wants to look like Jesus Christ...to act like Him, to talk like Him, that is something!

This verse speaks of loving men and loving God. A Christian should be a peace-maker. Primarily we should be pursuing diligently peace and harmony within the church.

So then let us pursue (or, we pursue) the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. (Romans 14:19)

But the text says "pursue peace with all men." As a Christian who is pressing on in the faith, you should be a peacemaker with everyone around you. Christlikeness is being one who seeks to make peace in the family, on the job, in the neighborhood.

In my neighborhood there are some fairly rough, little kids. One of my elderly neighbors asked me why I have anything to do with them. She said, "If you give in at all, they'll tear your place up." But I hope to win some of them to Christ. And while I am not crazy about my daughter being around them, I am trying to befriend them a little, and become an influence of peace among them--to try to curb some of this, "Make my day" spirit among them.

Christlikeness also involves the pursuit of holiness. The text tells us that Christians should be striving after becoming more and more separated (which is what "sanctification" means) from the WAYS of the world, the THINKING of the world and the VALUES of the world. Notice it does not say to pursue ISOLATION from the world.

Now holiness is pusuable really only by born-again Christians.

It is impossible to live the Christian ethic (lifestyle) if you don't know the supernatural character of Christianity. This means that Christian ethics is not just a set of rules. Christian ethics are ethics that are based on a personal relationship to Jesus Christ. And if you have NOT that relationship, it is impossible to live a life that is pleasing to God. (S. Lewis Johnson, tapes on Hebrews)

There are two kinds of holiness, or sanctification: false holiness, and true holiness.

That it is possible, and indeed all too common, for men to pursue a false kind of holiness is plain from Christ's condemnation of the "holiness" of religious hypocrites whose sanctimonious piety is a public display of self-esteem, manifested in the calculated ostentation of their devotional exercises and almsgiving, "that they may be praised by men." True holiness however, is inward, private, between a man and his God, and the good deeds which are its fruit are performed as secretly as possible as an expression of loving concern and with an aversion for all fanfare and publicity (Matt.6:1-18). This kind of holiness which reflects the pure goodness of God, not from love of human applause, springs from single-minded love of God, and is consistent with a longing to see the Lord, who is all-holy, not with a lust to be seen by men. (P.E. Hughes, Comm. on Hebrews)

Verse 14 is not teaching that without working to become a good person, a peacemaker even, a man cannot BECOME a Christian. It IS teaching that in order to see the Lord the unbeliever must have something to look at! There must be a model. There must be some people around who look like Jesus Christ.

If you are a born-again Christian this morning, do you look like Christ? When non-Christians look at you do they see a person who loves his fellow men, and loves God? Can they see Jesus Christ in you IN SPITE of all the confusion around today about what a Christian is?

Verse 15

We in Dartmouth Bible Church should be diligent--rather, VIGILANT in the task of oversight. "See to it" translates the Greek word "episkopeō" which is related to "episkopos", an overseer or elder. We are to have oversight of each other. We are to help each other grow in holiness and Christlikeness. We are also to look out for, oversee, those in our midst, especially those in the church, who may not be believers. We are NOT to judge, but to be sensitive and concerned for opportunities to present them with the claims of Jesus Christ. And since this letter speaks so often to such people in the assembly, this is a crucial point!
(MacArthur)

Tragically, countless thousands of people have spent their entire lives in church, yet have never come to salvation. Making a profession of faith, and even adding to that a knowledge of doctrine does not necessarily equal being saved, WITHOUT having made it YOURS in a personal way.

I have been encouraged by our sensitivity to this many times. At our pool party I was witnessing to one person there who is interested but not yet saved. A brother was sitting next to me, and he invited the person over to he and his wife's home for a meal, right on the spot! This is the kind of opportunity seeking we need more of! When Renée and I lived in Washington D.C. we went to a little Baptist church, and we never seemed to have too many people around to share the Gospel with. This is not the case in Dartmouth Bible Church--we have NO SHORTAGE of folks to share the Gospel with, RIGHT IN OUR OWN MIDST!

It is easy to assume a person is a Christian. We like to cut a person slack don't we--especially if it is a person in your family. And we try hard NOT TO OFFEND people. So we hold back witnessing some times, out of fear of offending someone. "Yet how much greater an offense is it if we fail to present Christ?...If an unbeliever dies before trusting Christ, he will be lost forever, eternally short of God's grace...too late, left out.

Another object of our vigilance, should be the prevention of bitterness. Moses warned the Israelites in the wilderness that there should not be among them,

...a man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turns away from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of those nations; lest there shall be among you a root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood. And it shall be when he hears the words of this curse, that he will boast, saying, "I have peace, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart in order to destroy the watered land with the dry. The Lord shall never be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the Lord and His jealousy will burn against that man, and every curse that is written in this book shall rest upon him, and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven. Deuteronomy 29: 18-20.

The "root of bitterness" refers to a person who is superficially identified with God's people, and who falls back into paganism. But he is no ordinary apostate. Concerning the things of God, he is arrogant and defiant. He thumbs his nose at the Lord. Some apostates simply fall away from the Lord and are never heard from again. But a person in the root of bitterness is a corruptive influence, a contamination in the Body. He stays in or near the fellowship of the Body, spreads wickedness and unrest. He is not content to apostasize by himself.

Steps to Prevent Bitterness:

1. Stay in the Word and in prayer. If you forsake these basic things, you invite bitterness.
2. Deal with anger and grudges that you have. Learn to ventilate your frustrations with some friend or your spouse.
3. Be faithful at the Lord's Table. We need the constant reminder of the blood of Christ, and His death, and our unworthiness.
4. If someone speaks to you in gossip, or in spreading a criticism, REFUSE TO HEAR IT. And rebuke them, gently, but clearly.
5. Don't take yourself too seriously. Cultivate a sense of humor about your own shortcomings, and while taking God and His work VERY seriously, realize that the Lord is not finished with you yet!

Verses 16 and 17

We must be vigilant so that no one turns from the truth. If you see someone in danger of this, deal with them, or come to your elders. We must be vigilant so that no one becomes bitter. Thirdly, we must be vigilant that no one starts following the course of the selfish Esau. Notice that Esau is called not only immoral, but "godless." Even though his father was a believer, his mother was saved and his brother loved the Lord, Esau did not find repentance. He rejected the Lord, and the Lord rejected him. The root of his rejection was in his selfishness. He had regrets about not trusting the Lord, but he did not repent...He went on sinning willfully after having received the knowledge of the truth.

Now this message this morning has not been the milk. It is the meat. It may be perplexing to you that coming short of the grace of God is even a possibility among God's people. It is a possibility in our church, and in any church.

What are our goals at Dartmouth Bible Church? I would tell you this morning that one of our goals is to "present every man (and woman) complete in Jesus Christ." This involves some hard work sometimes. It involves getting involved with each other's lives, beyond just dressing up together on Sunday mornings. It involves a little sacrifice of your time. It involves being patient with one another, and not just splitting when the going gets a little rough.

Christian, if you have been born of God's Spirit and truly trusted in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you need never fear that you will apostasize. Christ is in you and the Holy Spirit will give you the power to push on, even in the midst of problems, pressures and even persecutions. Therefore, Christian, persevere in the faith. Don't consider going back to the leeks and onions of Egypt. Prove that you are truly among God's people.

Are you this morning still without Christ? Trust Christ and you will have your sins forgiven and be granted eternal life. Perhaps you have been raised in a Christian home, instructed from the Bible by parents and the church, but you are not saved. Perhaps you are well acquainted with Christianity and many people think you are a Christian...You are in great danger. You may become so hardened in your sin that one day you will make the fatal decision to throw off all Christianity for the world or false religion. Turn to Christ and be saved, before you pass the point of no return. He will never ignore you. He will always respond to us in love, when we come to Him on His terms.

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
"A Kingdom Which Cannot Be Shaken"
Hebrews 12:18-29

Introduction: If you were to ask ten people on the street the question, "What is God like?", you would probably get ten different answers. Even Christians would probably give you ten different slants on the attributes of God. Some would say God is full of love. Some would say God is holy and just, which He is. Some would say He is wrathful against sin, which He is. Others would say He is kind and forgiving and full of mercy, which, praise the Lord, is true. And finally others would say, "Look at Jesus Christ, if you want to know what God is like." And they would be absolutely correct!

In the section before us, the writer does the same thing. He presents two views of God: one, as the Israelites faced Him before Mt. Sinai; the other, as the Hebrew Christians faced Him in their time, which was the beginning of the same era (or dispensation) in which we live.

And as Bible-believing Christians, it is our job to get to know what our God is like. We are CAPABLE still of many misconceptions about God, and about what He is doing and how He works today. We need to know Him!

"...Knowing God is a matter of personal involvement, in mind, will and feeling. To get to know another person you have to commit yourself to his company and interests and be ready to identify yourself with his concerns. Without this, your relationship with him can only be superficial and flavorless. 'Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good' (Ps. 34:8). To 'taste' is, as we say, to try a mouthful of something, with a view to appreciating its flavor. A dish may look good, but we do not know its real quality till we have tasted it.
(Knowing God, J.I. Packer)

The writer to the Hebrews would have us understand the excellence of knowing the Lord well! And he wants us to know the wonderful newness of knowing Him in this dispensation of grace!

Hebrews 12:18-21 Let's look at Exodus 19:16-22 to see what the writer to the Hebrews is talking about here. And also Deut. 4:11, 12. As God revealed Himself at Mt. Sinai, there was great fear in the people--not as towards a malevolent being, like we have become accustomed to think of in 20th century fantasies; but they were fearful because they were seeing God close to being unveiled in His full holiness. The proper words to describe their feelings are "terror" and "awe." And, as we could surely do neither, they could not handle it. They couldn't just hop into the Cadillac, roll up the windows and turn up the stereo!

The writer to the Hebrews though, says that the Hebrew Christians did not have to face God in that way. They should still have a healthy fear of the Lord, but their approach to Him was greatly improved! In fact, the Israelites, even with Moses, could scarcely approach God at all. But in our age, by God's exercise of grace, we not only can approach Him, but come before His throne of grace boldly for help in time of need.

But before we leave this section, which is a scary reminder of how the God of the Old Covenant resounded to Israel's cold-heartedness to Him,

let us remember that "It is a blessed thing to be removed from the summons of the Law, to have to answer for the guilt of sin" (Owen, in Plumer, Commentary.) I do not think that many of you know much about the Law of God. The term, "the Law of God" is really what the Old Testament is all about, although there is clearly much grace in the Old as well as the New Testaments. Before Jesus Christ came, God's people had to live under the Law: moral, civil, and ceremonial. It was a blessing to live among God's people, but the Law was a curse, because no one could live up to it. And THAT was really its purpose, to SHOW men that they were sinners, and could never earn God's favor. His character is just too perfect and pure.

We too need constant reminders of our natural unworthiness before God. If you live close to the Lord as a Christian, you will notice (and grow to welcome) the little reminders the Lord sends to keep us humble.

In the past nine years, since I entered the ministry, the Lord has used my parents to wake me up to my own unworthiness for the ministry. I can almost chart the times when I start to get a little cocky, by when my folks would call me up and point out some shortcoming of mine, or scold me for the supposed idiocy of even being in the ministry.

All through the Old Testament, there is a saying: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Do you have the fear of the Lord in your life? Not the terror of the Lord, but the fear, respect, awe of actually being a child of God because of the work of the Lord Jesus on your behalf. It will be useful in your life, as you are tempted many times into sin, cold-heartedness and drifting.

Hebrews 12:22-24 But for the true Christian, there is a wonderful newness about knowing the Lord in a NEW way which is not filled with the terror of facing the unleashed wrath of God.

I would like you to think for a moment about your fears you had before becoming a Christian: fear of death, fear of poverty, fear of loneliness, fear of insanity, fear of being rejected by God...If you have trusted Christ, then you have come to a God who, while still holy, has revealed Himself in a different way to us!

The text enumerates several things about the Christian's experience which are unique. It is Mt. Zion to which we have come. Whereas Sinai was forbidding and terrifying, Zion is inviting and gracious--it symbolizes the APPROACHABLE God. And since God is approachable in Christ, so Christians ought to be approachable to the non-Christians. We should reflect the grace of God. Unfortunately I think many evangelical Christians portray something of the demeanor of the Ayatollah! Our "fundamentalism" should not look like his "fundamentalism": angry, mean, ruthless...

As Christians, we are citizens of a "heavenly Jerusalem," the "city of the living God." In Hebrews 11:10, it says we come by grace to the city Abraham looked for, "the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God." In becoming a Christian, our residence, so to speak is a city: populated, organized and active. Why do some people, after making a profession of faith then, isolate themselves from other Christians?

The city is populated by the saints, "the church of the first-born," and by countless angels. Dr. S. Lewis Johnson says something here that I get a kick out of:

When I get to heaven, I'm going to check out my guardian angel. The Bible indicates that each of us has at least one--I probably will have needed several assigned to me! But my guardian angel and I are going to have a wonderful time of fellowship in Christ, when I meet him.

Now Christians are saints--did you know that? And our names are written down in heaven. I do not know if it is really somekind of big book, or a massive computer disk...But I know there is some marvelous record of all those who have trusted in Christ.

Now at Dallas Seminary they sometimes enroll an individual even before they have finished college, sometimes as long as two years in advance. The person hasn't arrived in Dallas yet, but they have met all the qualifications for entrance into that graduate school. They are part of the "Advanced Enrollment" program. Christians are part of heaven's "Advanced Enrollment" program. If you are born-again, and have placed your dependance for salvation in the finished work of Christ, your name--first, middle and last--is written in the "Lamb's book of life" (Rev.21:27), (S.L. Johnson).

The King of the City is Jesus, who mediates the New Covenant by His own shed blood. Do you love Jesus? Is His blood precious to you? This is what an "evangelical Christian" is: one who loves Jesus, and who loves the substitutionary atonement which He made by His blood!

Hebrews 12:25-29 This last section is the application for us this morning. Note carefully verses 25 and 28. Because Jesus Christ is in the process of setting up His Kingdom...

And this by the way is my understanding of the Kingdom of God: We are in the process of seeing it unveiled and spread--it is not yet fully evident (as the amillenialists hold), but because Jesus is not just playing celestial golf in heaven now waiting for the Kingdom to be given Him, it has already begun, at the cross!

His Kingdom is not weak. It is not temporary. It cannot be shaken. The earth will be shaken. Even heaven will be shaken in some great way. But the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ is a permanent fixture!

We are told two things to do: Don't refuse Him. If you are not a Christian yet, come to Christ. Receive Him as your Lord and Savior. Refusal of Christ by a Christian even, brings divine discipline on him. Let's be becoming a people who increasingly YIELD to the will of God. Let's be a TEACHABLE people, who are growing each month in how much of the word of God we give our lives to, even though the flesh, says, "NO!!!" so loudly sometimes!

Secondly, in verse 28, we need to be consumed by gratitude to the Lord, motivated by the fear of the Lord, and give ourselves to serving Him! How can you serve God?

1. Look for opportunities to serve in little ways--working with kids, helping in the Body on Sundays, encouraging people on the telephone, helping Linda in her ministry around the building by picking things up before you blow out of here at 12:30 on a Sunday...

Creativity is exciting in serving God! I love to see someone take some initiative in trying a new ministry. It is rare for me to say, "No, you can't do that," when someone says they would like to try something in their service to the Lord.

2. Be faithful in what you are already doing for Him. Your ministry should be energized by your worship of Him and your reverence and awe of whom you are serving! I know it is easy sometimes to lose sight of your Lord when your ministry is not all that appreciated or even noticed by people. You must remember what I must remember: This is God's work. It is HIM WHO I SERVE!
3. Serve the Lord in evangelism. He is delighted when we share the good news, the "Gospel" with someone. He will bless your work in that area, and He will bless you for doing it. We ought to be an evangelistic church NOT because of the practical effect it will have on our church budget; NOT because it builds our individual self-esteem; NOT because we want to have a reputation among the evangelicals as being an EVANGELISTIC church; NOT because it feels good!...We ought to be an evangelistic church because our God is a consuming fire, and those who die before trusting Christ will be lost forever, eternally short of God's grace!

As Christians we should be the most humble, the most servant-minded and the least self-seeking people on earth. Are we? Let's not refuse the Lord. What is the Lord trying to speak to you about this morning? What issue have you been trying to drown out the Lord's voice on? Will you make it right? Will you turn your life over to the Lord in that area, out of gratitude to Him for the shed blood of Christ?

If you have not yet gained that assurance that you are truly a Christian, you can have it. I stand up here week after week telling you about it. The Bible constantly promises it. The writer to the Hebrews would have you know the excellence of knowing the Lord! And he wants us to know the wonderful newness of knowing Jesus Christ in this age of grace, when salvation and all the countless blessings of being a Christian, come free for the asking! They cannot be earned. Salvation cannot be bought. It is the free gift of God through putting your personal trust in the finished work of Christ!

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
Final Exhortations (Part 1)
Hebrews 13:1-4

Introduction: If we could hire a team of consultants to come into Dartmouth Bible Church for say, two months, and then they would give us a report on how to improve our ministry...I wonder what would be in that report? The church of which the early Hebrew Christians were a part received just such a report--it is called the Epistle to the Hebrews, and it outlines a lot of truths that the people in that church needed to know, or be reminded of. We now come to the final chapter of the book, and here we find a series of standards by which we should develop our ethics. Christian ethics are based on Christian doctrine, or truth. You cannot require a person to live a certain way without his first believing in certain moral principles. This is one of the great uses of knowing Christian doctrine!

"The world takes its notion of God most of all, from those who say they belong to God's family. They read us a great deal more than they read the Bible. They see us; they only hear about Jesus Christ" (Alexander Maclaren, in MacArthur's Comm.)

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your father who is in heaven."
Matthew 5:16

"I think there are many good points on which I agree with Christ a great deal more than many professing Christians (do)...There is the idea that we (are) all wicked, if we do not hold to the Christian religion. It seems to me that the people who have held to it have been, for the most part, extremely wicked. The Spaniards, for example, in Mexico and Peru, used to baptize infants of the Indians, and immediately dash their brains out, by this means securing a place for them in heaven."
(Bertrand Russell, in Why I am Not a Christian)

Christian ethics demands right doctrine, and a right relationship with Jesus Christ. The writer to the Hebrews is writing to a Christian community. His ethics for them is distinctly Christian. Let's begin to look at the standards.

Hebrews 13:1 The primary moral standard of Christianity is love. In the Greek, verse one is really just two words: "philadelphia menētō." "Philadelphia" is made up of two shorter Greek words, philēō, (tender affection) and adelphos (brother, or near kinsman; literally, "from the same womb").

Brotherly love is the natural outflow of the Christian life. It cannot be generated, conjured up. We are told here not to make it happen, but to let it happen. It is the first mentioned fruit of the Spirit of God in Galatians 5.

Sometimes someone will be in our midst who is unlovely, a Christian or a non-Christian. The Spirit would call us to allow the Lord to love that individual through us.

I was talking with one of you recently who was telling me of several friends who are heroin addicts and very lowly people. If one or two visited DBC, how would they be received?

John Buffam, a longstanding brother from Hixville Church, has written a marvelous commentary on the Book of Hebrews. He says here, "Love the unlovely fellow; he needs it most. We are too (often) given to the use of the whip and the club.

This is the best way to prove to the world, to MODEL for them the love of Jesus Christ. Do we have love for one another. Do we prefer to be with one another. Do we enjoy one another's presence. Do we accept one another?

So often, we put one another on trial. We have a set of guages by which we are constantly hooking one another up and seeing what the readout is. "Well, Joe Christian over there doesn't measure up to MY concept of the Christian life this week. So, I think I'll put him on hold for now, in terms of my friendship with him."

We need a healthy dose of acceptance of one another, and a tender-hearted approach, coupled with understanding and kindness. Are we longsuffering with one another, or do we put one another on a schedule?

"Philadelphia menetō." There is already Christian love here. Will it continue?

Hebrews 13:2 There are few verses in Hebrews more intriguing to me than this one. We should be a hospitable people. Why? Because it reflects the love of Christ. In the ancient world, the idea of hospitality often included closely with it the responsibility to put people up.

I can think of no more pressing need today than for Christians to show real hospitality to unwed, pregnant girls or women. Our creed of anti-abortion needs to be undergird by a life-style of helping and assistance. Would you or I be willing to take into our home for 7, 8 or 9 months another mouth to feed?

We minister because of need, NOT because of any consequences we may be able to foresee. We can never know how important and far-reaching a simple act of helpfulness may be! Abraham went out of his way to help the three men who were passing by his tent. He did not wait to be asked for help but VOLUNTEERED. This is a hallmark of a truly spirit-filled church: do they take the initiative in helping out people who need help, and even to the point of putting up strangers? Do the individuals in the church ALLOW their private space to be invaded from time to time, for the sake of the Gospel?

Hebrews 13:3 There is to be a kind of sympathy so real that those who are in prison are really not alone in there! If a Christian is in prison, is he forgotten? Or is he regularly ministered to by those of his brethren outside? This is an area that we have yet to explore. I hope that we begin to.

Among other things, Hebrews 13:3 is a warning against spiritualizing the Christian life. The Bible does NOT teach, as do some eastern religions, that the person in touch with God transcends physical pain, hardship, or

other such realities. Our true home is in heaven, but we are still "in the body" here. We still get hungry, we still get lonely, and we still hurt, physically and psychologically.

(I always get a kick out of the fact that the Bible never calls us to DENY reality--it constantly acknowledges reality, and gives real, workable solutions to it!)

Our own hungers and hurts should make us more sensitive to those of others. Instead of seeing our own troubles as an excuse for not helping, we should see them as an incentive for being MORE helpful. Our own troubles should make us MORE sensitive, hospitable, and loving; NOT LESS! (MacArthur)

Hebrews 13:4 Of all the issues that a church may need consulting on, marriage is number four on the list in the Hebrew church.

"From the widest duties of the social life of the Christian, the Epistle passes to the closest. Marriage is sacred..."
--Westcott.

God established marriage at creation and has honored it ever since. In much of the world today, of course, marriage is anything but honored. A great many couples who marry do so as a temporary convenience, not as a social, much less a divine, requirement for their living together.

If we at Dartmouth Bible Church are considered "old-fashioned", out-of-date, or even repressive because we hold to the sanctity of marriage, then so be it. We answer to God on this, and to no man or government or social trend.

The phrase, "and let the marriage bed be undefiled," has many implications for us.

Dr. James Dobson, in his book, Tough Love tells about couple after couple whose marriage has decayed, and one partner becomes so afraid of losing the other, that he or she actually lets an extramarital partner into the bedroom to participate with the couple--to keep the marriage together.

I was speaking to a pastor friend of mine in Virginia last March. He told me of a couple, the girl of which was a very good friend of my wife's and I. In fact Renée and she went to the same high school. She married a man who professed to be a Christian, came to church with her, even worked in the ministry with youth with her. But now I was told that their marriage has fallen apart. He began encouraging her into increasingly bizarre sexual acts, and she came to a point that she couldn't take it any longer. The marriage is over, last I heard. I don't mean to stir up your imagination here. But these things happen, and they happen to Christians. The ethic for us; God's will for us is that we hold marriage, and the marriage ACT in high esteem, and to not let the world pollute us.

Don't let the world seduce your thinking. Billy Graham has commented that writings coming out of (some) contemporary authors are "like the drippings of a broken sewer."

Last year I bought a book from the History Book Club (one of several book clubs to which I belong) which is a novel about the 2nd Battle of Manassas in the Civil War. The book was acclaimed to be the best thing written on that battle for many years--very realistic and able to transport you right to the smoke filled fields and to hear the crash of cannons, and so forth. As I got into it, I was captivated. It was also very descriptive in another way...(this author, by the way, is a highly respectable editorialist for the New York Times; in fact his editorial is run in the Standard-Times once a week)... He described the sexual encounter of a young captain on General Stuart's staff with a young Southern bell. And he described a developing homosexual encounter between two soldiers. And as I read this, the Lord was telling me, "Don't let the Lord seduce your thinking. Just because it is good historical writing, doesn't mean it is profitable for you to read."

It is a high priority for us at Dartmouth Bible Church to be constantly encouraging one another to let marriage be held in honor AMONG EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US. And yet we still have marriages that fail. One last year; one this year...it grieves the Lord. It grieves me.

Conclusion: What we are saying this morning is that Christians are responsible to act out their doctrine. A person can SAY he or she is a Christian. Basically, that and 35¢ will get you a cup of coffee. But, is your life changed? Is the way you view your brethren in the church changed? Are you growing in your affection and devotion and loyalty to them? Is your thinking changed about helping (notice, I did not say "entertaining") "strangers?" Is your perspective such that you grieve with those in prison, and go out of your way to help them? And finally, is your thinking Godly about your marriage and about the marriage of others?

If you are a Christian this morning, these words from Hebrews 13, ~~are~~ the first of some thirteen practical exhortations. They are worthy of your writing them down and sticking up on the mirror in the bathroom so that you see them every morning. Are you wondering what the will of the Lord is for you in these days? Here it is.

Are you unsure of your relationship to God this morning? You can be sure and assured. You can know that you are in His family, and have His love in you and around you. Simply trust in Jesus to be your Savior. Flee to Him. Depend on Him completely to be what the Bible says He is, the Lord and the Savior, and He will surely come into your life. He will surely save you.

Hurricane
"Gloria" - no power
for computer!

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
Hebrews 13:5,6
"The Lord is Our Helper"

Introduction: The theme of the Book: keep pressing on / don't give up.

- There are many things we need to remember on that theme.
- There are many areas in which we need instruction
 - know doctrine - who Christ really is - what has He really done?
 - know the cost of going back to the old life: apostasy
 - does us well to study the lives of Christian heroes gone before.
 - Ch. 13 holds about 13 final commands - it is a SUMMARY of Christian ethics.
 - loving the neighbor (vs. 1)
 - hospitality (vs. 2)
 - prison ministry (vs. 3)
 - marriage (vs. 4)
 - In pressing on for Christ, we need also to know that the LORD will supply all our needs!
 - may seem elementary, but we are given something to forgetting this truth.
 - Because Christians are not immune from covetousness.
 - C.H. Spurgeon never remembered having any member of his church confess to him the sin of C.

What Covetousness is: here, loving silver. "because it can secure so many other things." - MacArthur.

- it is a sign of a decaying church - building conscious.
- it is good for us to have not too much - to be in a humble state.
- Zeisler Quote
- MacArthur quote
- The subtlety of covetousness:
 - ↳ the craving for sophistication / more technology today.
 - ↳ an amusement.
 - the compulsion to improve your lifestyle.
 - ↳ needs / some comfort is one thing.

vs. } a step up / the pressure of what the Jones' have / other FAMILY member have
ESP. IN LIGHT OF TODAY'S NEEDY WORLD!

The Antidote to Covetousness

— Being content —

— You can be content — The Lord will never desert you, if you are a C^h.

— The author applies the promise the Lord made to Joshua & the Israelites Deut 31; Joshua 1.

— Then he quotes Ps 118:6

— Zeiser quote No. 2

- The Lord is your helper —
- FINANCIALLY
 - socially
 - physically
 - emotionally
 - mentally
 - spiritually

— Being content w/ what you have, has to do w/ FEAR too.

↳ some people surround themselves w/ material things out of fear of loneliness — Col. Green.

- Are you satisfied w/ your current housing — all of you have far better than most people in the world
- ... transportation?
 - ... kitchen utensils?
 - ... entertainment devices?

Is the Lord the source of your contentment in life?

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
Final Exhortations (Part 3)
Hebrews 13:7-9

Introduction: We are impressionable people. We like to make a good impression on other people, and we are prone to be impressed by other people. What are the kinds of things that impress us ABOUT other people? It might be their dress--one of the lecturers in the Hospice class I have been taking is a fairly overweight woman. But she is very careful in how she dresses herself, and in what kind of body language she demonstrates. She is an impressive lady. We might be inclined to be impressed with somebody by what kind of car they drive--in a small church like this, those of you who have been around for a while probably know which car belongs to which person out in the lot. Obviously we form our impressions in part at least on the transportation we wear...As Christians, we form impressions of each other too. There are all kinds of criteria we use here in forming our impressions of each other: things like, how often a person attends church, how they discuss Scripture, whether and how they pray out loud, do they witness??? And in many churches, how much money an individual gives, is noticed.

In short, we make impressions on each other, and therefore we have an impact on each other.

The Christian leaders we follow make an impression on us too. They make an impact on our lives. Their role is to make a positive impact on us, to lead us in the Christian life, and to model a person following Jesus and doing His will. They make mistakes, but in general they are to be men who follow the Lord and who pay the price of discipleship. The fact is that Christians need people to follow, to look up to, to learn the Scriptures from, and to depend on in times of trouble.

Now the primary thrust of these first three verses this morning (vss.7-9), is for Jews who had heard and professed the gospel not to return to legalism. The New Covenant in Jesus Christ does have standards! It holds for us very high standards...but they do not involve ceremonies, rituals, holy days and formalities. They are internal, not external. (MacArthur).

Hebrews 13:7-9

The point of verse 7 is the importance of the purity of doctrine. Each of you is a systematic theologian. Each of you holds some opinion about a number of areas of doctrine, and therefore, you are a theologian. And you believe the way that you believe for a number of reasons: 1) hopefully because you have undertaken a careful study of Scripture on the subject and are convinced that on that point, such and such is what the Bible teaches. I hope you do not form your ideas of doctrine only by what you have seen, felt or were brought up to believe. On matters of doctrine, we need to be Biblicists, not mystics. 2) Secondly, you believe what you believe (most of you, anyway) because you were taught it by someone you respected. This is a good and natural part of the life of the Body of Christ--are you a learner? And if at one point you soaked up the truth, are you still learning more about Jesus? Is your heart still open to the instruction of the Holy Spirit? Is your mind still open to more truth from the Word of God?

This verse is careful to make a distinction between following men, and following the truth that men bear. The Hebrew Christians were not instructed to follow men, but their faith and their good acts.

As Christians we should seek to mimic the faith and righteous acts of our leaders--but to follow men will always bring disappointment for all men have feet of clay. We are not to mimic their mannerisms, personalities, or methods, but their faith. As you look at the Christian leaders in your life--either in this church, in the media, or in print... How much are they trusting God for? How much do they gear their lives on the conviction that this Book is true and correct? How much of their most precious resources, their time and money, do they invest in the furtherance of the Kingdom this Book describes? Are they men of faith? And when a crisis comes into their lives--when it is hard to live for the Lord, how much do they fling themselves on Christ, and simply wait expectantly on Him? That is the thing we are to imitate. But following men, for their being men, will bring disappointment.

When I was in seminary I became enamored with a seventeenth century pastor from England named John Owen--a remarkable pastor and theologian. And in studying him, I became acquainted with a contemporary English scholar who has written alot on Owen in the past fifteen years, and in the process became something of a follower of this modern writer. Through my first three years of school I sort of fantasized about being a friend of this modern Englishman, since he loved Owen, and Owen so clearly loved Jesus. Then in the fall of my fourth year, I heard that (Lo and Behold) this scholar would be coming to DTS for a week of lectures in the spring! I was ecstatic, and went to see my department chairman to get on the schedule to have the man over for a meal. And for months I looked forward to a great evening of sitting around discussing John Owen, and sitting at the feet of this modern Owen-scholar. When that evening came, the man couldn't have been more bored with me, John Owen or any of the other men who we had over the same evening. I thought, "what a nerd!"

I was disappointed, not in his knowledge or what he taught about a subject of interest to me--but in his person. My misconception about the man backfired on me. This happens often in the Christian life, if we become so men-oriented, and less doctrine-oriented!

It is popular to have a "main man" today. Some of you have favorite Bible teachers--where you would do just about anything to get "some time" with that person. That's fine as long as it is the truth, the doctrine that they teach that enamors you and not the leader himself. We should not become cynical, and isolate ourselves from the person, the humanity of our leaders, but we should be wise and realize that men do change. We are, after all just a vapor, which is here one day and gone so easily the next.

This is all why verse 8 is so exciting! Men do change. Their affections sometimes change. Their bodies and perspective definitely DO change, the older they get. Even some of a man's theology may change as he comes to understand more and more of the Word of God. But his Lord does not change.

I'm glad the Lord Jesus never changes. He is absolutely perfect. He is God and therefore any change for the better is impossible. Any change for the worse would destroy His perfection and He would cease to be God. Richard W. DeHaan, God, Miracles and You.

This does not mean however, that Jesus is static, or stagnant. He is not. He is dynamic, full of life (the center of life (1:3)), and always radiating the divine glory of the Father.

Sometimes this verse is used by those who teach supernatural faith-healing or other supernatural gifts. But the unchangableness of the person of Christ--a wonderful fact--doesn't mean that His program never changes.

No one for instance, would claim that the Lord is dealing with the church under grace, the same way that He did with Israel under the Mosaic Law, requiring the people to bring animal sacrifices and offerings. So, His plan today is for His people to be people of the Book, relying on the solid promises in it, not on the signs and wonders of the apostolic age. (DeHaan).

Are we willing to follow the changeless Christ at whatever the cost? We today might look back to the men and women of our past who have influenced us for Christ. If you have no one personally who has persevered in Christ, LOOK AT CHURCH HISTORY! Luther, Calvin, Knox, Whitefield, Wesley, Moody, Augustine, Polycarp, John, Paul, Peter...

Verse 9 warns us against letting our Christianity deteriorate into mere external religious practice, even into a legalistic system of do's and don'ts...The Hebrew Christians were surrounded by some Jews who said, "to get near to God, you must eat certain things, and stay away from other things."

Dear ones, our hearts cannot be strengthened by outward rules and regulations. Our hearts can only be strengthened by a continual reminder of God's grace. Is that word a well-used part of your vocabulary??? It needs to be! We need to talk about grace, we need to pray about grace, we need to sing about grace! We need to be well-acquainted with the truth of God's free-grace in the blood atonement of Jesus Christ! When we come to Christ initially, it is only through a first time awareness and acceptance of our need for God to be freely gracious. And our receiving of that grace...Then as we grow in Christ, sometimes (quite often, probably) we are confronted with the fact that even as Christians we are still sinners! We are prone to wander, and inclined to sin still...And we need the strengthening of God's grace, the most when we are weak..And finally we need that regular reminder through the symbols of the Lord's Table of these things--that is one reason why we have the Lord's Table.

The Apostles continually warned the people of God in the early church against being carried away by strange teachings--seemingly "Christian"... But anything which undermines the full deity of Jesus Christ (or His humanity), anything which undermines the sovereign grace of God through Christ, and the hope of the resurrection, as Paul says, "Let him be accursed (anathema)."

This message in these verses tells us to think back on those basic things about the faith that we fell in love with as new-born Christians. For many of you it was the freedom we have in Christ from ritual--the free access to a loving Saviour, and the love we can have for one another, that maybe we were incapable of before we came to Christ--these are all things we need to be emphasizing in Dartmouth Bible Church!!! Remember those simple truths you learned (or are learning) as a new Christian, and do not depart from them--no matter how confusing church matters or your own life become!

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS
How To Please God (Final Exhortations, Part 4)
Hebrews 13:10-17

Introduction: What do you think the best religion in the world is? As religions go, it would be better to be an orthodox, Old Testament-loving Jew, than to be anything else in the world today. In fact it would be better to be an Old Testament-loving Jew than to be in any of today's Christian counterfeits. The best religion that you could find, would be to have the reality of Judaism. The trouble is that with God, religion is not enough. One needs a personal relationship with God, by trusting in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. In order to please God a person must receive the free gift of eternal life, by placing his trust in the promise of Scripture, that Jesus' blood is sufficient to save, APART from any works on man's part. We need simply to believe that the promise is true, and that God will make good on His promise.

The "religion" of Christianity is really not a religion at all--I know it fits the literal definition of the word, but in reality Christianity, when it is based on the Bible alone, is a relationship. And the features of that relationship between Christians and God are unique. There is nothing like it in the world!

The Book of Hebrews was written to people who had come out of religion into a relationship with Jehovah God. They were being tempted to leave it now, and go back into what they had know before. And in the verses we want to look at this morning, the writer one last time is going to hit you up with the basic distinctives, or differences of Christianity. Wrong doctrine is devastating. Right doctrine is powerful, and as he comes to the end of his letter to this flock, right doctrine, and their need of being reminded of it, are on his heart still!

Its much like the story of the immigrant who comes in on the ship into New York harbor, passes the Statue of Liberty, gets off the ship and walks into the immigration center to begin a new life as an American. And the person is talking with the immigration officer, who is explaining what it means to be an American, "you will have the freedom to live where you please; you will have the freedom to work where you please; **AND DON'T FORGET TO VOTE**. You will be able to retain your culture, to eat what you like, to wear what you like, **AND DON'T FORGET TO VOTE!** You can learn to drive, or you don't have to learn to drive, as you please, **BUT DON'T FORGET TO VOTE!** You can enlist to serve in the military, or join the communist party if you want, **BUT DON'T FORGET TO VOTE!**" And the immigrant thought it was a little strange that the officer kept saying over and over, "Don't forget to vote," and asked the officer, "Why you keep saying, 'Don't forget to vote?'" And the officer replied, "Its the most precious part of democracy. It was purchased at a terrible price, and has been defended at a terrible price. Never forget that!"

Right Christian doctrine, as it keeps coming up in the Book of Hebrews is just like the right to vote in the mind of the immigration officer. Right doctrine is the most precious part of Christianity. Never forget that!

Hebrews 13:10-13

All the things in a religion that appeal to the eye and the senses, Judaism had. The Temple, the visible sacrifices, the clothes that the priests wore all visibly appealed to the eye of the Old-Testament Jew. Every detail of the Levitical system of worship was designed to teach some truth. But all the Old Testament looks forward to the coming of Jesus Christ, who IS the Great High Priest and has His people (Christians) serving Him as a nation of priests (I Peter 2:9).

In fact I think pastors and ministers today who dress differently than their people, for religious reasons, are really living an Old Testament carry-over.

Many churches still have a place up front in the auditorium that they call the altar. The auditorium is often called the "sanctuary" too. Neither of these terms are really relevant in a physical sense for Christians--the Christian's human body is what the New Testament calls the "sanctuary of the Holy Spirit" --not some building in which the people meet. And in verse 10 here there is reference to an altar that Christians eat at. It is not a physical altar, but a spiritual one.

It is so easy to let the life of faith decay into a life of physical religious practices. It is much easier to fall into the routine of observing religious seasons, arguing about the particulars of communion tableware, wrestling with the decor of the choir robes...THAN TO keep a fresh walk with the Lord Jesus. THAT takes concentration and effort, NOT Jesus makes walking with Him complicated, but because we all still have a deep-set sin nature, and it makes us prone to wander away from a purely supernatural, faith-fed lifestyle.

The altar we eat at is outside of the camp of organized religion. The bread we eat at that altar is what Jesus spoke of in John 6:35-37. We have no mystical elements in our worship. We have little in the way of visible signs of our relationship with Christ, outside of a changed life; which I think speaks much louder than merely looking religious. When a person's attitude is changed on something; when a bitterness is forgotten; when a person truly forgives another person; when a person truly repents of a sin; when a marriage is put back together; when a teenager changes some aspect of his relationship with God, THESE things are the visible things in biblical Christianity--the changed life!

Verse 13 compels us to accept the rejection of organized religion, just as verse 12 speaks of the rejection by religion of Jesus Christ. We need to be separating ourselves from the system of organized religion. Anything which distracts your attention away from walking with Christ strictly by faith, needs to be cut loose! The practical point is that as Christians, we must be willing to go out from anything which tempts us to walk by sight. We are not to isolate ourselves from other people, or we could never witness to them or be hospitable to them. But we do not need to buy into their philosophies and attitudes. True separation may be costly. It may cost something to bear the reproach of Christ, because the Bible teaches that the world system is at odds with Jesus Christ!

Hebrews 13:14 How tied into this present world are you, and how involved with the world that is to come are you? Is your life 95% tied

into things which deal with the present world, or is it 95% tied into what is to come? We need to be responsible citizens here and now. We need to meet our family's needs and earn a living. But how much are we distracted by an itch to earn more money so that we can feed the materialism which we are bombarded with in the media?

We are citizens of another city, as Christians. We are temporary residents here, but our papers say we are citizens of another place. As Christians, we do not bow down at an altar here, as if certain religious practices will earn God's favor. We have an altar in our hearts where we offer a different kind of sacrifice.

Hebrews 13:15-17

Even though our worship is spiritual and by faith, there still is a sacrifice that the Lord is interested in receiving from us. These things in these verses do not purchase for us God's being pleased. But as born-again Christians, grafted into God's family by grace, certain fruits will be forthcoming!

There are **3** elements of sacrifice that Christians DO need to be offering to God, on the altar of our hearts, in order to please our God:

1. The sacrifice of praise. Through Jesus Christ, who is the only priest who can do any good--He is the Great High Priest...we offer up testimonies about how much the Lord means to us, things that He has done which we are thankful for, provisions He has made for us. It costs something to give a verbal testimony of your love for Christ. It costs laying aside that fear of what you imagine people may think of what you say. That is why many of you do not share verbally. And the sacrifice of praise in the public assembly costs you your fear--or it wouldn't be a sacrifice. It also impacts your pride. Some people love to talk about themselves. But to speak of what God is doing, that focuses the attention on Him and gives HIM the glory!

2. The sacrifice of self. When we say "no" to self and say "yes" to the need of someone else, the Lord is pleased when Christians act in this way. You may confront the need of your brother or sister at a time a little inconvenient to you. You may be asked to help someone out when you're already tired...when you yourself don't have too much money, or time...There may not be too much food in the refrigerator and the Lord sends someone along with a need, and because of embarrassment, you are inclined not to be hospitable. You may confront the need of someone to be encouraged when you yourself are running on fumes only emotionally, and you just can't see how you can give that person support at this time. That is why this is a sacrifice of self--it costs you something! Its easy to give when you have plenty. Its hard to give when you have little...

3. The sacrifice of pride. In many churches today the congregations rule the leaders! The biblical pattern is for the leaders to rule in the Body--not as dictators--not as people who make every last decision, but who rule nevertheless. It takes the trust of the Body. It takes a sacrifice of pride!

It is a serious (and all too common) thing for stubborn, self-willed people in church congregations to rob their pastors (and leaders) of the joy God intends faithful pastors to have... (John MacArthur, Commentary on Hebrews).

The Bible tells us to "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (Eph.5). Christians are to be submitting their pride to one another, and giving preference to one another.

This does not mean that in the church, the people are supposed to blindly follow their leaders. This is what we dealt with last week. God does not call us to sacrifice our dignity and self-respect to one another. I certainly hope that as a leader in Dartmouth Bible Church I never treat you in such a way that would be disrespectful, or would violate your dignity. That is the kind of pastoral behavior that has given the Body of Christ a rough reputation. Pastors and leaders ought not to be intimidators. Their authority should not come by virtue of the fact that they lord it over the flock. Their authority comes from the fact that they are ordained of God to minister, gifted by God to do the job and have a measure of spiritual maturity which motivates the people to follow Christ!

The leaders in the Body of Christ have a primary function--a single main job: keeping watch over the souls of the people. A medical doctor helps you keep watch over your physical body. Pregnant women, for instance, have regular appointments with their doctor to monitor the progress of their baby. The policeman watches your neighborhood with a view to protecting you from crime. And your church leaders, if they are doing their job, are constantly watching over your spiritual development.

For some reason though, some Christians resent this. I don't know if they have had it lorded over them--or were intimidated in the past by some overbearing pastor; but sometimes I call someone up to request a visit, and they get real cold. I make two types of pastoral visits: 1) agenda-visits (when I have something specific on my mind to discuss); and 2) non-agenda-visits (when I just want to see how you're doing, and spend some time with you.

It is the job of the Body to "let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." There is a special grief that accompanies men who make their livelihood in ministry. When you labor over an individual with time in prayer, spending time with them, counseling them and helping them as best you can--and then they still choose not to walk with the Lord, or do His will, it is grievous to the leader. When a Christian in the flock even makes a personal attack on a Christian leader, to his face or to another leader, it brings grief to that person. It is your responsibility to let the leaders in your life do their work of ministry with you in joy.

I might add that there is no greater joy for me, than to be with you as you are growing in Christ. When I know you are going through something and are growing by it, man! That's exciting to me. I love to watch people grow in the Lord. Are you growing, or are you stagnant? A young pastor gives the best years of his life to a young flock--the most energetic years--but there is no finer reward; no more excellent payback than to see someone fall in love a little more with the Savior, or try a new ministry though it may be a little scary; or, work on sanctifying himself to Jesus in some new area of his life as yet untouched; or, exercise a new willingness to read the Scripture or to pray. These things make me happy--very happy, and if they are happening in this church you will never lose a pastor, hopefully. But if they are not, the ministry becomes a great burden.

So, let's offer up these sacrifices to the Lord out of our love for Him!

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

Themes in Hebrews (Final Exhortations, Part 5)

Hebrews 13: 18-25

Introduction: If someone walked up to you on the street and said, "Hey, buddy! What's the New Testament Book of Hebrews all about--I've got two minutes?.." WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?

I hope you would give him a rundown on a few basic ideas that the Book of Hebrews makes so clear--ideas about God, man, how man can please God, and about the effect (ministry) of Jesus' coming to earth. In these last verses in this great Book, which was actually a letter, these themes or basic ideas are finally reviewed. And we must remember this letter was not written with the idea of being a textbook on theology--it was written as an impassioned plea for some Christians NOT to depart the faith--and as a warm pastoral encouragement to please hang in there for the Lord.

Hebrews 13: 18,19

There is no book in the New Testament which teaches facts just for the sake of teaching facts. Christianity is not just a heady kind of religion, just for those who like to know alot of abstruse theory. Christians can sometimes get that way, but the Bible is not. Each book has in it the purpose of changing lives. And therefore each book in the New Testament is eminently PRACTICAL! Even in the books which include a fair amount of theology, like Romans, Galatians, Hebrews and the Gospel of John--there is so much of an interplay between the theology and the Christian's everyday life. Christian truth is not just abstract knowledge--it is life-changing in its intent; so that when you read it and dwell on it and pray over it, you may change a little that day. Change is not what we like naturally. But the Scripture is after change.

The element of change in these two verses, is that we should be becoming more of a praying people! And in the verses here, the writer (who is obviously an apostle, or under an apostle) asks these people to pray more for the ministry of the apostles.

Christian leaders need their people to be praying for them. Do you pray for the leaders in Dartmouth Bible Church? We need your prayer support! We will not have an effective ministry without it--it is our job to DO the job--it is your job to pray about the job we are doing, and to seek the Lord about how you can help more in doing the job! We need your prayer support! Is the ministry important enough to you that you pray for the leaders here at DBC every day--that we keep growing in our walk with Jesus Christ? It is possible for a leader to fall into discouragement, moral compromise, weariness, depression...We need your prayer support! I worry less about there being money in the box, than I do about whether the leaders of this church are carrying on their ministry in a prayer vacuum!

Secondly in these verses is the application concerning praying for those who are "sent out." Now I do not believe that there are still apostles today, in the New Testament technical sense of the word. But I do believe that we have people whom have been sent by the Body of Christ, to spread the message of salvation. In the midst of a wicked and perverse generation, there has never been an age when the Gospel is going forth so freely and so quickly, and to so many people! There are many missionaries who have gone out to foreign countries. There are even some countries that have begun sending Christian missionaries to THIS country to share the faith, because we are becoming so godless, as a nation!

I'm not one to get too overly mystical about such things, but I am persuaded that a person's going to a mission field and whether they have an effective ministry or not, involves a special call from the Lord-- a special burden and preparation, and a certain willingness to put up with the conditions of that field. You and I may not be inclined to go to Brazil, and spend our lives there trying to win people for Christ. But Haje and Kelly Anderaos are. And we need to be supporting them in prayer IN that endeavor! You or I may not be inclined to spend the next five or ten years trying to smuggle Bibles into communist countries, but Brother Andrew and his couriers are! And we need to be praying for that effort. That they remain honorable to the Lord in what they do, in all their methods, in what they say to those in authority and among themselves, because STRIFE internally is sometimes a greater enemy to the Body than enemies on the outside!

Is Dartmouth Bible Church a praying church?

Hebrews 13: 20,21

I love these verses! This is what we call a "benediction" or a prayer, or wish for prosperity among the people. Many churches end their service this way! In fact, if you look at selection 618 in our hymnal, you will see a list of SCRIPTURAL benedictions. This benediction in Hebrews shows you the love this writer had for his readers. He wants only good for them, though he has warned them sternly and gravely of what will befall them if they depart from Christ.

Notice it is the God of peace, whom the writer invokes. The Body of Christ should be a place of peace. Your Christian life should be characterized by peace. This is what God is trying to bring about in the world, and WILL bring about finally at the end of the age. We know nothing of what real peace is like, compared to that peace which exists in the godhead! And because God is sovereign, there will be universal peace when He returns. You can see the beginning of that NOW, as you grow in Christ, because peace is one of the fruits of the spirit.

In this benediction, the writer reminds them one last time about what he has been saying all along. The blood of Jesus Christ, and his resurrection are the validation and credentials of our high priest. Here, Jesus is called the great shepherd of the sheep! He is not only the high priest who makes access to God possible, He is the shepherd, who brings us TO the place of access, the temple in our hearts. What I am saying is that Jesus makes the way to God possible, and He goes with you along the way too, because a good shepherd knows his sheep. Jesus knows the things you struggle with (Heb.4:14-16). He sympathizes. You can tell Him whatever is on your heart.

The great shepherd is willing to help you do his will. You must ask yourself, am I willing to do God's will, as a Christian. He will help you. Are you willing to do what you KNOW God wants you to in your home? He will equip you. Are you willing to do what God wants you to on the job and in your business ethics. He will equip you! Are you willing to do what you know God wants you to in the Body of Christ, or in trying to minister to non-Christians? He will equip you.

There is nothing so frustrating as KNOWING you have to do a job and not having the ability or equipment. I HATE taking my car to a mechanic. I do it, because I just don't have the ability to repair a transmission or to adjust the valves. But if I had the know-how or the equipment, I would do it myself.

God never calls you to do something you can't do. He is not an unreasonable taskmaster. He provides the strength, the wisdom, and the courage to do everything He asks us to do.

God is in the business of being honored by His people. He is God. He has created us, and now He wants to have fellowship with us, and for us to enjoy His magnificent fellowship. If I were to ask you, "What are some of your goals in life?", I hope you would say, "Well Neil, I just want to please my God in whatever I'm doing."

That's the goal of the Christian life--to live a life pleasing to God. You can't do it if you're not a Christian, if you haven't yet settled the issue of knowing Christ in your heart. But once you have that settled, your goal should be, to please your God--because He's such a great God!

Another of the themes in Hebrews has been the correction of false ideas about God. And one of the "falsest" concepts of God is that He is some sort of aged, crotchety old miserly ogre, who must be pleased by burning animals on an altar. Nothing could be further from the truth. God is alive, and never-changing, and always fresh and exciting. Jesus Christ showed us that for the years He was on earth. The Book records it!

Hebrews 13:22

But He is a holy God too. And the Christian life should not be thought of as a passing or temporary fad, or a PHASE of our lives which we somehow outgrow, when we get a little more worldly-wise! Once you set yourself to follow Christ, you must not toy with the old way of life. You must press on. You must see that in following Christ, there is a price to pay--not to be His child, for that cannot be bought, it is free and only free through His blood. But in following Jesus Christ, each day, there is more and more change that you should be experiencing in your life. Is your life changing, or are you stagnant? Can you tell from one year to the next that you have grown in some way in Christ and can you articulate that to yourself. If asked, can you say specifically, "Yes, I have grown some in this area or that area, and while I used to think this way, or do this thing, now I do this."=in short, do you love Jesus Christ a little more this year than last? Its not so much that you feel some kind of warm emotional feeling all the time, when you hear the name Jesus, but is your life changing? Are you pressing on, even though the Spirit may be trying to work into some rough areas, some private areas of your life? THAT'S spiritual growth! That's pressing on!

Hebrews 13:23-25

The last theme in the Book of Hebrews that I would like to remind you of is the fact of the family of God. You cannot live the Christian life by yourself. We have seen this in the laboratory of Dartmouth Bible Church. Those who isolate themselves from other Christians, shrivel up and die, spiritually. You must make yourself available to encourage your brothers and sisters in Christ, and you must open yourself up to them. Are we involved with one another? Are we involved with the Body of Christ across town? Are we involved with the Body of Christ across the continent and across the ocean? Following Jesus Christ is a world-wide movement. It is not just a post-war American, upper-middle-class, socio-psychological and TEMPORARY phenomnah! You are part of a movement which stretches back two thousand years (and further, really--children of Abraham), and which has people from every nation/culture in the world! Press on in that movement. Don't let the failings of others influence you to throw in the towel yourself!

"...Christ was faithful as a Son over His house, whose house we are, if we hold fast on confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

Hebrews 3:6