

## Jesus is Better: A Study of Hebrews

*A Better Conclusion* (Hebrews 13:1-25)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on September 14, 2025

### Introduction

- ❖ This morning we're concluding our summer series through the book of Hebrews. Next Sunday, we'll jump back into Genesis, and our goal, Lord-willing, is to finish preaching through Genesis by the end of the year. That concluding series will be focused on the life and trials of Joseph, covering chapters 37 to 50.
  - **But this morning, let's turn our attention to Hebrews and see how this sermon concludes.** And, by that, I'm not talking about the sermon that I'm preaching right now. **I'm talking about this ancient sermon that we call Hebrews.** I realize it's usually called the Book of Hebrews or the Letter to the Hebrews. And yes, genre-wise this is technically a NT epistle (letter).
- ❖ **But, as we've noted before, Hebrews reads more like a sermon than a letter.** Remember how it started, in chapter 1, with a sermon introduction that jumped straight into the main point. There was no personal greeting from so-and-so writing to this or that church. Which is why Hebrews has remained anonymous throughout church history.
  - Now it's true that, in this concluding chapter, we do come across typical elements of an ancient letter. Final greetings. Mention of travel plans. A final benediction of "*grace be to you.*" **But even in his concluding words, the author of Hebrews essentially describes what he just wrote as a sermon.** Look at v22, "*I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.*"
    - That term, "*word of exhortation,*" is used in the NT to describe what we understand as a sermon (Act 13:15). Where someone is verbally exhorting others to rightly respond to God's Word. And the author would've expected Hebrews to be read aloud to a congregation, which, if you tried, it would take about 35 minutes to read aloud the whole thing. So this is a sermon.
- ❖ And through it, the author of Hebrews has been exhorting his readers to rightly respond to God's Word, specifically to the message of salvation (to the gospel) declared by Jesus and his apostles (2:3). **And like with any good sermon, Hebrews has a main point that is artfully woven throughout the entire message.** And that main point can be put like this: **Do not neglect the great salvation we have in Jesus. Hold fast and persevere in the faith.**
- ❖ As we've noted before, the author was most likely writing to the church in Rome. In v24, he ends with, "*Those who come from Italy send you greetings,*" which suggests that, wherever he's writing from, there are transplants from Rome with him (*those who come from Italy*), who are now sending their greetings back to former church members in Rome.
  - And we said, in those days, the Roman Empire had laws in place, in cities like Rome, that secured religious freedom for Jews worshipping in their synagogues. **But that exemption was *not* extended to this new Jewish sect that worships a Messiah named Jesus of Nazareth.** Meaning the Church was susceptible to persecution. Meaning there was pressure for Christians to revert back to Judaism and rejoin the Jewish community. **There was great incentive to neglect the gospel, to drift away from Jesus, and go back to a religion that was safe and culturally accepted.**

- ❖ That's why this sermon was written. **It was written to encourage and exhort believers to persevere in the faith.** To keep running, with endurance, the race set before us, looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (12:1-2).
  - And like with any good sermon, it concludes with illustrations and applications, helping us to live out the sermon's main point. That's what you find in this morning's passage. Let's walk through it and see how this ancient sermon concludes with three practical ways to persevere in the faith: (1) by continuing in brotherly love, (2) by continuing in personal holiness, and (3) by continuing in step with your leaders.

### **Continue in Brotherly Love**

- ❖ The first practical application by way of concluding this ancient sermon is: **To persevere in the faith by continuing in brotherly love.** V1 begins with the exhortation, "*Let brotherly love continue,*" and the author offers, in vv2-3, two illustrations of what that could look like in the life of a church.
  - The emphasis in v1 on letting this kind of love *continue* among them ties in with the sermon's larger theme on perseverance. **In other words, as we strive to hold fast our confession and persevere in the faith, one way that's manifested in our everyday lives is a continued demonstration of brotherly love.** Especially those expressions of brotherly love that cost you something.
- ❖ The Greek word for brotherly love is one you're all familiar with. It's the word *philadelphia*. It was used, back then, to describe the love between family members. But early Christians quickly adopted it. **Brotherly love became the defining mark of their love for each other since they saw themselves as members of the same church family.**
  - Jesus affirmed this biblical reality in Matthew 12:50. There he addressed his disciples as family members. He said, "*For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.*" **What Jesus implied in that statement is that being spiritually related is more fundamental than being biologically related.**
- ❖ We already know this to be true. **We know that a husband and wife – though not biologically related – but, through the covenant of marriage, are spiritually joined together as one flesh.** And their new union is recognized as something fundamentally deeper than what they share biologically with parents. We know that to be true about marriage.
  - Ephesians 5 tells us that marriage is an illustration of the spiritual union between Christ and his Church. **So it's no stretch of the imagination to claim that the spiritual union shared between fellow Christians is fundamentally deeper than the biological connection between parent and child or between fellow siblings.**
    - The world understands why a mother would sacrifice her health and happiness for the sake of her children. That's part of the natural order of things. **But what the world finds surprising (and compelling) is when they see Christians do the same thing for other Christians they're not related to.**

- ❖ In John 13:35, Jesus said, “By this the world will know you are my disciples if you love them.” No, he didn’t say that. He said, “They’ll know you are my disciples *if you love one another.*” **In other words, our brotherly love for fellow believers is a more powerful gospel witness to a non-believer than even the neighborly love we try to show them.**
  - What that means is that this exhortation to continue in brotherly love is in no way encouraging an insular, self-serving mindset where Christians only care about each other and ignore the rest of the world. **No, Jesus told us to prioritize our brotherly love for each other because that’s how we proclaim a powerful and compelling gospel witness to the watching world.**
- ❖ And there are two practical ways to continue in brotherly love. **The first is to show hospitality.** Look at v2, “*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*” Understand that, in those days, travel was a dangerous prospect. But according to the book of Acts and Paul’s letters, Christian leaders and missionaries had to travel quite a bit between cities visiting churches. They didn’t have Comfort Inns. That’s why hospitality was so important.
  - **And the point is that your hospitality becomes a beautiful act of brotherly love when you show it to a fellow Christian – who otherwise would be a perfect stranger to you.** You see, it’s normal to show hospitality to a friend. But to a stranger – to open your home to someone you have no previous connection with besides your shared connection to Christ – that’s a surprising (yet again compelling) act of love. That’s why hospitality was highly valued as a Christian virtue. Why it was a key qualification for who could serve as a church elder (1 Tim 3:2).
- ❖ Now that intriguing mention of possibly entertaining angels unawares, that’s a biblical reference to the stories in Genesis when both Abraham and Lot showed hospitality to strangers who turned out to be angelic messengers. Let’s not rule out that possibility in our day. Since, as biblical Christians, we believe in angels as much as the OT saints did.
  - But I don’t think the point is that we should be hoping, each time we have people over, that maybe one of them is an angel in disguise. **The point is that you never know the impact a simple act of hospitality might have.** You might consider it a small deed, but you never know who you’re blessing and what kind of impact it has.
- ❖ Church, let brotherly love continue among us by practicing hospitality. And by that I don’t just mean hosting more socials or parties. **Christian hospitality is not about entertaining guests. It’s about meeting practical needs.** It’s about opening up your home (your personal space) to bless others without concern of what they might be able to do for you in return.
  - **I encourage you to make a point of showing hospitality to someone who is probably not in a position to reciprocate.** Invite some college students over when the holidays roll around. Or some new immigrants or refugees. Those who have little to offer you but who have big needs that you might be able to meet.

- ❖ **And another group of believers who are in dire need but have no way to reciprocate your kindness would be those in prison.** That's the second practical way to continue in brotherly love – to care for those in prison. Look at v3, *“Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.”*
  - **The author has in mind fellow believers who were persecuted for their faith and are currently imprisoned.** He already alluded to them back in chapter 10:34. There he commended his readers for their compassion. For being willing to associate with fellow believers in prison through their regular visitations.
- ❖ Which, in those days, was essential to your survival in prison. Roman authorities weren't going to provide you the necessary food, clothing, or bedding. **Prisoners were largely dependent on family and friends to supply their needs.** So, back then, it wouldn't be that hard to feel *“as though in prison with them.”* Because caring for them required visiting so often you were practically in prison with them.
  - **And because this kind of brotherly love was so visible, everyone would know that you too are a Christian.** That perhaps you belong in prison as well. There was a risk involved in caring for fellow believers in prison. Again, the author already alluded to it back in chapter 10 when he mentioned how their property was plundered because they were willing to associate with those in prison. But they joyfully accepted the cost because they were operating out of brotherly love.
- ❖ Now I realize we may not share the same context as the original audience of Hebrews. You may not personally know any believers wrongly imprisoned for their faith so you have no one to visit. **Our circumstances might be different, but the principles are the same. The principle here is that we're part of the same body of Christ, part of the same spiritual family.** When one part of the body suffers, the whole body suffers together (1 Cor 12:26).
  - So brotherly love continue among us when we're willing to care for fellow believers even when it costs us. It could cost you materially (financially), or it could impact your reputation. Even if it costs you, will you continue in brotherly love?

### Continue in Personal Holiness

- ❖ So that's the first application that concludes this ancient sermon. **A second application is to persevere in the faith by continuing in personal holiness.** This is emphasized in vv4-6 where the author addresses the topics of marriage and money. Which, at first, might seem like a sudden pivot, but those topics are actually related to the letter's overall theme. **Two of the biggest reasons why people fail to persevere and eventually fall away from the faith have to do with marriage and money.** Namely, because of sexual sins and greed.
  - **So the first exhortation is to honor marriage.** Listen to v4, *“Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”* **In other words, Christians are to have a high and honorable view of marriage.** The term “to honor” means to consider something exceptionally valuable and highly prized. It's the same word Peter used to describe the *“precious [honored] blood of Christ”* (1 Pet 1:19)

- ❖ It's clearly something you hold in high esteem. **So in our case, for marriage to be “held in honor among all,” it means that all of us cherish the institution as something precious and valuable.** But in our day and age, sadly, this is not the case. **Many people today carry a low view of marriage. Even those in the church.** It's seen as merely a human arrangement to which one is bound so long as your feelings stay the same. But if feelings falter or fade, then marriage partners are considered free to pursue other arrangements. How did we get here? **How did marriage decline so drastically from its elevated status in our society?**
- ❖ **Because many husbands and wives have not kept the second command in v4, “Let the marriage bed be undefiled.”** That is, undefiled by sexual immorality or adultery, as the verse goes on to say. When individual couples fail to keep their vows and the purity of their union – and when this becomes a larger societal trend – a value shift takes place among all of us, diminishing the institution of marriage in the eyes of all.
  - So now, sex outside the bounds of marriage is normalized. Adultery is considered justifiable. That's where we've shifted. Where we've landed in our culture. But God hasn't moved. As v4 says, he will still “*judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.*”
- ❖ I realize that's one of the most unpopular things you can say today. Many people find it outrageous. **Considering all the brokenness and violence in this world, doesn't God have bigger concerns on his mind than what goes on in the privacy of our bedrooms?**
  - But that assumption fails to consider the fact that marriage is a sign of the gospel. As we noted earlier, marriage is a picture of the exclusive, enduring, covenantal love between Christ and the Church. **Which means there's a good, gospel reason why God cares about your marriage bed.**
- ❖ And so should you. **If you care about the gospel witness displayed through marriage beds marked by exclusive, enduring, covenantal love – then make every effort to keep your marriage bed undefiled.** For married couples, that means pursuing sexual faithfulness. And for singles, sexual purity. And do it – not just for the health of your (future?) marriage – but because it's your small part in preserving the sanctity of marriage as an institution. That it might be held in honor among all. Especially among all in the church. To lessen the impact sexual sin and marital infidelity has had on people falling away from the faith.
  - Now before we move on, a quick word. I do want to stress what the Bible says – that God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. But I don't want to leave you with the impression that there's no forgiveness for such sins. **All of this must be understood in light of the bigger theme regarding the High Priestly work of Christ.** And the good news that forgiveness is always available to anyone who repents and turns to the shed blood of Christ for the atonement of their sins.
- ❖ **Now keep reading in v5, and we'll see a second exhortation to reject the love of money.** “*Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have.*” **This is a warning against greed and the love of money.** Which would be a relevant issue for the original audience, since they were being persecuted and having their possessions plundered.

- ❖ So they were facing financial hardships. Hardships that could easily go away if they would just abandon their faith and return to the synagogue. That's why the author exhorts them to be content with what they have and to steer clear from the love of money.
  - **I think it's important to note that he's not warning against the dangers of money.** Money is not the root of all evil. No, Scripture says, "*the love of money is the root of all evil.*" (1 Tim 6:10) Money is not evil. **Money is what we call an instrumental good.** That means it's supposed to be an instrument or tool that you can use to do a lot of good. **But when you fall in love with money, you start treating it as an intrinsic good.** It's no longer an instrument or tool to accomplish good. It becomes a good. It becomes a goal, in and of itself. That's when money is turned into an idol.
- ❖ **That's when we're no longer putting our hope and security in God but in how much money we have stored away.** That's why the author follows up the exhortation to keep free from the love of money with a powerful promise from God. Look back at v5, "*for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'*" *6So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'*"
  - **Again, having money is not the problem. The problem is loving money.** The problem is putting your trust and contentment in money. Because it means you're no longer putting it in God and his promise to never leave you nor forsake you.
    - Just ask yourself, "Why do I have the instinctive urge to save my money?" Am I doing it out of fear? Out of insecurity? Because I fear that maybe God just might forsake me. That he might leave me wanting.
- ❖ **Perhaps this is where you need the living and active Word of God, sharper than any two-edged sword, to do its work of exposing, in your heart, any trace of discontentment or disbelief.** Confess to the Lord. Confess your discontentment. Confess your disbelief in his promises. And ask him to help you. To help you believe. To believe that he'll never leave you in wanting or forsake you in times of need.
  - **Ask the Lord to help you believe he's the highest intrinsic good and that the money he entrusts to you is an instrument you can use to serve and do good.** Brothers and sisters, if your heart's desire is to persevere in the faith, then continue in your pursuit of personal holiness, especially when it concerns marriage and money.

### **Continue in Step with your Leaders**

- ❖ Let's consider the final application in this ancient sermon – **to persevere in the faith by continuing in step with your leaders.** That's what's stressed in vv7-17. Look at v7, "*Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.*"
  - The author doesn't use the words for *overseer* or *elder*. He uses the more generic term *leader*. But since he's referring to "*those who spoke to you the word of God,*" we know he has pastors and elders in mind. **Specifically, he's saying to remember your former leaders who have since died and gone to be with the Lord.** That's why you can consider the outcome of their way of life. They've already finished the race.

- ❖ Whether these particular leaders died of natural causes or because of persecution, the main point is to remember – not just their teaching – but their way of life. And then to imitate them, especially their perseverance in the faith, even in the face of hardship and persecution.
  - **Now he already provided a whole chapter of faith leaders for us to remember, to consider, and to imitate.** That was Hebrews 11, the biblical Hall of Faith. But I'm sure each of us have personal heroes of the faith to look to. Family or friends or church leaders that fought the good fight and finished the race. Be encouraged as you consider the outcome of their way of life. And strive to imitate their faith.
  
- ❖ But I know that can feel daunting. It feels hard to imitate their faith since they lived in a different time, in a different context, with very different challenges than you. And that might be true. **But no matter how different your circumstances may be, the point is that you're trusting in the same Jesus.** That's why the author goes on to say in v8, "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*"
  - **The same Jesus of yesterday that your former leaders followed and imitated is the same Jesus of today.** And that same Jesus who sustained them through their hardships is the same Jesus available to you. Who will help you persevere through your own unique set of challenges.
  
- ❖ And then later on, in v17, the author draws attention – not to leaders in the past – but to leaders in the present who are watching over our souls. "*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*"
  - **Here he's talking about the actual pastors and elders in your church.** Those of us who have been called and appointed to this task. Who will have to give an account to the Lord for how we watched over your soul. The author is exhorting readers to obey their pastors and elders.
  
- ❖ But, as a pastor, I want to be the first to say that submission to your leaders is *not* absolute. Keep it within the context of Hebrews. **You obviously shouldn't submit to any leader whose life or teaching ends up deviating from Christ and his gospel.** So put positively, if you continue submitting to your gospel-centered, gospel-preaching leaders, then that's a good sign that you yourself haven't deviated from the gospel. That you're persevering in the faith.
  - And notice how your obedience enables your leaders to lead with joy and without groaning. Look at the end of v17. And let's be clear, our joy is not in getting to get our way all the time. **No, a true shepherd's joy is in the sheep's perseverance. And it's to the sheep's advantage to have joyful shepherds watching over them.** So it's a win-win for everyone when shepherds and sheep are all holding fast to Jesus – the Great Shepherd of the Sheep (v20) – and all persevering in the faith.
  
- ❖ **Now that mention of our Great Shepherd draws attention to the One Leader we simply have to continue in step with.** Look at the text starting in v9. The author is exhorting his readers, once again, not to abandon Jesus and revert back to Judaism and temple worship.

- ❖ He says don't be led astray by anyone encouraging you to offer food sacrifices on the altar again. **You have a better altar. In the shape of a cross.** Upon which Jesus offered his body as a sacrifice for sin. For your sins and mine.
  - In v11, the author alludes to how, in the sacrificial system, the animal's blood would be poured out on the altar. But the animal's body would've been burned outside of the camp. That was intentional. **Because being cast outside the camp symbolized being rejected by God.** So by burning the sacrifice outside the camp, it symbolized God's rejection falling on the people's substitute. **The substitutionary animal was rejected outside the camp so that God's people can stay inside the camp and be near him.**
  
- ❖ In the same way, Jesus was cast out of the camp. He suffered outside the gates of Jerusalem. Look at v12, *"So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood."* He took upon himself the divine rejection that we deserve. **Jesus was rejected outside the city so you could stay inside and be sanctified. So you can experience God's nearness and acceptance.**
  - In light of that gospel truth, the author exhorts us v13, *"<sup>13</sup>Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. <sup>14</sup>For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come."*
    - He knows his readers were tempted to figuratively stay within the camp of Judaism. To identify with a worshipping community that was welcomed and acceptable to the larger society. That's why he challenges them to go outside the camp, continuing in step with Jesus.
  
- ❖ **Jesus was willing to take on the reproach and rejection of God for you. Are you willing to take on the reproach and rejection of man for him?** That's the big question. Are you willing to persevere in the faith even when it's hard, even when it costs you?
  - If you're his follower, continuing in his steps, then you have no reason to expect peace and acceptance in the city of man. **You should be fixing your eyes on the coming city of God.** And until that city comes, keep trusting in the God of Peace who will *"equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."* (v21)