

Great God

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[0 : 00] Now, like if you turn back with me this morning and come with me on this journey into the Book of Hebrews, some regard it as a difficult book, but it's a wonderful book and it will help us to understand the Bible much more clearly.

So I want to ask the question by way of introduction, why Hebrews? Why have I chosen to take this book to look at over the next number of Sunday mornings, God willing?

Partly because it will help you and help me to make more sense of the Bible. It will really encourage us in our understanding of God's Word because there's a great linking between Hebrews in the New Testament and between the Old Testament and particularly the early books of the Old Testament and especially Leviticus.

And so I would ask you if you have time in the next few weeks and months, as we're looking at Hebrews, will you please take the time in your own private lives to read Leviticus?

Because probably sooner rather than later because if you read Leviticus, which is a difficult book to understand, then Hebrews will make more sense and then Leviticus will make more sense as well.

[1 : 19] So do take time to read Leviticus because it will help you understand Hebrews. And in looking at Hebrews, we will find how important the Old Testament is to our understanding of Jesus.

We're disciples of Jesus. We're followers of Jesus. We call ourselves Christians because we follow Christ and therefore we are hungry to learn and know more about Jesus Christ.

And we are leaving out a vast swathe of biblical truth if we don't go to the Old Testament because it also teaches us about Jesus and it points towards Jesus and it will help us understand even the cross of Jesus Christ much better.

Please don't be the kind of Christian that leaves the Old Testament shut. Just be New Testament Christians because it will be kind of, our understanding of Jesus will be one-dimensional.

We will not have a three-dimensional, deep and insightful understanding of this great and wonder who is our Savior. So we're looking at Hebrews.

[2 : 25] We don't know who the author of Hebrews is. The Bible doesn't tell us and I'm not going to speculate on that. But ultimately it's the Holy Spirit. And so the Holy Spirit gives us this book and he's going to teach us about Jesus Christ.

And another reason that I've chosen it is because it was written to a people who were going backwards. Now I'm not suggesting for a moment that we are a people going backwards, but let me explain what I mean.

This was written to Jewish Christians, people who were brought up in the Jewish faith who had come to understand and accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

It may have been the Hellenistic Jews that are referred to in Acts 6 and 7. It's not clear. But nonetheless, in coming to faith in Jesus Christ, it became very difficult for them to live their lives. They were rejected by other Jewish friends in many ways for accepting Jesus Christ. They were often ostracised, they would have lost their jobs, and they were persecuted in the Greek and Hellenistic world in which they lived.

[3 : 30] And so the writer is writing to them because they were beginning to lose confidence in Jesus Christ. They'd made a great start and then they were beginning to just drift back and beginning to move back into kind of their old ways of Judaism and their rituals because they found security there and they've kind of got help there.

But they were struggling because they were lacking confidence in Christ. And at best they were, what could we say, treading water, if you can ever tread water spiritually because you tend to always be going backwards.

But they weren't progressing in their faith and they were struggling in their faith because there was so much opposition and they were isolated, they were islands as believers.

Now we can often be in that similar circumstance in the world in which we live today because it's a world in which Christianity isn't popular and where there's a great deal of opposition towards Christ and a great deal of philosophical atheism that's coming into the world in which we live, which makes it unacceptable in the eyes of the world to live and follow and believe in and serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

So there's always a temptation for us, especially when we're hearing it all the time, to lack confidence in Jesus Christ, to begin to stop believing His promises, to not consider them, to maybe just tread water and say, well, I'll just use this as an insurance policy and hope that it is true and that one day I'll get to heaven.

[5 : 00] But just now it's tremendously difficult. I'm just going to hang on in there and I'm not really going to progress and grow and trust and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ fully and have confidence in Him and believe in Him.

And that will always lead, you may say, well, I don't do that, I don't think like that, but it will always lead to a lack of prayer. If you don't have confidence in Jesus Christ, you don't believe His promises, you'll not pray for these promises to be fulfilled.

If you don't believe in His strength and in His courage and in His glory, then you'll not pray for Him, pray to Him for His guidance and wisdom and forgiveness. So an evidence of maybe thinking like that will be if our lives are prayerless or becoming prayerless.

If we're praying less than we used to, if we're less dependent, it shows a lack of confidence that we don't really believe. It's okay for a minister to believe, it's okay for one or two others to believe, but I'm struggling to believe in my life.

He doesn't know what I'm going through and that may well be the case. But God knows and this is written to people who are struggling, which to a greater or lesser degree we all are.

[6 : 13] So it's going to be a relevant book for us. And why then have I entitled it a better country? I've entitled this series a better country because that's the theme.

That's the theme throughout the book. The theme is the supremacy of Jesus Christ. The writer is taking the Old Testament and he's saying, look, don't go back into that ritualistic way because in the New Covenant what is much better is Jesus Christ.

He is far better and he speaks throughout the book. That's what he's doing. He wants you and he wants me to know a better Christ. So we'll have greater confidence in him and so we will serve him and understand him and worship him more.

And it uses that term a lot. It talks about a better hope, a better covenant, better promises, a better resurrection, a better plan. And Hebrews 11, 16, a better country.

It talks about Abram looking forward to a better country, a country not his own. And it's speaking about the future. It's speaking about heaven.

[7 : 23] It's speaking about our home. And so the whole theme is that having that perspective and having that vision of a better future. And obviously within that Christ is the focus.

He is something better. Absolutely. He's the best. And he must be in and we want him to be in our understanding and our insight. We want him to be the best to know him better.

And particularly so that when you're in dark places in your life you will have confidence in him, that you will be able to trust in him, that you'll be able to share your faith in him, that when you can't see the way forward, he knows the way forward.

He loves you and he will take you through that to that better place. That you will pray more and I will pray more, that we will serve him better.

And that we will encourage us when we're tempted to give up and walk away for there is nothing but darkness away from Jesus Christ. So I would ask that you pray for the Holy Spirit to be with you as we go through this series, that he will inspire you, that he will teach you, that he will guide you and me, that we will appreciate grace more and that we will come from this having that something better, that we will have a something better understanding of Jesus, that we will know him and love him and serve him.

[8 : 51] Not just for the hour that we're together but as we walk from here as we live our lives, that he will be for us something better. Now to the introduction that I want briefly to look through.

I want you to hold on here to your seats because this is a ripping start to a book. If you like the Olympics, if you like sport then you may know about Usain Bolt, the greatest 100 meter sprinter that ever lived as far as we know.

And he is fast but he always is amazing. He could be even faster because he has a kind of Caribbean beginning to his 100 meters.

He kind of loops out of the starting, not quite but he's a slow starter, he's renowned for being a bad starter. He's usually within the last 40 meters that he begins to power past everyone, slow starter. Now it's 2012, some of you guys might be slow starters. Might struggle with an 11 o'clock beginning to the service and being prepared spiritually for worshiping.

[9 : 57] But this is not a slow start book. We don't have a long kind of introduction to the gospel setting the scene. We go straight into it, it's a wonderful start and we have an amazing inspiration from God to tell us about Jesus.

And he is reminding us right from the very beginning that Christianity is completely unique because every other religion is wrestling with trying to reach up to God and to make peace with God and to please God and to make our efforts to go towards him.

And the writer to the Hebrews is making absolutely clear from the very beginning that this is God's work. God starts the work. God begins, God speaks in the Old Testament, God sends his son, God breaks into our silence and into our darkness and into our lostness with his gospel and with his salvation because we can't take the first step.

We can't reach up to God. We've tried it from the dawn of time when they tried to build a tower that would reach up to heaven. It can never be done.

We can't go that way. God reaches down to us, he takes the first step. God is not, can I say very strongly today because we fall into this, God is not our idea.

[11 : 23] God is not our idea. God is God and he breaks into our life to reveal himself to us. God is not someone we can tinker with in some kind of way so that we will like him and he'll be our puppy dog.

He is God and he is God who speaks to us, who is real and who is not up for debate and the Holy Spirit wants to make that very clear at the beginning of Hebrews in the past.

God spoke to us through our forefathers and through the prophets and in many times in various ways then he spoke to us through his Son. So God speaks.

So if you have any reason for opening up the Old Testament, it's because God speaks in it. God speaking in the Old Testament. Don't close the Old Testament because we think it's the Old Covenant, it's out of date and it's just all about Jesus.

God speaks in the Old Testament and he's preparing the Old Testament people and us to know, to understand more about him and to present Jesus to us so that in the right time Jesus comes.

[12 : 29] So God in the Old Testament, he does speak and it's his word. It's not that the Old Testament contains some words of Jesus. It is the word of God and it's spoken into real lives, to real communities and into real cultures, very different from our own which of course makes it sometimes difficult to understand because God accommodated into different cultures and God used people from different cultures to proclaim his word into their situations which weren't like 21st century Edinburgh, which were very different.

So we have to wrestle with that and we have to unpack that and we have to understand that but God speaks into these things and he speaks in small, sometimes large but in progressive steps in many times and in various ways.

Sometimes with, well always with great variety. He spoke in terms of law and then he would spoke in terms of narrative and in history and then in prophecy and in poetry and in all kinds of different ways and we need to wrestle with that.

Well what is this part of the word? And what is God saying? And why is he saying it? And why does he need to say it? And what does it say about Jesus? And how does it help us to prepare for Jesus coming?

So God spoke in all of these old ways, building truth, making us ready to receive Jesus. So please don't close the Old Testament as an irrelevance, it may be difficult in many places but it is God's word and he spoke through our forefathers in that way.

[14 : 06] But then we are told that he goes on to speak through his Son and these days he has spoken to us by Son and that is what this is all about.

This book of Hebrews is all about the preeminence of the Son, of Jesus Christ, how important he is, how everything points towards it. Hebrew people, Jewish people, don't go back to the rituals now that you have come to understand Jesus.

Don't go back there because it is all about Jesus Christ. It is all about the Son. Don't go back to sacrifices. It is worthless. Understand who Jesus Christ is because it is all about Jesus Christ. He is God's final word. And so we have this incarnate word in the beginning was the word, the word was with God, the word was God. The word becomes flesh.

So we have this final word of God to us and it is in the person of Jesus Christ. So you can maybe say the Old Testament is verbal.

[15:07] God speaks to his people. The New Testament is verbal and visual. God speaks to us through Jesus. And Jesus speaks to us. So it is verbal but it is also visual.

So people say, and I have said this so many times here, haven't I? What is God like? Well we look at Jesus because Jesus is God. And so we have God revealing Himself to us in the person of Jesus.

And we have here a beautiful summary, very short summary of how great Jesus is and who He is. And let us remember these things because it is speaking about, can I say again, the preeminence of Jesus.

Is your Jesus small? Have you shrunk Him over the years? Have I shrunk Him? Does He fit into our back pocket? Do we not pray to Him? Are there other people far more important to us than Jesus? Including ourselves usually. How small is He? Are we allowing Him to be preeminent? This is about His preeminence. And we are given various things here that tell us about how preeminent He is.

[16:08] Spoken to His by His Son, whom He appointed, heir of all things. He is heir of all things. Now I am going to come back to this, all things. He is not just heir of the church in a Sunday morning. He is not just heir of some other people now and again.

He is not just heir in my brain and in my mind, in my thinking. My understanding, He is heir of all things. And it comes up again, all things. It is very important. Through redemption and by right Jesus and by victory on the cross, Jesus owns this universe.

He is the heir to this universe. He has defeated evil which came in as a cancer to attempt the destruction of this universe and the people made in God's image.

But on the cross He defeated that. And one day it will be expunged. It will be taken from this universe and Christ is the inheritor of all things.

This is His world. And the amazing thing of Romans 8 says, what does Romans 8 say? You are joint heirs with Christ.

[17:16] That means in Christ we all inherit this universe. But one day there will be the expulsion of evil entirely and we will belong with Him in this.

So have you come today with an ever shrinking, smaller idea of salvation, struggling with how difficult it is, with how far Jesus Christ seems away, how futile His promises appear and yet He is saying here, look, you are a joint heir with me of all things.

You will inhabit this future with me. This is not pie in the sky when you die. Steak on a plate.

Well, whatever it is, I forgot it. Well, you wait. It's a number and we know that this is important truth, not just for the future but for our understanding today of the privilege of being Christians, of where we're taken as being Christians into this place of great privilege.

Our salvation isn't a small thing. He is heir of all things, we are joint heir with Him. Then He says, through whom He made the universe.

[18:32] What is our Jesus like? Because Christ is here described as God's creative agent, this vast, unfathomably complex and ordered universe that can't be understood for its size and magnitude and complexity and beauty and distance and height and depth and everything else was spoken into existence by Jesus Christ.

And I think we prefer Him as a carpenter rather than a creator. We can understand Him as a carpenter. That's absolutely right. That's what God has done.

He has revealed Jesus Christ in the flesh. But don't forget in the flesh what He emptied Himself of and why He humbled Himself of in becoming a redeemer. He is the Creator, God through whom the Father, the agent through which, the person through which He created this universe.

He is power and strength and creativity beyond our understanding and often beyond our requesting when we say, I've prayed to Jesus and He hasn't answered my prayer.

Or this is too big a problem for Jesus. Jesus can't possibly deal with this because He's no longer a creator. He's only a carpenter. But Jesus Christ in all His glory which He emptied Himself of to be a redeemer, as He was nailed to the cross, He was able to understand and break down the DNA of the wood on that cross because He was the Creator, God.

[20 : 07] And yet He allowed Himself to be nailed to it on our behalf, to be a redeemer, to be our savior which we will come and see. So He's this great, creative God.

And He is the divine Son of God spoken of here. The Son is there. How can you unpack these words? The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His power forward.

The radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of the being. Words can't say more clearly, this is God. This is not just a child of God. This is not just an offspring of God.

This is God. This is God in the flesh. This is God who is separate from God the Father, but who is at one in essence with God the Father, absolutely and entirely and clearly the teaching of the New Testament.

And in Colossians 2 and verse 9 we have these words, for in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form. Amazing statement of who Jesus Christ is.

[21 : 19] Christ who is not made, but Christ who has always been and Christ who is the Son of God, God with us. It's that great Emmanuel principle again, isn't it? That Jesus comes, we saw that in looking at Moses and the temple and God living in the temple, the Emmanuel principle.

I was pointing forward to Jesus being the one who is with us and in His glory is God. Now we know that in the New Testament His glory is hidden, isn't it?

We don't see it. It trickles, maybe it's not the right word. It pours out at the mount of transfiguration physically where the light and the glory of Jesus is made known to those who were there.

But generally His magisterial glory is hidden, but we do see glimpses of it, don't we? We see it in the amazing washing of the disciples feet as the great act of Christian service is what He wants for His people.

That's the understanding of God and the understanding of grace. We see it in His walking on the water. We see it in His forgiving sins. I forgive you, clearly taking the authority Himself.

[22 : 30] We see it in His raising the dead. We see it on the cross when He declares, not Satan, when He declares for all His people, it is finished.

He's done the work. He's completed salvation. We see that. And He is the exact representation. This is what God is like.

Our God is a God who has nails in His hands and feet, who does wash the disciples' feet, who isn't afraid of exposing sin, but who will say, I forgive you when people come to Him, who highlighted hypocrisy within the religious elite, and who wasn't afraid to expose the needs and the realities of the blackness of human hearts, but who single-mindedly can come into this world to destroy the cancer of sin before it destroys humanity.

Only Jesus Christ can do that. Only God can do that. And so if you have a small Christ, as we all do to one degree and another, we've lost sight of the fact that what He did then was once for all the only way that we could know a relationship with Him and know the cancer of sin which destroys every single human being and replace with the principle of life and the Holy Spirit that He gives. So He's the Son of God, a couple of things just as we close. He's also the one who is sustaining all things. The exact same thing we do, sustaining all things by His powerful word.

[24 : 22] Sustaining all things. You always know in the Bible when things are repeated they're important. It's already talked about all things. We need to be reminded again of the all things.

Do we believe that? Do you believe that? Because that takes you down a road of struggle if you believe it. But that's what the Bible says. Do you believe all things?

Do you believe He's allowed a terrorist to wake up this morning and do His work? Do you believe that? Or a murderer to do His work? He's sustaining that person, allowing that to happen.

Do you believe that? Do you believe His sovereignty and the mystery of responsibility within that that doesn't take away from the individual's responsibility to do right, but that God is over all of these things?

Because if He's not, He can't be Lord. Because if He's not, someone else is over all these things. And it must be Satan. So God in the mystery of His own purposes is allowing this world with the defeated but yet not destroyed evil in it for a purpose, but one day it will end.

[25 : 29] One day there will be no more acts of terrorism. One day there will be no rapes and murders and killings and abuse and jealousy and greed and envy. One day we will not struggle anymore because He sustains all things by His authoritative word.

And He is heir of all things and will bring us home. How small is your Jesus today and mine? You see, the sustainer of all things.

Did you? Did you fall on your knees when you got up this morning to thank Him that you're alive? He's given you today. He may not give you tomorrow or me. He's given you today all things. He sustains your life today. We are not self-sustaining batteries that have the right to get up every day.

He sustains and allows all things. Everything in life, every scientific decision, every act of the universe, every atom that is explored and investigated and new things are found in this universe.

[26 : 35] Everything He sustains, He keeps it going. He's the source of life. He is life. He is life. And our danger is compartmentalizing Him to five minutes of our day or one hour of our worship because He's small.

He's not the sustainer of all things. I'm the sustainer of all things. I live my own life. I make my decisions. And He says, no. I am.

That's why He's so great. But He's even greater. Why? Because after He had provided purification for sins, He sat down.

So there's all things God. There's great God, the sovereign God. This Old Testament revealed God in Christ on a tree as our redeemer.

He offered purification for sins to the Father. That's why you'll find Leviticus helpful. The language there will be helped to be understood when we know a little bit more about the Old Testament's sacrificial system because it points towards Jesus.

[27 : 46] He comes to offer humanity purification, cleansing from sin. No one else can do it. Do you know anyone else can do it?

You and anyone else that can be right with God, can make themselves right with God? Is it not right that God is telling us and showing us the way to be right with Him?

Does He not know that? And not only does He not know that, but does He not provide the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world in love and in grace because we can't do it ourselves.

The only hope for your life and my life is purification from sins that comes through Jesus Christ.

And we praise and thank Him for that today. That's why we celebrate the Lord's Supper, maybe we don't celebrate it enough. Certainly should think about it a lot.

[28 : 45] And it shouldn't become passe to us, yeah, yeah, I've moved on beyond that. I'm into the deep things of God. There's nothing deeper than the cross. There's nothing more significant and important than the cross.

If you've moved on to the deeper things of God, you're in great danger of being a hypocrite because there are no deeper things in the cross. And that's where we find purification for sins. That's where we need to fall at.

The fruit of every day of our lives. And appreciate we are more wicked than we ever imagined and more loved than we could ever dream of. And that is the reality of an incarnate God, God who comes and dies on a cross to buy us back.

This God, all things, sustains all things, Creator of all things. He goes on Calvary's hill on a cross and is derided and spat on and mocked and abused and rejected for you and for me.

How serious is our understanding of sin? If we sin lightly, everything, it doesn't matter. Do we appreciate that the all things God was nailed to the cross?

[30 : 03] Because it was the only way to set us free. And we skip around in the garden of sinful pleasure, thinking sometimes, well, what the heck?

God's forgiven us anyway in Christ. And yet He wants us to walk in the meadows of His grace in gratitude and in love for what He's done for us.

And lastly, and I'm not going to say anything about this because there's a section in the questions that we'll deal with it in more detail, which we can discuss, that He provided purifications of sin and sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

So Jesus is enthroned. And that's what often it speaks about in the Bible about Jesus being the firstborn of God or the one who is enthroned in heaven. And it's because of His work of redemption that He has given this amazing place of honour by the Father in all the mystery of that.

And the various references to it in the New Testament, which we find difficult because, you know, that whole idea of being enthroned, we are a, you know, we still understand the reality of a king and queen and enthronement, but it's kind of not that maybe important to us that we don't understand because it's slightly different in our political situation.

[31 : 28] But for the Jewish reader and for us spiritually, it means that He has given the place of honour, the place of authority, the place of rest His work is done, and also the place of interceding. Romans 8 speaks about that, that this sovereign God, the Son, prays for you.

Now I know, because pastorally it's the most important thing that people receive from anyone. It's when people say, I'm praying for you.

The most important thing I receive by way of encouragement from anyone is when they say, hey, I'm praying for you. I've remembered you today. Sometimes when I haven't even remembered me, and I certainly haven't remembered me before God, someone else will say, look, you may be struggling, but I've been holding up your hands in prayer today.

That is ultimately precious and encouragement for any Christian to have that. But to know that God in Jesus is interceding for us, for me, for you.

Nobody knows about us, but God, the Son, is praying for you and interceding for you before the Father in the mystery of the Trinity and in the mystery of His providence. That's what He does.

[32 : 54] His work is finished, but He is still serving in this amazing way of praying on your behalf. You realize that and what it means, follow it through in Romans 8.

Christ is intimately interested in your life and in mine. He's proved that with what He's done in the cross. He could have taken these nails and He could have turned them into wings and flown from that space because He knew people rejected Him, but in His perfect love and because He had your life and my life in before His eyes on the cross, He carried on and wouldn't even take a sip of wine to dull the sensation of the moment because He was alert into hell on our behalf so that we don't live and walk there. So may it be that we understand Jesus Christ.

I don't know what your need is today. I don't know what you think of Jesus Christ, some of you. I don't know how big or how small He is. As I say, as I look in the mirror I have to focus on what I think, but you have a responsibility before God and will face Him one day to allow today the Holy Spirit to speak to you and allow yourself to have a better understanding of Jesus Christ, to see Him as a better Savior, the only Savior, to commit your life to Him, not to fall back, not to give up, like these Jewish Christians were tempted to do in Hebrews, but to keep on keeping on and growing and maturing for Jesus Christ.

Pray about this series. It's really important because of the subject, the preeminence of Jesus. Pray that it will transform your life. We've lost 30 of our people to a new church.

Pray that it will transform our lives so that we will be motivated to pray and share the gospel with another 30 or another 60 so that you can do exceedingly above and beyond what we can ask and even think, to fill all these empty pews where the wind is just blowing around and the dust is just settling for God because He's given us, He's sustained us for another day and all things are His.

[35 : 24] I mean, let's pray briefly together. Lord God, help us to understand Your Word and help us to be filled with Your Holy Spirit and help us to learn the preeminence of Jesus. And I ask today particularly for forgiveness that we don't see the greatness of Jesus Christ and that we treat Him shabbily and drag Him into the gutter of our own failure and love for sin so often and our own pride and our own self-righteousness.

Take these things from us as we pray and help us to be enveloped in Your grace and in the glory of Your finished work and understand the motive of love that drove you to receive the nails into your hands and feet on our behalf and bear the wrath of God far greater than the physical pain, the wrath of God against sin.

So Lord God, help us to love You and serve You and worship You in spirit and in truth this day for Jesus' sake. We ask these things. Amen.