

30.1.08 Hebrews 1 to 13 midweekchurch Hebrew1-13(mid)

Often on a Sunday night, I come home exhausted. Usually I have led and preached at two or three worship services. Led a bible study. Run a youth group. Talked to people all day. And so by the time I come home at 8:00 or so on a Sunday night, I just want to relax and unwind.

Which is why one time I was so desperate that I watched a girls movie, *How to make an American Quilt*, with Winona Ryder. It must have been due to the fact that there was nothing much else on. Or maybe it was that Kaylene had shown an interest in seeing it, I'm not sure. But I remember a while back I watched this movie.

It was about four or five ladies who were making a quilt for their beds. But it wasn't just any old quilt it was a quilt where each patch of the patchwork depicted an episode of their lives. So as they sewed each patch they discussed what happened. As they moved on to the next patch they talked through the connections. And when they completed all the patches they sewed it all together while thinking through how their stories made sense, and how they were going to put this quilt, this collection of stories to good use.

Well I mention this because over the last couple of months, as we have been reading through the book of Hebrews, I believe we have been making a Hebrew's quilt. For chapter by chapter we have pondered and talked through what the writer has been saying and sought to apply it to our lives. It hasn't been a short letter, it hasn't been an easy letter but before we moved onto something else I wanted us to take one last look at this letter together. I wanted to sew it all together and give you something that I hope will be even more useful than it is right now.

But to do that I will need your help. I will need you to have the book of Hebrews open and I will need you to have your hearts open. For remember the first verses of the book of Hebrews started with a bang rather than a whimper. Look with me at 1:1, "*In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.*"

Right at the very beginning the preacher declares to us that **God speaks.**

God is not silent. God does not just make the world and let us be. God wants to communicate to us. To you and me. He has a message that is important. He has a plan and a purpose that he wants to tell us all about. We don't just have to work it out by starrng at the clouds. We don't have to do some scientific experiment to dissect the truth from the creatures that God has made and placed all around us. We don't have to use our vast intellect to deduce what God wants to say to us, for God has spoken.

In the past he has spoken in many and various ways by his prophets. The prophets were the greatest men of the Old Testament era and graciously God communicated to us through them. God spoke to Job out of a whirlwind, He spoke to Joseph in dreams. He spoke to Moses out of a burning bush. He spoke to Joshua through an angel. He spoke to Samuel through a voice in the darkness. He spoke to Elijah through a whisper. He spoke to Daniel through a vision. Throughout the OT God spoke and told

us what he was like and what he was doing.

But now, says the writer, God has spoken to us not in a dream or a vision, but in person — through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is God's final revelation. This message gives us the fullest idea of what He is all about. This is where we see the clearest teaching about God. It is in Jesus, the one who comes with God's own authority. The one who is the radiance of God's glory.

Friends the letter spells out clearly how God speaks to us. Not primarily through religion, not through science, not even through creation, it is through the prophets and then through Jesus. It is through the Bible. The Bible is a letter written to you and me, translated into our own native tongue, because God wants to speak to you. God thinks so highly of you, he wants to ensure that you know the truth.

So what truth does he want to speak to us about? Well he wants to tell us about **how great Jesus is.**

Jesus, being the Xerox, the photocopy, the exact representation of God, means he is God Himself. This Jesus is greater than the heavenly beings, greater than the angels for they actually worship Him, that's what chapter 1 is all about. This Jesus comes in the guise of a man, a great man, and through his suffering here on earth was declared to be perfect, and so is greater than any other human being that ever lived. That is what chapter 2 is all about.

He is even greater than Moses, the great OT leader and prophet because whereas Moses aim was to give God's people rest in the land of Canaan, the people's disobedience meant they never received that rest that they looked forward to. But Jesus is the one that gives *us* that rest, that eternal rest from both work and from the fight against sin. Jesus is the greatest because *through* Him God forgives us our wickedness and *in* Him God draws us back to Himself, that's what the first part of chapter 3 is all about.

Jesus is the greatest! Greater than any politician, leader, sporting hero. Greater than the philosophers, the thinkers, the religious leaders. For only he can purify us from our sin and reconnect us back to our Heavenly Father.

So, the writer warns, in 2:1, **listen to Jesus.**

“We must pay more careful attention, to what we have heard so that we don't drift away.” For if in the past God punished people when they ignored what the prophets said, how much more serious is it if we ignore what Jesus Christ says. If in the past God was angry when people decided to walk away from the prophets and do their own thing, how much worse will it be if we turn our back on the son of God who died on the cross to purchase our salvation?

Friends, this is not just Stephen Taylor speaking to you. The writer to the Hebrews says, this is God speaking to you. To us. Don't let your brain drift away. Don't mentally turn off and think through the week to come. Listen to Jesus. Look at Jesus. Ponder what Jesus did.

For that leads to the next part of our quilt. For this Jesus is **our great high priest**.

For someone has to be the mediator, between us and God. Someone has to be appointed by God to fulfil the OT regulations and hence fulfil man's side of the covenant. The problem is that Jesus isn't from the priestly line, the line of Aaron. He is from the kingly line, the line of Judah. So how can Jesus be a prophet, a king *and a priest*? Well he can be a priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Like Melchizedek He was appointed by God. Like Melchizedek He too can be a priest forever. He too was declared by God a priest by oath, by promise. Thus Jesus is the great priest from God, in that he never dies and he never sins himself, thus he is always available. Even now he is at the father's right hand side, interceding & praying for us. But not only is he a priest, he offers **a perfect sacrifice to God** on our behalf.

Not the blood of a bull or a goat or a bird, but his own blood. The blood of the perfect lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus himself gives up His life, His future, even His perfect relationship with God. He places these things on a Roman cross and sacrifices them to God on our behalf. This sacrifice, offered once for all means that the punishment for my sins and yours is paid. And the broken relationship between us and God is restored.

Don Robinson was a missionary to the cannibalistic, headhunting Sawi tribe of Irian Jaya, Indonesia. Try as he would, he could not find a way to make the people understand the gospel message, especially the significance of Christ's atoning death on the cross.

You see the Sawi villages were constantly fighting among themselves, and because treachery, revenge and murder were highly honoured there seemed no hope of peace. The tribe, however, had a legendary custom that if one village gave a baby boy to another village, peace would prevail between the two villages as long as the child lived. The baby was called a "peace child".

The missionary seized upon that story as an analogy of the reconciling work of Christ. Christ, he said, is God's divine Peace Child that He has offered to man, and because Christ lives eternally His peace will never end. That analogy was the key that unlocked the gospel for the Sawi's. In a miraculous working of the Holy Spirit many of them believed in Christ, and a strong, evangelistic church soon developed – and peace, both peace with God and with each other came to the Sawi's.

This is not easy teaching, but as Christians we have to ponder it, think it through and apply to it our lives. For the writer reminds us that we can't continue to be spoon fed **our milk**, we have to **go onto the real meat** of the word of God.

Too many Christians are spiritual infants, they want to keep sucking at the breast of the Bible, just concentrating on the simple truths, the easily digested teachings and never thinking through the hard issues. Some of us want to be continually spoon fed our faith, when its now time *for us* to start teaching these truths to others. Some of us are willing to rest on our laurels and remember what we did in the past for the Lord rather than let God's word speak to us again, change us and equip us for new avenues of service.

Today in much of Christianity we are looking for a deeper experience of God. We have the second blessings of the Pentecostals, the ritual of the Anglo Catholics, the deeper and secret truths of the cults, the vibrancy of modern worship. But we don't need a new experience, instead we need to draw near to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. We need to trust in what He has done, rather than look at what someone else is doing. John Stott, a prominent Christian spoke in Canberra last year. He asked: "*what is the greatest need of the church today?*" His answer was: "*the church needs a greater number of deep Christians – Christians that are not shallow nor superficial but deep and committed*".

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that this sort of teaching must change us, must mould us and make us into the image of Jesus. He sacrificed His life for us, so we should now live our lives for Him. But what does that mean in practise?

Well chapters 10 and 12 say that it means *hanging onto the hope* that God has placed within us. For the Christian life is not an easy life. At times it is just plain hard work. So at these times we need to lift our head up from the difficulties that surround us and look forward to the promises that God has for his people. The promises that he will give us the hope we need and that hope will enable us to endure to the end.

A number of years ago researchers performed an experiment to see the effect hope has on those undergoing hardship. Two sets of laboratory rats were placed in separate tubs of water. The researchers left the set in one tub in the water and found that within an hour they had all drowned. The rats in the other tub were periodically lifted out of the water and then returned. When that happened, the second set of rats swam for over 24 hours. Why? Not because they were given a rest, but because they suddenly had hope!

If we hang onto the hope that God offers us we will be able to endure anything this life throws at us. If we realise that God will lift us out of any hot water we find ourselves in then that will encourage us to keep on being faithful to the very end. For hope, this sort of hope leads to *faith*, or a greater trust in God's promises.

That's what chapter 11 was all about. Remember there we have that classic definition of faith, "*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*" Faith is not a vague, uneasy hope. Faith is not wishful thinking. The author of Hebrews says it's "being sure" and "certain" of things that *are not* visible to our eyes. Specifically, it is a confidence that God is true to his word. It's an assurance that Jesus death on the cross was sufficient to bring us our forgiveness and reconciliation with God. It is the firm conviction that we are participants in eternal life now because Jesus paved the way with his resurrection.

And it means that even if I don't get what God promises me in this life, then like Abraham and Noah and Moses and others before me, I will still keep trusting in God. I will still keep persevering in my faith. I will keep longing for a better country, a heavenly one, I will still keep my eyes on the city that God has prepared for me. And so I will not put down permanent roots here on earth. Instead I will hold onto all my possessions lightly. Because I don't want any of them to get in the way of what God offers me for the rest of eternity.

And that will lead to hope and faith and love.

Which is brilliantly described in chapter 13. I will share what I have with others. I will be hospitable with my home and possessions. I will be committed to others rather than just be committed to myself and my family. Why? Because God's love was so great for me, his sacrifice so amazing, that I want nothing more than to allow that love to wash all over me and rub off on all those around me.

A hospital visitor saw a nurse tending to the sores of a leprosy patient, and said, "I'd never do that for a million dollars!" The nurse answered, "*Neither would I, but I'd do it for Jesus for nothing.*" Remember Jesus has given us everything, the least we can do is to respond in love to the one we can't see, by loving the image of God in the people he has placed all around us.

So the writer is calling us to faith, hope and love. But he is aware, very aware that there are people in the Church who will fall away.

There are some whose lives have, bit by bit, drifted away from Jesus. There are others who have blocked their ears and have stopped paying attention. Others who have allowed their hearts to go astray. Even some who have grown weary and have lost heart and who have walked away from it all.

It's a real danger that is presented to us. Yes God chooses us. Yes God predestines us before the creation of the world. But only God knows who is predestined or not. The rest of us will see a constant stream of people who will sing with us, pray with us, work in the Church with us and then walk away from us. And more dangerously they will also walk away from Jesus.

So don't let this happen to you. Make sure we take hold of the teaching of the letter to the Hebrews. Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith. Have this hope as an anchor to your souls, so that it is always firm and secure.

And run with perseverance the race of life that is marked out before us. Corrie Ten Boom once said, "*If you look at the world, you'll be distressed. If you look within, you'll be depressed. But if you look at Christ, you'll be at rest.*" *It all depends on where you've got your eyes.*"

Where have you got your eyes upon? Whom are you looking to right now ??????

We can't change our past, it's gone. We are helpless to control the future, who knows what will happen to us around the corner. All we can do is live in the present. All we can do is make every effort to live in peace with all men and be holy. All we can do is worship God acceptably with reverence and awe. All we can do is have faith in Jesus and have hope in Him, and seek to love like Him.

Is that what you will do? Is that the legacy this letter will have for you? Or will you turn your back on God's voice and just go your own separate way? Dwight L. Moody: "*The world is yet to see what God can do through a few people who are totally sold out to him.*" Are we completely sold out to God or do we just give him our leftovers.

But as I conclude I want to leave you with just one further picture, a picture that I believe is very much in keeping with this great letter to the Hebrews. Many years ago John Bunyan wrote the classic book Pilgrim's Progress. Its all about the walk of faith from the city of destruction to the Celestial City. And at one time, the pilgrim named Christian is walking along the way with a friend called Interpreter. And they come to a wall where there is a fire blazing from a grate.

They look as a man is trying to douse the fire with water. Then Interpreter shows Christian the other side of the wall, where another man is secretly pouring oil on the fire to keep it ablaze. Interpreter says, "You saw the man standing behind the wall to maintain the fire, teaching you that it is hard for the tempted to see how this work of grace is maintained in the soul." Satan tries to quench faith, but Christ keeps it alive.

Friends as you make your progress as a pilgrim toward the heavenly city, always remember that Jesus will keep the fire of faith alive and well in your soul. He started it, he will maintain it. All he asks of you is to continue to rely upon it by feeding daily on His grace. Well you do that with me, this week and beyond? For if we do this quilt of the Hebrews will have become our quilt.