

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

In our growth groups we'll be finishing the year with 5 studies from chapters 1-4 of this incredible letter. January 2018 will see us in sermons only, working through to the end of chapter 6. In February, we'll move onto another series and probably come back to Hebrews throughout the year.

Hebrews is a magnificent letter, full of incredible promises for us as believers; promises, but also significant challenges. The author compels us to consider Jesus, his person and his work, and draws the comparison between the old and new covenants. We do not know the identity of the author nor the precise situation of those to whom he is writing. It would appear that they were being tempted to return to worshipping God according to the old covenant. This would result in Christ's person and work being undermined and them losing their salvation.

The readers were undergoing trials and thus the writer seeks to encourage them to steadfast courage to stand firm in the face of them. His appeal to them is based on a long and intricate doctrinal argument which at each step leads to a renewed warning. The theme of the letter is the absolute superiority of Christ.

The excellence or "betterness" of Christ is established with respect to angels, Moses, Joshua, Aaron and the levitical priesthood. Jesus was the mediator of a better covenant with a better sanctuary, ministry and sacrifice, opening up a better way to the presence of God. The fact of Jesus' "betterness" is mentioned 13 times in the book.

Peter Adam writes in his book, *The Majestic Son, Reading Hebrews today*,

Many have just had already drifted far outside of the Church of God, ranging in mood from pensive nostalgia for what they've lost, to aggressive demolition of the faith of those who remain Christians. Others are still members of churches, but only too well aware that their lives have become a sham and that they have lost the heart of the matter. Some slip away through the enticements of a secular society, some through frustration with their churches, others through busyness or apathy.

But Hebrews was written to stop that drift. It describes itself as a 'word of exhortation' or 'message of encouragement'....., and it's pastoral aim is to encourage people to stop moving away from Christian faith and practice. It does this by warning member of the dangers of rejecting God and by urging and hold fast to Christ God's Son and priest

So 'encouragement' in Hebrews is not just soft sympathy and understanding - it is encouragement which derives its strength and vibrancy from the character of the true and living God, and from the work of his Son Jesus Christ as our priest and saviour. It is powerful sympathy, because it both assures us of a clear understanding and gives us motivation and power to change. It is encouragement which is fully Christian, deeply theological and profoundly effective.

Series title: Anchor for the Soul

Possible series talk titles (NB No studies produced in January as groups generally don't meet) :

1. Hebrews 1:1-4 Jesus – God's final word to us [in his son]
2. Hebrews 1:5-2:9 Jesus – All subjected to him [listen]

- 3. Hebrews 2:10-18 Jesus – the pioneer of our salvation
- 4. Hebrews 3:1-18 Hold firmly to our confidence & hope in Jesus [hook/ issue - fear of death]
- 5. Hebrews 4:1-13 Rest with Jesus & striving to enter that rest

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- 6. Hebrews 4:14-16 Receiving mercy & grace
- 7. Hebrews 5:1-10
- 8. Hebrews 5:11-6:12
- 9. Hebrews 6:13-20

Hebrews Series			
Growth Group study (during week preceding sermon)	Other Event	Sermon Date (sunday)	Sermon
1. Hebrews 1:1-4 week (starting 13 November)			
	M. global partner visit 19-24 Nov	19 November	1. Hebrews 1:1-4
2. Hebrews 1:5-2:9 week (starting 20 November)			
		26 November	2. Hebrews 1:5-2:9
3. Hebrews 2:10-18 week (starting 27 November)			
	Canberra Bible Talks, AFES, 2-5 December	3 December (No evening church on 3rd due to Canberra Bible talks)	3. Hebrews 2:10-18
4. Hebrews 3 week (starting 4 December)	Carols - saturday 9 December		
		10 December	4. Hebrews 3
5. Hebrews 4:1-13 week (starting 11 December)			
		17 December	5. Hebrews 4:1-13

NB : We're not producing a study for the last talk of the Reformation series on "glory alone" as we'll be moving back to having the Hebrews studies in the week prior to the sermon.