

HEBREWS

THE DAILY DISCIPLINE OF A DEVOTED LIFE

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**26 UNDATED DEVOTIONS
THROUGH THE BOOK OF HEBREWS**

INTRODUCTION

‘Don’t give up!’ That is the message behind the letter to the Hebrews. It was written to a group of Jewish Christians who had left their Jewish heritage behind to follow Jesus, but they had begun to regret that decision. Judaism had centuries of tradition, a magnificent temple, and priests who wore splendid robes and offered sacrifices and incense. The Jewish temple was a spectacular sight.

By contrast these new Christians met together in humble home groups. They worshipped a Saviour they could not see, and were being severely persecuted by Jewish friends and relatives who believed they had betrayed their Jewish roots to follow a ‘sect’, a distortion of Judaism.

So the writer wants to encourage these Christians that what they have in Jesus is far greater than the Judaism they left behind. Jesus is greater than all the heroes of the Old Testament put together. He is greater than angels (ch. 1), greater than Moses (ch. 3), greater than Joshua (ch. 4), and greater than Aaron the priest (chs 5–10, the heart of the book). In fact all these Old Testament heroes and institutions are pointing to Jesus. Christ is the fulfilment of all the Old Testament was pointing to. To turn your back on Jesus is to reject the Son of God, the Saviour whose blood was worth more than all the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament put together.

‘Don’t give up on Jesus’ is a timely message for Christians today. We face an onslaught from atheists telling us our Jesus is make-believe and our scriptures are full of myths. We live in a world where what you can see and touch is all that matters, and it is difficult to live your life for an unseen Saviour.

But in the challenges we face as believers today Hebrews keeps telling us, ‘fix [your] eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith’ (Heb. 12:2). Walk by faith, not by sight. Jesus is God’s final word. He is the ruler over all creation. But he is not only God the Son, he is fully human. His blood rescues us from sin forever, and he sympathises with our frailties and weeps in our pain.

Christ is totally sufficient, not just to save you, but for every doubt, every failing, and every tear you shed. Following him will bring rejection today, yes, but glory tomorrow. So don’t give up. The best is yet to be!

I remember visiting the British Houses of Parliament a few years ago. They allowed me to sit in an upstairs gallery and view a debate in progress. I had been used to seeing on the television Prime Minister's Questions, when the atmosphere was electric, and every seat was taken. But on this quiet Wednesday afternoon there were about six MPs, who were almost lost in the giant halls, and were debating something about electricity prices. I enjoyed the visit, but this small group of MPs were a sideshow. The Prime Minister was the main event.

Hebrews opens with a bang as the writer tells his Jewish readers that their Old Testament heroes, the prophets, were actually a sideshow to the main event. They were important, but their value was in pointing beyond their own times to the coming of God's Messiah. And the decisive moment of God's salvation plan had now come.

Jesus of Nazareth was not just another prophet; he was and is God's Son, the 'exact representation of [God's] being' (v. 3). Like the image of the emperor stamped on Roman coins, God's character was so stamped on Jesus that to see him was really to see the Father – the God of Israel who appeared to Moses from a burning bush.

This Jesus is not just another Hebrew prophet. He is the one to whom all the prophets were pointing. He is the creator of the universe, and humanity's saviour. He came to shed his blood and provide purification for sin. Today he sits in heaven (v. 3) – the act of sitting showing that he has completed the work of redemption.

'Take the world, but give me Jesus' is how the hymn-writer Fanny Crosby put it. All God's plans for the whole of creation revolve around Jesus. He is worth every sacrifice it takes to follow him. Everything else in life is sinking sand compared to what Paul called 'the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ' (Phil. 3:8).

REFLECTION

Is there anything that matters more to you than Jesus? What other 'treasures' do you need to let go of to 'gain Christ'?

I believe in angels' sang the Swedish pop group Abba. For many today, angels are only the figment of an overactive imagination. But for the Old Testament Jews, angels were awesome beings who provoked fear in their hearts. Jewish tradition said it was angels who delivered the Ten Commandments to Moses at Sinai.

So it was a huge thing for the writer to say that Jesus is greater than the angels. But that is the theme of this amazing passage: Jesus is greater than angels:

- **In his identity.** Angels are 'servants' of God (v. 7), but Jesus is God's Son (v. 5). Before Jesus became human at Bethlehem, he enjoyed an eternal relationship with the Father. The writer calls Jesus the 'firstborn' (v. 6), which does not mean he was created, but that Christ rules over creation. Jesus is the eternal Son who holds the cosmos in his hands.
- **In his purity.** Jesus 'loved righteousness and hated wickedness' (v. 9). The angels are holy, but Jesus is the essence of purity. Purity is considered quaint and old-fashioned today, but purity delights God, and Jesus' purity is the theme of angel worship. God calls us to reflect Christ in the purity of our thoughts and motives.

- **In his eternity.** Jesus' throne is 'for ever and ever' (v. 8) and his years 'will never end' (v. 12). We limited humans have only ever known time, and see our brief lifespan as a series of moments. But Jesus is eternal, and stands outside of time. He has always existed, and will always be!

- **In his authority.** This passage says Jesus has a throne and a kingdom for ever (v. 8), and one day God will put all his enemies under his feet (v. 13). We cannot fully see Jesus' authority in our world now, but in a coming day, all of creation – angels and demons and human beings – will bow and accept that Jesus is Lord.

Whatever we think of angels, we should fall down in wonder at the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son, for whom the universe exists, and who holds our breath in his hand.

REFLECTION

Have you lost your awe for Christ? Are you purifying your thoughts and motives (see Phil. 4:8)?

You may remember the various colour codes that the American government used in the aftermath of 9/11. Green meant a ‘low’ risk of terrorist attacks; blue meant ‘guarded’ or remain vigilant; yellow meant an ‘elevated’ risk; orange meant a ‘high’ risk; and red meant a ‘severe’ risk – in other words, start filling your underground bunker with tins of baked beans because World War Three is about to start!

Hebrews is interspersed with red-level warning passages, because rejecting Jesus is such a huge issue. The most famous warning is in the middle of this passage: ‘how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?’ (v. 3). The writer warns the Christians about the danger of drifting (v. 1), like a raft floating away from its moorings while no one is paying attention.

We may not think that we will ever give up on Jesus. But there is always the danger we might simply neglect him. I have seen many young Christians full of passion for Christ. But then family comes along, work gets busy, and building a home, making money and pursuing hobbies – all legitimate interests – start to crowd in. And little by little their faith gets eroded, like waves beating away at a rocky coastline, until one morning they wake up and they have no real desire for Jesus at all.

The problem with drifting is that it never seems serious at the time. We

live our lives on code green, probably thinking, ‘I should be reading my Bible or praying a bit more’, but never actually getting round to it. The warnings in Hebrews are stark for that very reason. Every backward step we take from focusing on Jesus – worshipping him, loving him supremely, obeying his commands, and thirsting for his glory – should be coded red, because we are stepping away from our ‘salvation’ (v. 3). This is serious business.

The warnings in Hebrews will end with the story of Esau selling his birthright for a pot of stew, and walking away weeping (ch. 12). It will feel 100 times worse if we drift away from Jesus. We would be casually drifting away from God’s Son, the creator of the cosmos, who died for us; drifting away from eternal salvation; and drifting away from a miraculous gospel story that was ‘testified to ... by signs, wonders ... and gifts of the Holy Spirit’ (v. 4).

If you are living on code green right now, and sense your apathy growing, shift the warning levels up a couple of notches, get back on your knees in repentance, and ask your gracious God to restore the joy of your salvation (Ps. 51).

REFLECTION

Are you drifting in your faith? Do you have an accountability partner?