

Title: Press on Pilgrim
Text: Hebrews
Theme: Perseverance
Series: Hebrews #1
Prop Stmtnt Because Christ is superior to all gods, follow him and don't quit.

Someone once said that there are three kinds of people in the world: those who can count and those who can't. Actually, the book of Hebrews was written to two groups of people, both of whom considered themselves to part of the people of God. However, some of them were pretenders and some were possessors. Some were fakes and some were the real deal. To those of you who are culturally Christian but not true followers of Christ, this book is littered with needed warnings. To those of you who have an authentic faith, this book is a much needed encouragement.

The scene is sort of like running in a marathon, and at the eighteen mile mark you come upon two runners on the side of the road. They have both stopped. One is quitting, the other is taking a breather. At this moment, you do not know which one is the quitter and which one is the finisher. But, in a just a little bit, it will become clear. That is in many ways what the journey as a believer looks like. Genuine believers are surrounded with pretenders. Time and trouble reveals the authenticity of faith. Frankly, I think that many of the pretenders come as a consequence of the terrible job that the church has done in communicating the gospel. We have tried to package and sell it like a drug companies' marketing campaign for a happy pill. Complete with butterflies and soft music, we are promised that if we take this pill that we will finally get up and make our bed, do the laundry and do triathlons. Never mind all that scary stuff listed in the fine print. But is that not how we tend to package the gospel? Come to Jesus, you'll get a job. Tired of drugs? Try Jesus! Tired of poor gas mileage, try Jesus! Whatever it is that you are tired of; Jesus will give you something better. What is often missing from the presentation is the whole story. Not only is repentance a necessary component of our faith response but Christ let his followers know what they were in for, and we should too. I love how Ray Comfort expresses it. He has often said that that Christianity promises four things: trial, tribulation, persecution and everlasting life. He's right!

This book is all about that! It is written to people who are in trials that are shaking the ground under their feet. What we see here is that the promises of the gospel sustain us in these present trials because of the active, effectual ministry of Christi on our behalf and because of the certainty of our future. The past accomplishment of Christ, the present ministry of Christ and the future promises of Christ give us joy in the valley and songs in the night. That is why we live with such hope, even in the present. When you look at the lives of the people who have been saved by the gospel, no one has ever been given a new past. We are given a new inheritance, a new future, but not a new past. However, because of the gospel, the past no longer defines us. The past no longer controls us. The past no longer keeps us down or hems us in. If you are in Christ, then you are to keep your behind in your past.

I think that you can already see some compelling reasons for me to preach through Hebrews. But, let me point out a couple of more. The obvious one is that our study in Exodus has set this up. I want you to see the completeness of the Bible. As your shepherd, I am also your teacher and I want you to see the magnificent tapestry of God's plan that ties everything together in one beautiful picture because I want that to be impressed so deeply upon your life. You are part of that plan. That sustains us. That energizes us. That encourages us. In addition to that I want to do everything that I can to help every single person to be solid in Christ in order to be faithful under fire. I want to present every one of you perfectly complete before Christ. I want to make certain that you really understand and come to grips with the gospel, so that you are ready for the pressures of life here and prepared to meet God. Some of you may come to faith in Christ during this study. Others of you will go through deep waters and these truths will hold you up. The fire of trial, tribulation and persecution is already here or is coming. That is how it is. But the hope of Christ sustains us with joy. Let me ask you this. Which girl is most likely to stop smoking during pregnancy; the one who is planning an abortion or the one who is planning to give birth? Future hope fuels present joy.

This morning I want to give you a preview of Hebrews, knowing that all I can do is a flyover. The next two Sundays I will be preaching on matters related to our global and local gospel opportunities, so we will not start with Hebrews 1.1 until February 14. But I am hopeful that this overview will be used by God to bring about within you a holy hunger and thirst for the rich satisfaction that is served by this book for your soul.

Read Text:

Hebrews is a book that begins like a sermon but ends like a letter. It is clearly written to a specific group of people who worshiped together, lived together, struggled together, and suffered together. As a result, some were falling away; some were falling apart, but most seemed to be staying the course. I believe, based on 13.24, that the original audience of this letter was the remnant of Jewish believers who were part of the church in Rome. The hinge of the book is 10.19. Before this is theology. After this is exhortation. Both are needed. Both are desperately needed. Some of you are a little more wired on the theology stuff. You love to research and you get some twisted sense of somber spiritual-ness when I tell you a Greek word or two. Others of you only want the practical stuff. Both are necessary. The gospel is incomplete as an intellectual exercise, and the gospel is incomplete without life-change. You are kidding yourself if you think that a profession of faith will save your soul if the affections of your heart and the direction of your life do not support it. At the same time, you cannot be a follower of Christ on the basis of doing good things or being a bit more moral than the average hypocrite.

So, even though this book takes us through rich doctrinal terrain and deep theological waters at the beginning, even that is sprinkled with a series of warnings designed to awaken us to the seriousness of what is at stake. So, this book is a book of extremes. The exaltation of Christ is brilliantly displayed before us. There will be times when we will sit in wonder and awe of these fresh displays of his majesty and his high-priestly ministry for us. We will be so humbled that this one who "is the radiance of the glory of

God” would really care, really care, really undertake for us and love us and comfort us and sustain us and represent us. We are so used to people who are over us to be aloof from us and to act as if they are superior to us. We are used to it, even though we resent it that people who are over us do not listen to us and do not take the time to really understand us, leaving us to feel like we are abandoned and ignored without any options. That is why, it will be such a challenge for me to preach this book and for you to hear this book because so much of the richness of this book is reflected in the fact that the One who is infinitely over us and superior to us, is in reality not aloof at all, though by all rights he could be. Instead, he is so engaging, and connecting and personal that he became one of us that he might fully enter into our humanity in order to die for us. The benefit and necessity of the incarnation did not end because of his effectual death, but the Son of God who became the Son of Man now stands in my place, on my behalf before the Father’s throne. The knowledge of the active, ongoing, effective, pleading and interceding work of the Son is not only an enormous comfort, but it fills our engine of perseverance with rocket fuel.

Did you know that during the first two minutes of lift-off, the space shuttle is mainly powered (over 70%) by two Solid-Rocket Boosters? Each Solid Rocket Booster weighs 1,300,000 pounds, which includes 1,100,000 pounds of propellant in each one. That means that there is 2.2 million pounds of rocket fuel. It is obviously highly combustive. The countdown is the countdown to ignition because this highly combustive propellant is ignited and due to the shape of the booster and the nozzle at the end, the force of this combustion is so powerful that it is able to lift the 4.4 million pound space shuttle off the ground and in defiance to the laws of gravity it is able to eventually get into space, although by that time it has burned up over 3 million pounds of fuel.

The first part of Hebrews is like solid rocket propellant. It is so combustible that when ignited by the Spirit of God, it will lift your life into great affection for Christ, it will fire your soul for holiness, it will empower us and propel us for a long obedience that will be seen in an intense desire to exult in Christ, to love him richly and to take heed to our souls, to be wary of any seeds of unbelief and to identify with our persecuted brothers and sisters and stand with them for the sake of the gospel. The theology of this part is rich. But this rich doctrinal rocket fuel is what breaks the gravitational pull of this world. This world is a drag upon us and tries to keep us tied to and identified by our past. Hebrews helps you with lift off. This brings me to the second part of the book.

Here is where the author connects the solid rocket boosters to the shuttle of our lives. He demonstrates how these truths empower us to be faithful under fire and to persevere under pressure. The history of the people of God is full of stories of ordinary people who banked on an extraordinary God and were used as his tools to accomplish extraordinary things. These were people who believed God and did not forget where their real home was.

Washington, D.C. sits inside of interstate 495, also known as the beltway. Politicians who come to this city from other portions of the country are supposed to represent their constituents. However, as we have seen over and over, something happens to so many of

them when they get inside the beltway. They seem to forget where home is. They become enamored with the appearances of power, and the perceived opportunity to be part of history. The national news and media spotlight does not shine so brightly on the back roads of their state or district, but D.C. is where the action, the power, the attention, the grandeur, the state dinners, the parties, the movers, the shakers, the glad-handers and the lobbyists. For so many, once they get there, they never want to leave. When that happens, something happens to them. Instead of representing the real needs of their people, they make decisions on what they perceive will keep them in power. Breathing the air inside the beltway has an intoxicating influence upon common sense, and stupefying affect on convictions. After a while they forget why they are there and become what they resented and ran against in the first place.

Beloved, Hebrews, is so needed because it reminds us that while we live inside the beltway, this is not our home, yet. We, like Abraham are pilgrims, living tents, looking for the city with foundations whose designer and builder is God. To those who say, it is the journey and not the destination that counts, I say, you are wrong! Without the security of the destination, the journey would be completely absurd. It is because of the destination, because of the goal, because of the joy set before us that we endure and persevere. We are pilgrims who press on, knowing that we are not home yet, and not expecting to be treated as if we are home. For that reason, I have chosen as the theme, Press on Pilgrim, to describe this book.

Why Hebrews is so needful for our souls:

1. **Because it champions the supremacy of Christ.** – chapter 1

Brothers and sisters, this is how the book begins and this is how the book bleeds. We will never get this completely but we will get more of it and more we get it, the more glorious it will be. Anything that raises our sights and helps us see another aspect of the infinite greatness and worthiness of our King and Savior Jesus Christ is good and necessary for our souls. In chapter one we will delight to see how God the Father says to God the Son, “Your throne, O God is forever and ever!” Islam, Mormonism, Buddhism, Jehovah’s Witness and Hinduism all crumble at the feet of that truth. They are broken empty systems that only offer fear because they have no Savior. They are full of people who need to be redeemed; and there is a Redeemer. He is Christ and Christ is God! Forever!! Forever Christ is King! Forever Christ will reign! And forever God the Father will exalt his own Son because of the eternal gladness that they share. The implications of that is a vast field of diamonds just waiting for us to discover and delight in.

2. **Because it reminds us of our great salvation.** – chapter 2

The supremacy of Christ above all things is what makes our salvation so great. Christ, for whom and by whom all things exist is the founder of our salvation. This same Christ was made one of us and by virtue of his experiences, his obedience to his Father brought to his own human existence an experiential maturity that was deepened by his sufferings

which all worked together as the means that bought our pardon and won our salvation. Our salvation is a great treasure! And our salvation makes so much of Jesus!

3. **Because it warns us against making idols of good but lesser things.** – chapter 3

Moses was good. But Jesus is greater. Moses was faithful. But Jesus is perfect. It was easy for these people to allow sentimental religious and traditional practices become more important than Christ. It is easy for us to elevate things, like religious traditions and people like our own children to the place where we make those practices or their happiness the source of our joy. This book reminds us that since Christ is so great, and his salvation is so great, nothing else can compete.

4. **Because it warns us of the danger of rebellion and unbelief.** – chapter 3

Our Savior and therefore our salvation is so high and so glorious and so uniquely effective that to reject it, to rebel against it, to treat it casually and flippantly, is the height of danger. We need to be warned about the deceitfulness of sin in our own hearts. You and I are in danger. I get tired of dealing with sin. I get weary with the battle. I want to go on vacation away from sin. But sin does not go on vacation. John Owens wrote, “be killing sin or sin will be killing you.” I need to be reminded of this. We need the faithful exhortation of one another because we can so easily and quickly become hardened by sin and blinded by its lies and ignorant and neglectful of the arrogance that like fertilizer in the soil of our hearts just waits to take seeds of anger, and bitterness and sprout plants of rebellion.

The doctor told Joanne Haughan this week that cancer was found in her brain. She was not permitted to drive home from the doctor. Tim left work and got her and took her to the hospital where treatment began immediately. Why, because of the danger that she was in. We are grateful that she has been told that her treatments will eliminate this. But, when news reached us this week, how many of you thought with me, “I hate cancer!” I hate cancer. But, all that cancer can do is kill my body. Cancer cannot touch my soul. Cancer cannot steal my joy, take my salvation or threaten my standing. But, when some of you see a brother or sister caught in sin, do you say, “Oh that is a phase they are going through?” Is that what you think about your own children? If they get cancer you run, but if they are caught in sin – you yawn? These warnings are for us. How your respond to the warnings of sin will reveal if you are a pretender of a possessor.

5. **Because it reminds us of the incredible ministry of Christ our High Priest** – chapter 4-5

There is no Priest, like our Priest. He was tempted like us – He knows! He suffered like us and way beyond we will ever suffer. He went before us and died in our place and rose again and has now passed through the heavens. And now in heaven he stands before the Father’s throne, he shows his wounded hands and claims me as his own. He is so glad to be your Priest. So, come. Come with confidence. Come and find rest, find mercy, find

grace that will help you in the need that has given you so that you will come and find that in him, you will have all that you need for your need.

6. **Because it reminds us of the certainty of God's promises.** – 6.13-20

You remember the joke? How do you know when a politician is lying? When his lips are moving. It is so sad, but so normal. And we fall for it so much. We think, oh this time it will be different. It's like listening the PR department before the Lions season. But it affects us. We are jaded. We are caustic. We are hardened. We are self-protective and suspicious, even of God. It troubles me to see how quick I am to believe in myself and slow to believe in God. Chapter six is needful for us.

7. **Because it humbles us with mystery** – chapter 7

Who is Melchizedek? I think the worst name of any game ever, is Bible Trivial Pursuit. There is nothing in the Bible that is trivial. The most obscure person, the most minute details all have a place in the perfect plan of God. Every note in his symphony, every dynamic in its performance reveals even more of the beauty of his majesty and brings glory to the one who is both composer and director. There are so many things that may appear to be trivial and random, but as we see how every part fits his plan, we will once again stand in awe.

8. **Because it builds our confidence in the superiority, the certainty, the sufficiency and the finality of Christ's effectual offering.** – chapters 8-10

All of us struggle with trusting in our own efforts as a source for God's grace. Those of you who had this idea institutionalized by means of what you were taught in the Roman Catholic church will benefit so much from these chapters. All of us will find rest for our souls in the finished work of Christ on the cross.

9. **Because it calls us to have full assurance of faith.** – chapter 10

This is the hinge of the book. Because the author of our faith is supreme; because the finisher of our faith is eternal, because the giver of our faith is faithful, because the foundation of our faith is true, because the object of our faith is certain, because the promises of our faith cannot fail, because the end of our faith is his glory and our joy in an unbreakable unity, we have confidence now! Confidence that:

10. **calls us to encourage and love each other** – chapter 10 (v.19) and 13

11. **helps us identify with believers who are suffering**– chapter 10

12. **drives our faithfulness under fire.** – chapter 11

13. **we have received an unshakeable Kingdom** . – chapter 12

14. **motivates our responsibility to the church.** – chapter 13

I am so anxious to preach through Hebrews with you because it links warning, encouragement, perseverance, love and faithfulness to Christ and the gospel. Press on pilgrim. Press on with Christ. Press on for Christ. Press on to Christ. Press on because of Christ. We trust in Christ alone but we are not alone in our trust in Christ. Press on Pilgrim, look for the lights of the city, we're almost home.