

# Hebrews: An Overview

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[0:00] Amen. You may be seated, kids. You may be excused to your King's Kids classes. If you would open up your Bibles to Hebrews, the book of Hebrews on page 1187 of your pew Bible.

This is the first of many sermons, 22 sermons on the book of Hebrews. We'll be in the book of Hebrews for several months. It's called hitting the wall or bonking. In a marathon, a marathon runner needs to run 26.2 miles to finish the race. It's an endurance race. It's not a sprint. And according to runnersworld.com, because I am not a marathoner, marathoners will regularly experience hitting the wall around mile 18. It's when a runner's body runs out of gas, heavy legs, cramping, persistent fatigue, distracted vision, feeling disconnected from your surroundings. And that's just what's going on in their bodies. Can you imagine what's going on psychologically? How much longer? Should I keep going? Boy, would it be great being one of those spectators. Does this really matter? Is this pain and discomfort worth it?

The Christian life is an endurance race. It's not a sprint. And in the book of Hebrews, we are exhorted time and again to run with perseverance. This race marked out for us, the Christian race, the Christian life, all the way to the end.

Together, we are to hold fast to Christ by faith all the way to the end. But there will be times when we run out of gas, when you hit the wall, when you do this bonking thing, where you start saying, how much longer?

[2:36] Is this spiritual? Is this Jesus thing? Is this worth it? You feel spiritually lethargic. You lose the vision of a high and exalted risen Christ.

And you can just kind of start to drift. You can run on spiritual fumes. Maybe you start thinking, maybe there's a different version of this race that I can run that's not so costly.

Maybe you're in the room this morning and you've hit the wall. This is where you're at. You're on fumes. Hebrews. I'm so glad you're here. You need the book of Hebrews. Or maybe you know someone who's hit the wall.

A brother or sister in faith. Oh, I'm so glad you're here. They will need to hear some things from the book of Hebrews. But we all know, chances are, you will hit the wall.

We all need the book of Hebrews. This book is one long exhortation to hold fast to Christ by faith all the way to the end.

[3:47] And this morning, I'm going to preach what's called an overview sermon. And maybe you've heard a sermon like this before. Maybe you haven't. The idea behind it is, I want to give you a sampling of the book of Hebrews so you are acquainted with it and you know, you see your need for it.

And so to that end, I'm going to provide three introductory points. If you're a Habits of Grace student, I am winking my eye right now because this is the organizational sentence.

Three introductory points. Just to give you an overview of the book of Hebrews, the concern of Hebrews, spiritual dullness, the purpose of Hebrews, exhortation, and then the heartbeat of Hebrews.

Hebrews gives us a spectacular vision of Jesus Christ, our great high priest. And all of this is to help us not become dull and drift away from Christ, but to hold fast to Christ by faith all the way to the end.

So let's look at this first point, this introductory point, the concern of the book of Hebrews, spiritual dullness or spiritual lethargy.

[5:09] Let me just kind of give you a couple things to know about the book. No one knows who the human author of the book of Hebrews is, but when you read the book of Hebrews, the divine authorship becomes evidently clear.

Every word of the book of Hebrews originated in mine, in God's mind, and was breathed out for our benefit.

Every word is designed to strengthen us. This author, human author may not be known, but the divine author is clearly evident.

God is speaking to us, brothers and sisters, through this book. And another point of just kind of background is, there's some debate amongst scholars as to who the original audience of this book was.

I've been persuaded that the original audience was a church of Christians with a Jewish background in likely the city of Rome in the first century.

[6:20] And the reason why I have come to be persuaded by that is just by the massive amount of Old Testament scriptures and references. It is packed with Old Testament.

Direct quotes, as well as references to the Old Testament priesthood in the Old Testament sacrificial system, the Old Testament tabernacle.

It's all kind of Jewish rich background, but you don't need to have a Jewish background to really benefit from this book. The author has written this book out of concern for this first century church. And it's a two-fold concern. So here's what I'm going to do this morning. I'm going to give you samples throughout the book of Hebrews to support the points I'm making.

And so I want to show you two kind of sets of concerns that this author of Hebrews has for this original audience. And so the author, he knew that this church has suffered greatly for Jesus.

[7:34] Would you turn in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 10, verses 32 through 34? The writer writes, So what the writer is saying is, hey, I know your backstory.

When you were originally converted, things got hard real fast for you because of Jesus. It's just not a struggle. It's a hard struggle.

And the nature of that hard struggle was public humiliation. Sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach. Like your name is getting dragged through the mud publicly because you're a follower of Jesus.

And not just because of that. Because of other people you associate with. Sometimes being partners with those so treated. You are reproached because you're associated with a brother and sister from a church.

From your church who's being reproached. And then there's this reference. You had compassion on those in prison. Do you know? It's referring to brothers and sisters from the church who've been imprisoned.

[9:08] Because of Jesus. You had compassion on them. You're going to visit them in prison. And could you imagine if you're one of these church members in this first century, going to visit a brother or sister in prison?

What are you thinking? Good to see them. Huh. I wonder. I wonder if I'm going to end up in the same prison. Plundering their personal property.

Having your personal property taken away. Because of your being identified with Jesus. We know from 12.4 that their struggle hadn't yet reached the point of shedding blood.

It hadn't entered martyrdom. But you know this is hard. Can you imagine being in a situation like this for any extended period of time? What that will do? In first century Roman Empire, the Roman Empire officially recognized Judaism as an empire-approved religion.

Not so with Christianity. Christianity. The followers of Jesus and his way, which was the early name for the church, they were treated as outsiders.

[10:26] They were seen as kind of rabble-rousers. They weren't seen by either Jews or the Roman establishment in a sense of, hey, yeah, they're official.

They're legit. Christianity was not a Rome-sanctioned religion. This week, President Trump issued an executive order that eradicated all anti-Christian basists trying to in our government.

There was none of that in the first century. Not with this church. Not in Rome. There was no space being made for Christians to protect them. There was a lot of Christian bias in the first century.

Now imagine the effect of that over time. How that could discourage you. How you can start asking the question, is this worth it?

Should I go to church? So the first thing, the first concern that we see in the book of Hebrews is that the writer knows their background.

[11:39] He understands. They've experienced something very difficult right after becoming Christians. But the second area is the primary concern.

And that is spiritual dullness. Spiritual lethargy. It can be the result of suffering over time where you just kind of check out. But spiritual dullness can also be a result of abundance.

Remember the cycles of the book of Judges? So I actually originally wrote down seven examples of this dullness in the book of Hebrews.

I'm going to share with you four. So that you can see the concern that this author has. It starts in chapter 2 verse 3. We're just going to do a little bit flyover of the book right now.

Chapter 2 verse 3. He writes, How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

[12:42] Neglect of this great salvation accomplished by Christ. Do you know what that's a sign of? Spiritual dullness. It's not sharpness.

But neglect is not a good thing. And they were neglecting first things. If you flip into your Bibles to chapter 5 verse 11. The writer's talking about, just started talking about Jesus Christ.

He is a new order in the line of Melchizedek. We'll get into that as we go into the sermon series. But he says this. He wants to talk about that more. And then he says, About this we have much to say and it's hard to explain.

Since you have become dull of hearing. Spiritual dullness. Not sharp. In verse 13 he says, For everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness since he is a child.

He is saying you guys are immature. You perpetually need milk. You're unskilled in the word of God. Now, if you're a new Christian, it's okay to be immature. Right?

[13:48] There's no problem there. The problem with this church is it was perpetual immaturity. They weren't growing. They were staying like children.

Because they're spiritually dull. In chapter 6 verse 11. In 12. This is after a stark warning passage. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end. So that you may not be sluggish. But imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promise.

Does anybody know? Is there anything kind of good associated with the word sluggish? There's not. It gets at the spiritual dullness. And then in chapter 12, if you flip back there, the writer of Hebrews starts talking about the church with a body metaphor.

Just like the apostle Paul does in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians chapter 4. And if you turn in chapter 12 and you look at verse 12 and 13, you've got some very interesting descriptions.

[15:00] Think of the writer is addressing the church. The your is a yawl. Therefore lift yawls drooping hands. Drooping hands.

And strengthen your weak knees. And make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Drooping.

Weak. Lame. This is spiritual unhealth. This is spiritual dullness. And the writer of Hebrews is deeply concerned about that for this church.

And that's why he's writing. The causes of dullness are many. In the book of Hebrews, in chapter 12, we are told, we are hinted at, you can see it in verse 15.

See that no one falls to obtain the grace of God. That no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble. There's some infighting going on in this church. In 16, that no one is sexually immoral like his brother.

[16:02] If you look at 13, 4. Let the marriage bed be held in honor among all. There's sexual immorality in the church. And then in 13, 5. Keep your life free from the love of money. There's greed in the church.

These are the classic culprits that lead to spiritual dullness. But what they all have in common is an unbelieving heart. Spiritual dullness is the primary concern of the writer of Hebrews.

He doesn't want them to remain dull. He wants them to, in the words of Hebrews 2.1, to pay careful attention to these things that we have heard.

The gospel. The gospel. So the first point, I hope you're seeing it. The concern of this writer is the spiritual dullness of this congregation who have been out.

They've been through some hard things. They've hit the wall. They're out of gas. And when that happens, you enter into a spiritual danger zone.

[17:17] Which now brings us to the purpose of this book. Exhortation. If you turn into Hebrews 13.

To the benediction or the final greetings in verse 22. Listen to what the author of Hebrews, how he describes his own epistle.

His own letter. He says, I appeal to you brothers, bear with my word of exhortation. For I have written to you briefly. So the writer of Hebrews sees this 13 chapter letter book as a word of exhortation.

Exhortation. And exhortation is a kind of communication, whether written or spoken, that carries this sense of urgency and concern.

And it calls for action. So this entire epistle is one long exhortation. For those who have hit the wall.

[18:21] Who have become discouraged. Distracted. Even dull. Does anybody know what's happening later tonight? There's something going on. I think there's a football game later.

It's called the Super Bowl. Kansas City Chiefs v. Philadelphia Eagles. Imagine this.

In the first half, Chadler Hurts and Saquon Barkley of the Eagles proved to be unstoppable. The Kansas City Chiefs don't have an answer for him.

At halftime, the Eagles are up two touchdowns. Kansas City Chiefs go into the locker room. Head coach Andy Reid gets in front of his team.

And do you know what kind of speech he's going to give? A word of exhortation. He's going to say, we need to stop doing this. And we need to start doing that.

[19:24] We need to stop the bleeding. Defense. Come on. Mahomes, you need to get rocking. You and Kelsey, let's go. It's going to be a word of exhortation.

Urgency. Concern. We can win the game. I believe in you. Let's do this. You know, a Super Bowl is just a football game. It has very little eternal bearing.

The book of Hebrews has massive eternal significance. And this whole book is a word of exhortation. There is warnings.

There are warnings and there are encouragements. warnings. And the warnings are designed like a smelling salt to dull Christians.

To wake you up. There are five warnings in the book of Hebrews. Let me just show you some of them. In Hebrews chapter 2.

[20:27] 1 through 3. We've read some of it already. Therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard. Gospel. Lest we drift away from it. Warning.

For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable. And every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution. How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? Warning.

In chapter 3. 7. Through chapter 4. 13. There is an extended warning. And the way this writer does it is with elegance and class.

Do you know what he does? He exposit Psalm 95 and applies it to this church. And in verse 12. He says, Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart. Leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another. Every day, as long as it's called today. That none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

[21:29] For we have come to share in Christ. It's a warning. Don't be like Israel. Who hardened their hearts and God did not bring them into his rest.

It's a warning. Chapter 6. 4 through 8. Many of you are familiar with this already. For it is impossible in the case of those who have once been enlightened.

Who have tasted the heavenly gift. And have shared in the Holy Spirit. And have tasted the goodness of the word of God. And the powers of the age to come. And then have fallen away to restore them again to repentance.

Since they're crucifying once again. The son of God to their own harm. And holding him up to contempt. That's a warning. 10.

26. Through 31. More warning. For if we go on sinning deliberately. After receiving the knowledge of the truth. There no longer remains a sacrifice for sin. But a fearful expectation of judgment.

[22:25] And a fury of the fire that will consume the adversaries. That's some stark warning. 12. 12. 25. Is another warning. And these warnings. Are spoken in love to this church.

They're addressing the unbelief in their hearts. To snap them out of it. Smelling salts. This is not who you are.

Why are you going down this path? Death. Now. For many of you. You've probably grown up a church. And you've heard. A word of assurance of salvation.

That goes something like this. Once saved. Always saved. That's not entirely wrong. But in the book of Hebrews. You do not see. That kind of language.

Once saved. Always saved. No. No. The book of Hebrews. Approaches assurance. In a different way. More along the lines of Matthew 24. 13. Where Jesus says. Those who endure to the end.

[23:29] Will be saved. The assurance. That is spoken of. Is not just. Just the finished work of Jesus. It is that.

That's the basis. But it's this idea. That a saving faith. Is a persevering faith. A genuine faith. Will endure to the end. A faith. That is true. Will hold fast. To Christ.

All the way to the end. And what this fosters. Is an ongoing dependence on Jesus.

So. What you need to see. Is that. The book of Hebrews. It has. Warning. After warning. After warning. But it's just not.

[24:22] Warning. There are some serious. Encouragements. In fact. I have 12. I'll just do five. Two. One. Here's the encouragement.

Therefore. We must pay. Closer attention. To what we've heard. Encouragement. Pay. Pay. Careful attention.

To what we've heard. What we've heard. About Christ. And what he's done. His death. And his resurrection. He is the great high priest. Pay careful attention. To that. Set your heart on that.

Believe in that. Three. Five. And six. Here's some encouragement. Now Moses.

With faithful. In all of God's house. As a servant. To testify. To the things. That were. To be spoken later. But Christ. Is faithful. Over God's house. As a son. And we are his house. If indeed. We hold fast.

[25:16] Our confidence. And our boasting. In our hope. Encouragement. Hold fast. Boast in our hope. Forward looking. 414. Since.

Then. We have. A great high priest. Who has passed. Through the heavens. Jesus. The son of God. Let us. Hold fast. Our confession. You see what's going on? In light of who Jesus is.

You press on. Brother. Sister. I love 416. Let us then. With confidence. Draw near. To the throne of grace. And we may receive mercy.

And find grace. To help. In time of need. I need help. Pressing on. And Jesus. On his throne. Is our help. 618.

Through 20. So that by two unchangeable things. In which is impossible. For God to lie. We who have fled. For refuge. Might have strong encouragement.

[26:11] To hold fast. To the hope. Set before us. We have this as a sure. And steadfast. Anchor of the soul. In the logo. For the sermon series. There is hold fast.

And there's this anchor. Behind it. This is a reference. To that anchor. We hold fast. Because we've been. We are being held fast. A hope that enters.

Into the inner place. Behind the curtains. Where Jesus has gone. Hold fast. Press on. 12. 1 and 2. Many of you know this passage.

By heart. Therefore since. We are surrounded. By so great a cloud of witnesses. Let us also lay aside. Every weight. And sin. Which clings so closely. And let. Us. Run. With. Endurance. The race. That is set. Before us. Looking to Jesus. Hold fast. To Christ. By faith. All the way to the end. Encouragement.

[27:08] Encouragement. Encouragement. These are God's. Life giving words. To our weary. And possibly. Dull hearts. To help us. Press on together.

Together. The author of Hebrews. Hebrews. Is repeatedly. Is repeatedly. Is exhorting. His audience. Both by way of warning. And encouragement. So that they would hold fast.

To Jesus together. Do you remember how I mentioned. That this church. Is likely a Jewish background church. church. When things get hard.

We are tempted. To go back. To what's familiar. And likely. These Jewish Christians. Suffering for Jesus. We're like.

Well maybe. If I could just go back. To the Jewish religious systems. Things will be okay. And what the author. Of Hebrews. Is saying. Is don't. Go back.

[28:03] There is no. Salvation. There. Hold fast. To your salvation. Jesus Christ. This book.

Is one long. Exhortation. It's the purpose. Of the book. But now. Point three. The heartbeat. Of the book.

I have in parentheses. The jet fuel. Of Christian endurance. When you're in an endurance race. Apparently. Not in them. Actually running in them. When you hit the wall. You run out of gas. And your body. Is out of energy. The best thing you can do. Is to put energy. In your body. So that you can continue. In the race.

[29:03] Now. Marathon runners. Have these little packs. Of like. Liquid. Liquid sugar. That they put in their bodies. And it instantly.

Gives them strength. So they can keep going on. The writer of Hebrews. Gives. Us. Something. Better than that. Jesus. That. Jesus. The jet fuel of Christian endurance.

Jesus is our strength. In Hebrews. Hebrews. In spectacular. In spectacular. Fashion. Gives us. A remarkable.

Christology. In understanding. Of the truths. About who Jesus is. And they're designed. To strengthen us. To help us.

To hold fast. To endure. And do that with joy. All the way to the end. And so again and again. The author of Hebrews. Is going to point us. To Jesus. And fix our eyes on him.

[30:05] And he does it. In a special way. In Hebrews 1. 1. Steve opened us up.

Open us up. Listen to 1 and 2. There's something going on there. Long ago. At many times. In many ways. God spoke to our fathers. By the prophets. Jeremiah.

Ezekiel. Isaiah. But in these last days. He has spoken to us. By the son. Do you know what that is? That's a how much better argument. Hey.

You know what? The prophets spoke. It was good. But now. God has spoken. Through Jesus. The greatest. Fullest. And final revelation. Of God. Jesus is better.

Jesus is greater. In 1. 5. Through 2. 8. We have this extended passage. In which. Jesus. Is the son of God.

[31:02] Is being shown. To being greater. Than the angels. It's a. How much better. Greater. Argument. Don't go back.

Jesus is greater. They can't save you. He can. Chapter 4. And chapter 5. Chapter 7. We start learning about Jesus.

As our great high priest. In the order of Melchizedek. Not. Not. The Levitical priesthood. Marked by sin. And they too would die.

No. He is from the order of Melchizedek. He is sinless. And he has an indestructible life. Don't. Go back. To that system. That cannot save you.

Hold fast to Jesus. Who can? Jesus is greater. Chapter 8. Because Jesus is our great high priest.

[31:59] He has established a better covenant. He has fulfilled the promise of Jeremiah 31. Where now we have full forgiveness. The cleansing of our conscience.

And God writes his word on our hearts. So that we would obey him. It made the old covenant obsolete. This is a better covenant. Established by the great high priest Jesus. Don't go back. Chapter 9. Because Jesus is our great high priest. He offers. He serves in a better sanctuary. Back in the Old Testament.

It was. It was a temple. A holy of holies. A dwelling place of God. Made by human hands. And it was just copies. Of the heavenly one. Do you know where Jesus. Ministers.

In the actual. Presence of God. And the holy holies. In heaven. It is a sanctuary. Sanctuary. Made by God's hands. It's a better sanctuary.

[32:59] Jesus is greater. Not dealing with copies. He's dealing with the real thing. Chapter 10. Because Jesus is our great high priest. He has offered.

A better sacrifice. Not. Not. Not the sacrifices of bulls and goats. Made repeatedly. Whose blood cannot.

Wash clean. A sinful conscience. And then you got to do it again. And again. And again. No. This high priest. Offered himself.

Once. And. For. All. One sacrifice. That. Makes perfect. For all time. Those who believe. They've been. Completely forgiven. Conscience is cleansed.

It is. It is a greater sacrifice. Accomplishing a greater covenant. Built on better promises. In a greater sanctuary. Because he's our great high priest. Don't go back. Don't go back to Judaism.

[34:00] Don't go back to your hedonism. Don't go back to your. A better legalistic Christianity. In which it all depends on you. Trust in Christ. Hold fast to him. Chapter 12.

Great high priest. He's a better example of endurance. Chapter 12. Our great high priest. Brings about a better kingdom. Not one that is shaken. One that is unshakable. One that's prepared by God.

It's a city in Mount Zion. It is the heavenly Jerusalem. And it is our homeland. Awaiting for us. Hold fast.

Jesus is greater. All of these warnings. All of these encouragements. In the book of Hebrews.

There are warnings. Of falling away from Christ. Of giving up on him. Settling for things. That there is no salvation. And there's no life in. And all of the encouragements.

[35:01] Are Christocentric. Encouragements. Hold fast. Because salvation is found. In no one else. The heartbeat.

Of Hebrews. Is Jesus Christ. Our great high priest. When you hit the wall. He's the one you need. He is your life. Christian. Have you hit a wall?

Are you on a gas? Are you looking down the line. Of what it means to be a Christian. In our culture. At this time. And you're like. Hmm. Maybe not.

If you haven't hit the wall. Chances are you will. Chances are you will know someone. Who hits the wall. They become discouraged.

[36:07] They become distracted. They become spiritually dull. Do you know what they need? They need. They need. What this book provides.

The concern of the book. Spiritual dullness. Of unbelieving heart. And the exhortation of this book. The purpose of this book. To warn them. From drift. And to encourage them.

To hold fast. And it's the heartbeat. Of the book. It's the jet fuel. Of Christian endurance. It's Jesus. Again and again and again. In spectacular. Spectacular fashion.

He is better. He is greater. There is no one who compares. And he's worth our lives. He's worth suffering for. He's worth enduring for.

So we hold fast to him. By faith. To the end. Or. We run. With endurance.

[37:07] The race. Marked. Out for us. Looking. To Jesus. Will you pray with me?

Lord Jesus. There is no one like you. And there is salvation found. In no one. No thing. Else. God would you.

Strengthen us. By your word. Focused on Christ. That we would lay aside. Every weight. Every sin. That encumbers. And we would. Push. Through. The wall. By faith. Running with endurance. This race. You've marked out for us.

Lord. And we will do so. With joy. Knowing that it was for joy. That you. Laid on your life for us. All glory to your name.

[38:16] Amen. Amen. And we will do so.