

# Know What to Believe

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[ 0 : 00 ] God, open our hearts to your word and your word to our hearts, we ask in Jesus' name. Summer has a mildly lulling effect on us. And this is a very dramatic, if not traumatic, week that we're going to live in in the next seven days.

You'll know that the woodworkers are about to go on strike. And that's a pretty foundational fact for the province of British Columbia.

You may think that you'd like to take a bit, but I began to suspect maybe British Columbia is different than the rest of the world. And here we work in order to enable ourselves to play.

Other people may play in order to enable themselves to work. So what are we going to do when it explodes over? That's the kind of problem that I think we have.

And I think perhaps it's going to be signified to us in that union, that strike is threatened at least.

[ 1 : 16 ] That it doesn't have to do so much with tensions for woodworkers as it does with some of the basic values that we as a province hold.

And some of the basic goals and ambitions that we have. And we tend to be up for grabs. And they seem to pass by in ways that we don't really see what's happening.

The Commonwealth seems to be at the end of its long and happy existence this weekend. It may indeed survive, but it's certainly seriously threatened. And because it's lovely and the sun's out and the beast is second, we may sleep through the whole event, you know, that it's taken so long to build up into a superior combination of the peoples of this world and to that commonwealth of nations.

And then, of course, there's a wedding on Wednesday, which has everybody's attention, which, if it serves no other purpose, advertises weddings in Anglican churches, and they become very popular.

I came across a church in New Zealand where they fly the whole wedding party from Japan in order to have a wedding that looks like Westminster Abbey.

[ 2 : 49 ] You fathers of the bride add to the other expenses the cost of flying the whole group to New Zealand for the day. And you'll know what a costly wedding is.

So that's another thing that's happening. The sanctions against South Africa are a way of fighting for right in our world.

And I don't know whether that's an expression of our love for our neighbors. I think the sanctions are totally successful in reducing that nation to rubble.

But we have felt that we have done our job well. That's another thing that might disturb our son's hand in this region. There are big issues around us and we keep on with the daily grind of our work tend to forget them and hope that they will work out and not unduly disturb us which they're not likely to do in this particular corner of the world but then we have eternity to live and think about these things make the decisions you make now fairly important if you have to live with them for the rest of eternity there is no big painkiller at the end which will eliminate them from our minds they're important issues important issues that we have to face so I don't know how to resolve them but I do know that there is something to which we must give our minds and attentions and that is the words of scripture and so during such times as I am able to preach for the rest of the summer I'm going to talk to you about the epistles of the Hebrews we do it on Wednesday night at the 7 o'clock service and that's sort of to get the groundwork underway and then I bring to you the clear distillation of all the truth we arrived at on Wednesday night here on Sunday morning so we've been working at Hebrews for three weeks now and I want to tell you something about the epistles of the Hebrews this morning if you wanted to turn to it it's on page so I guess it's 203 is where the epistle begins and it's hard it's a hard chapter I don't know what to do with it in one sense because what it

tries to do is to bring Christianity into the scope of our little minds to reduce Jesus Christ to what our minds can manage and our minds can't manage that much can they if we get hold of a very little bit that's almost more than we can handle and that's why we need each other to complement our understanding of our God and of his love but that's what

[ 6 : 37 ] Hebrews is trying to do is to bring Christianity within within our understanding so we can get hold of it we tend to want to limit God to our experience of him you know what occurred to me I thought this was quite brilliant but you probably heard it in a million forms before but it was new to me when I thought of it early this morning we try and live in control of what we believe right so we accept that we reject that we do that all this kind of thing goes on all the time but the truth of the matter is we live under the control of what we believe and so it becomes very important to figure out what it is you do in fact believe and one of the reasons that you should subject yourself rigorously and regularly to the exercise that you're subjecting yourself to now is in order that you might determine what it is you believe because that's what will control you and your life that's how you will live your life under control of what it is you believe so what I want you to look at and to allow to help you probe what it is you believe

I want you to look at this epistle to the Hebrews they wanted very much to fit God into their mold of him as we all do and of course God doesn't fit and because our minds are always trying to do it we get into trouble and reduce God to an absurdity and then the world around us laughs at the absurdity that we say we believe they see the absurdity of it and laugh at it and so somehow it's not a matter of us fitting God into our mold or reducing him to what we understand of him somehow it's got to be more than that you know in the back of your prayer books is a tremendous statement that your mind will never get hold of or mine about the catholic faith is this and whosoever believes it doesn't believe it will most certainly perish the creed of saint athanasius very complex statement of who god is as far as the best minds of one age of the christian faith could express it and we owe that age of christian faith a great debt for having expressed it express what christian orthodoxy is now i have a good friend called tom harper and he's written a book called for christ's sake and when he comes to this tremendous expression of who god is called the creed of saint athanasius in the back of the prayer book he says and i quote most of the language and dogmas about jesus are simply incomprehensible to a generation that has seen man walking on the moon most of the language and dogmas about jesus are incomprehensible now that we have a man walking on the moon no more of this we are emancipated we're free we can put a man on the moon isn't that wonderful there hasn't been anybody back there lately that i know of but uh it was done and it was done in this generation well some people uh he says may be able to make sense of this account of required belief but i cannot and tom harper is a very intelligent person and when he says he can't make sense of this account of required belief then uh i think he's in the same trap of reducing christianity to what his large and comprehensive mind can get hold of so that even when you see what his large and comprehensive mind can get hold of it's infinitely less than is there in the epistles of the hebrews for instance it's way bigger than the biggest of men's minds it's way beyond the comprehension of the most clever among us it's big big big way beyond and that's why we can't always

come to our religion and examine it and say i can't abide with this and this is intolerable to me and we must do away with this and the whole world is living under the tyranny of this concept no more of this we'll design something more fitting to man as we know him all that proves is that we don't know god nor that we know man it's not big enough and so when he says some people may be able to make sense of this account of required belief but i cannot i happen to be reading another book at the same time as i was reading tom's account and it's a book by gerald bray called christ creeds and counsel and he makes the most exciting good sense of even the creed of saint athanas so that you wonder why we don't say it every sunday in church why we don't stand up and sing it why we don't stand on the street corner of declare he can somehow make sense of it now not sense in that he's in control of it but sees it as how god has chosen to express himself to us now if you go back and i'm sure you're concerned that i should get there soon back to the first chapter of the epistle to the hebrews you will see that it wasn't the man on the moon that affected that generation it was angels they were big on angels our materialist kind of secular society is not big on angels we're we don't think about them a lot in fact we probably think they're mostly for children and that well read the first epistles of the hebrews if you want to know who an angel is and how god uses but you see their problem was that they thought probably the angels were the greatest people in the world and

in the whole of our spiritual and material world and so the writer argued with the hebrews and said angels are nothing really you may think they are the supreme beings in the whole of the universe but they are really nothing then he begins hebrews chapter one we may think that walking on the moon is the supreme achievement of our century but it was made under two presidents of the united states who almost simultaneously announced that they were going to wage war on poverty and win they didn't somehow our world is focused around the man on the moon and their world was focused around the angels hebrews one is to tell them that there's something infinitely greater and if you take the first four verses of this chapter you will have what is described by people who know these things the most superb example of new testament

Greek in all the new testament describing the most sublime person in all of history that's the one who stands as the man for all ages and they say of this man that he was the one through whom the world was created he is the heir of all things he is the one who perfectly reflects the glory of God he is the one who bears the stamp of God's nature he is the one who upholds the universe by his word of power he is the one who made purification for our sins on the cross he is the one who is seated at the right hand of

God awaiting the tribute that needs to be paid from him from every nation and every generation and every part of the whole of life God so that's what comes in the first four verses and then the writer takes the Old Testament and like a skilled lawyer he draws out the testimony of the Old Testament and says now will you bear witness to this man so from the Psalms it says he is the one to whom we bear witness that that God has said of him thou art my tongue he is the one of whom God says in the Old Testament the one whom angels worship passing down their golden crowns upon the silver sea he is the one through whom the righteous rule of God is established he is the one that makes the whole created universe look like a worn out overcoat that is ready to be thrown away because it's finished that he is just beginning something infinitely greater than the whole of the created universe that's what they say about him then the whole chapter ends with a kind of throwaway line because he's establishing that he is infinitely greater than the angels he says angels have a single purpose that is that they are ministering spirits sent forth to serve for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation that the myriads upon myriads of angels exist for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation salvation they are the servants of god for his purpose in our lives i don't know if you ever stopped to figure out how god holds this universe together how god can take a bunch of totally contrary people like you and me and work with us and keep us from destroying ourselves through generation after generation of how god can assault the hearts of men and bring them to fervent belief and trust in him of how god can penetrate the strong concrete walls of culture and bring something totally new will you get some idea of how god does it and what a tremendous task it is in that one verse all these myriads of angels are ministering spirits sent to serve for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation my friend tom harper dismisses the creed on the basis of a certain amount of empirical evidence that he was able to pick up when he went to church one day and he says in his book not long ago I was discussing the much simpler apostle's creed with a man who had been a devout and loyal churchman

[ 21 : 30 ] for more than 60 years served as a sideman and church warden in one of the largest anglican cathedrals in Canada always standing at crisp attention whenever the creeds are said or sung I asked him how much of it he really understood he said precious little if anything well I'm sure that answer applies to Tom Harper too and it certainly applies to me and it certainly is totally in accord with the first chapter of Hebrews because when you're introduced to the man who is the heir of all things the one through whom the world was created the one who perfectly reflects the glory of God the one who bears the stamp of his nature and upholds the universe by his word of power the one who made purification for sin the one who is seated at the right hand of

God the best among us no precious little of him but do we want to know do we want to know more and more do we want to live in a world where we control what we believe or do we live in a world where he who is the image and glory of God creator and sustainer of the universe has made himself known to us and we with our little minds have grasped precious little of that truth but that little is very precious indeed in that it may bring us at least from time to time to the place where we fall on our knees in the worship of the God who has made himself known to us in Jesus Christ and whose purpose of eternal salvation is directed toward men who neither know nor honor him is directed towards man in his red-handed rebellion against the rule and authority and love of God this God is new and

Hebrews 11 tells us that he does. You see if our generation is absorbed with the man who walked on the moon every generation every culture every language every century of history is now confronted with not the man who walked on the moon but the man who rose from the moon. He is the one. We are to know him. He is the one to whom we must come in humble adoration and faith and belief.

Put our whole trust in him. The man who walked on the moon and the men who put him there are not able even to challenge the spiritual powers and darkness of our world.

[ 25 : 25 ] This man who rose from the dead has not only challenged him but overcome him and invites us to put our faith in him and in his word we are given the assurance that all the myriads of angels are there to serve God in order to bring us and all men to that eternal salvation which it is God's purpose we should come.

Powerful chapter, chapter 1. I hope it could very much disturb you and me and our people out of the narrow little rough in which we try and force the God in whom we believe and whom we think we control bring us into the awesome presence of the God who controls us and who in that love and desire to make himself.

Amen. Amen. Our offertory hymn is number 7.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[ 29 : 15 ] Amen. Amen.