

The samaritan problem

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Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] Hebrews chapter 1, we're going to be taking a section of Hebrews chapter 1 beginning at verse 10. As you make your way there, the writer to Hebrews is talking about how God revealed himself in the past through prophets, speaking through them to people on earth. But in these last days, of course, the days of Jesus, and since then, he has spoken to us through his Son, Jesus Christ being the final revelation of God, the complete revelation. In other words, if you want to know what God is like, then take a good long look at Jesus. We pick it up then in verse 10 and read through to the end. It says, You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain. They will wear out like a garment, like a robe, you will roll them up, like a garment, they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.

And to the witch of the angels has he ever said, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation? Well, may God bless his word, bless it to our hearts, our understanding. We'll come back to that after we sing. So I've just spilt water all over myself, sorry.

I do apologise. Well, this morning, I addressed to you the importance of getting the gospel right, and the two ways that people get the gospel wrong, by prepending the gospel, that is putting something that you must do before the gospel, before hearing the gospel in order to be saved, or adding to the gospel, that is something that you must do after you have heard the gospel.

I explained that the Christian church, while they may claim to believe in salvation by grace alone through faith alone, a little bit of testing of that proves that actually not too many actually do in practice.

[2 : 48] That it's very easy for many in the church to fall into a works righteousness, where they even believe, perhaps tempted to believe, that if they pray more, that God would think more of them.

God will not think more of you if you pray more, and he will not think less of you if you pray less. The encouragement to prayer, of course, will always be reflected in your Christian life, but your value to God doesn't change based on what you do or do not do.

Well, this evening, we come to Hebrews, and it's getting God right. And the reason for getting God right is incredibly important, bearing in mind everything that we have just done.

We're here to worship God in spirit and in truth, and Hebrews is the very testing of whether or not we've actually done that. Hebrews is written to Christians who are already beginning to turn back on their faith.

They're already beginning to turn around. They're not continuing. And the writer wants to know, the writer knows why this is happening, but the reader might be very interested into why it's happening and why even that those turning back from the faith may not always recognize that they're actually doing that.

[4 : 18] That is a crucial observation that those who are turning back not recognizing that they have done that very thing. Persevering in the faith is something we must all do, but it is a perseverance in the faith by faith in God.

But this backslidden pattern begins to happen the moment the church fails to meet together. it's not just a neglect of God that's happened, but it's actually a neglect of the image of God in each other.

That we're failing to meet with the people of God and in doing so, it's not long before they are gone altogether. Hebrews 6, of course, is a very famous chapter on apostasy of someone in the church who has enjoyed almost every blessing that you've had.

You know, they've tasted the things of the Spirit and the things to come. They've gone through the waters of baptism, and yet they have fallen away. And there's nothing more devastating to see than to actually witness that happen.

And some of us here in this church have witnessed that very thing happen in those that we know and love. So the writer of Hebrews is very, very clear about how to stay on track.

[5 : 43] And he's also equally clear about why many don't. He also recognizes that without the sufficient enough information, a sufficient enough truth, you've got nothing to anchor onto.

That your faith is weak because your knowledge of God is weak. Our faith is strong when our knowledge of God is growing because there's more to anchor onto.

And we often hear the message that a little knowledge is dangerous, but it's not always applied to Christianity. But it's equally true that a little knowledge of God is dangerous.

It's dangerous because your faith is nothing to grab hold onto and you begin to slip away. That while you may be presently here, your actual Christian life is far from what it ought to be.

Now, we all want to grow, assumedly, that is an assumption. But we definitely don't want anybody to turn away from the faith.

[6 : 50] And so what happens is that many Christians arrive at plenty of conclusions about God that may actually be a long way from the truth. We want to get God right. We want to understand God properly so that we sing the right things.

We do sing the right things here. So that we pray the right prayers. So that we know who it is that we are addressing as we gather together like we do this evening. The reason the writer of Hebrews writes like this is because he has to deal with the Samaritan problem.

And the Samaritan problem is not just a problem for these Christians here in this church. The Samaritan problem is still a problem in the church today. And the Samaritan problem is you have a group of people who worship what they do not know.

Jesus says that to the woman at the well in John 4. The Samaritan woman. You worship what you do not know. It's not that her worship is insincere.

It's not that it's an act of genuine part. The thing is she's worshipping something she does not know. What happens then when Christians worship a God that they do not know?

[8 : 03] Well they're unable to determine whether or not their worship of God is going to be acceptable by him. They don't know who he is or what he wants. How can we ever know whether or not the things that we sing please God if we don't know the God that we actually sing to?

How can we ever know if our life of service is something that pleases God if we don't know the God that we actually serve? How can we actually know what God expects from the Christian life if we don't know the God who expects us to live a Christian life?

You see the problem. It's not just that our faith has less to anchor onto but we don't know what standards to live to or by.

And so the expectations of God fall as it were on deaf ears which is what the writer to the Hebrews points out that they've forgotten many things. It's not just that they're neglecting many things they have forgotten many things.

So the writer of Hebrews begins this way Jesus is better Jesus is greater You want to know who Jesus is?

[9 : 17] Jesus is the great one. He's better than any prophet. He's better than any king. He's better than any angel. Jesus is the greater one.

He begins by drawing your attention to who Jesus is. He begins by getting you to pay attention to the God that you're actually being called to worship.

He begins to show us Jesus' rightful place after the ascension. salvation. Not just who Jesus was as he walked and ministered amongst the disciples but where Jesus is now and what Jesus is doing.

And the reason why that's important is so that we would worship the God we know or rather know the God we worship. So when you take into consideration the whole of the Old Testament and you get to Jesus the writer says Jesus is better.

Jesus is the one we listen to. Jesus is the one we follow. If I can illustrate it this way it would be like this. When God gave his people the Ten Commandments one of the things that's perhaps puzzled me or at least I've always asked the question is why he gave it to them when he did.

[10 : 33] Why not give it to them before they came out of Egypt or why not give it to them once they got into the promised land? Why did God decide to give the Ten Commandments when he

did?

Right? Why not wait until all of God's people were in the promised land that he promised them that they enjoyed the health of the land, the wealth of the land, that they enjoyed all the resources, that they were settled?

Why not at that point give them the Ten Commandments? And of course the simple point is that God is to come first before all of those things. That your relationship with God is to be of first importance.

And there's absolutely no way that all of these people would know how to relate to God if God didn't tell these people who he was or what he was like. The Ten Commandments is God revealing to his people who he is.

And he's revealing to his people who he is so that they may respond to him appropriately, properly. God is saying look, if I don't tell you who I am, you won't know how to come before me.

[11 : 42] If I don't show you who I am, your worship of me will be unacceptable. And you'll notice that when Moses was actually up on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments, that very issue happened.

That God's people having been brought out of Egypt, having been redeemed as it were, by the blood of the Lamb, in Old Testament fashion. Of course, all redemption happens in Christ Jesus. But as they are brought out, as they are saved, as it were, it's not too long before they're asking Aaron, can you take our gold earrings and melt it down into a golden calf?

And they begin to praise God through a graven image, thus breaking the second commandment. One of the issues that you have is that you do not know how to worship God unless you know who God is.

They worship who they do not know. And so what the Ten Commandments does, though the story unfolds with Moses breaking them and then it has to happen all over again, is that the people need to learn who God is so that they can worship him properly.

[12 : 54] God is not to be worshipped through an image of any kind, whether it be a golden calf or a mental image. image. And by mental image, I mean, if your imagination of God is incorrect, then you are worshipping what you do not know.

That if your mental image of God does not reflect the true God, then it cannot be said that you are worshipping God properly. So getting God right is important for our worship and for our life before him.

God is God. And another reason is simply because we are to reflect God in this church, then we need to know what God is like in order for that reflection to be a true reflection.

If we want to love the image of God as it were, in people, this is the only image we are allowed to love, of course, the image of God in people, then the way it must happen is that image must reflect the God who made us.

So Hebrews begins by telling us that Jesus is greater. It's just making clear who is the one that we worship. And the writer writes this way because he's having to speak to a load of people who are turning back, thinking that the old way of life is better than this new way of life in Christ Jesus.

[14 : 22] that they want to reflect their old life rather than the new life that they have been given by the Lord Jesus Christ. And the reason they're turning back is because they're failing to see the promised future.

They're failing to see what Christ has actually accomplished. They're failing to see everything that God is and what God is going to do in the future.

They're turning back because their image of the future is blinded by ambiguity. They don't take a step forward.

They take a step back because it's familiar ground. I know what I'm doing back there. Can things not go back to the old way when I knew how to live that type of life? I was more familiar.

I was more comfortable. But all this is all new and I feel lost. lost. Well, when you feel lost in the newness, the answer is learn. Come before God and learn.

[15 : 25] Don't go back to the old just because it is familiar, because it's easy, because you've got a settled routine back there and you're finding it uncomfortable to fit into a new routine.

Okay? The new routine is the worship of God. That'll shape your life properly. It'll shape your life and conform you to the very image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what God does when God's people worship who they know. Worship God properly. So, Jesus is greater for a number of reasons and you'll notice in verse 13, one of the key reasons why Jesus is greater.

Verse 13 quotes Psalm 110 and Psalm 110 is one of the most quoted Psalms in the whole of the New Testament, if not the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament.

And Psalm 110 begins, The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, as it says here, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.

[16:34] The image here is of what Jesus is doing after his ascension and where Jesus has gone. The image that you are to have in your mind of the Lord Jesus Christ now is that he sits on the throne at the right hand of the Father with all authority.

Total authority. That that is where he has gone. And what is he doing? He is sat there until the very enemies of the Lord Jesus are made his footstool.

Now, the image here is one that we may not be familiar with, but a really important one. that when victory was won in the Old Testament, you go read Joshua, Joshua chapter 10, if you read that, when victory was won, the victor would stand on the throat of the one who was defeated.

You would literally put your foot over the other person's throat. And the image was to declare who the victor was. That you have one who's seen in that picture is strong, mighty, the warrior, who has won the victory, and the other one who's lying defeated.

Game is over. There's no more battle to be fought. And what we see in this image of the Lord Jesus Christ is he's sat on his throne with his enemies being made his footstool.

[17:57] Victory is the Lord's. And all enemies are literally defeated. There is nothing that can come to Jesus. There is nothing that can triumph Jesus.

There is nothing that can overcome him or the people who are in him. As one person once said, that every enemy of the Lord is also beneath my feet because I am in Christ Jesus.

If they're beneath Christ's feet, they're beneath our feet by virtue of us belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot lose because Christ has won the victory.

victory. The image is clear. Jesus is the victor. Jesus has won. But not many believers live with this kind of image of Jesus.

Not many believers live with the kind of image that clearly portrays Jesus Christ as the warrior who has defeated his enemies. Through the cross of Christ, of course.

[19:02] And one of the blessings here is that one day, there is coming a day where the visible reign of Christ will be manifest to everyone. Everyone will see what is said here to actually be true.

There's coming a day, Psalm 22 says, where the whole world will worship God. But not too many Christians live with that view either. That they often live with a view that we're just here ready to escape it at some point.

But that's not the picture the scripture paints. It's a picture of Christ having won the victory. And the people of earth will one day bow the knee. And the world will turn and worship the Lord.

And the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of the Lord. That's the picture that we are painted in the New Testament. It is a picture of victory given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's the God we worship. That's the God that we bow our knee to. And so what begins to happen when you learn of who God is, you move further and further away from worshiping what you do not know.

[20:12] The more you learn of Jesus, the more you learn of God, the more you invest yourself in what God has spoken, the further and further away you move from worshiping what you do not know.

But the further the other way means that you're just further and further into the positioning of worshiping what you do not know. This isn't just about our faith being strengthened, though that happens.

This is about getting God right. What happens when we understand God is that we're looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Strong faith comes with seeing Jesus clearly. strong faith comes with looking to Jesus. Strong faith comes with fixing your eyes upon him.

It comes with worshiping who you know, what you know. Faith doesn't change in the sense that it becomes something different.

[21 : 18] Imagine it like this where a child is born and then after a number of years that child is now an old person. They've had faith, let's say, from when they were young and now they're old.

What's changed? Well, the maturity of their faith has changed. The maturity of their faith has changed because as they have grown, as they repent and believe, as they learn of God through his word, their faith is strengthened.

It is anchored in his word. Their faith matures. But the faith that is mature when they're old is the same faith they had when they were young. It's the same faith.

It's just the level of maturity is different. Think of the disciples who were in the boat in the storm and they're confused over why Jesus is not doing anything about it or why he's fast asleep.

And Jesus rebukes the wind and the waves and of course he also rebukes the disciples. Oh, you of little faith. And they look at Jesus and they say, who is this? Who is this that can calm the wind and the waves?

[22 : 24] They've been following a person that they do not fully know who it is. They know who Jesus is but they do not know who Jesus is. Their faith has to mature.

They have to learn more. They have to take it in and they have to appreciate the God that they belong to. How can they ever worship God properly if they do not know who God is properly? Peter is one that always puts his foot in it. But the issue for Peter was not that he didn't have faith and the other disciples. It was rather that his faith was immature and that it needed maturing. Faith grows but it doesn't become something different. It always fixes on Jesus. It always looks to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

But these Christians here who are turning away have turned their eyes away from Jesus. And not only have they turned their eyes away, they've turned their ears away because faith comes by hearing.

[23 : 32] The reason why their faith is not strong is because they have forgotten that faith comes through the ear. And this is one of the failures I think of the modern church.

That we have forgotten the very basic understanding that faith comes through the ear. that your faith is strengthened through the ear. Through hearing the word of God like you're hearing now. That's how God strengthens your faith. It also is devastating to evangelism because the Christian church that forgets that faith comes through the ear can easily slip into forgetting that evangelism is something that's something people must hear.

It is something must be said to the world. And so when you have a church that doesn't listen to God you also have a church that doesn't speak for God because we have nothing to say.

It takes us to listen to God to be able to say anything about God to anyone else. Faith comes through the ear. Our faith is strengthened through the ear.

[24 : 37] But this church have become dull of hearing. They're turning away because the writer is saying I want to say more to you but I can't hear.

And everything rests on you hearing. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Everything rests on you hearing what God is saying.

Reading it for yourself or hearing it audibly. Everything rests on that. But you've become I can't do anything more with you until as Jesus says let him who have ears to hear hear.

So the writer is convinced that one of the reasons why these Christians fail to see who God actually is and begin to turn away is because they've turned their eyes and ears away.

And one of the reasons any Christian turns their eyes and ears away is because they've become like what they worship but what they worship is not God. Psalm 115. Those who don't hear God, those who don't fix their eyes on Jesus as Psalm 115 would put it, have become like their idols that have ears but cannot hear, that have eyes but cannot see.

[25 : 48] And they have become like the very thing that they love and trust in. They become like what they worship but what they worship is not God. They become like what they love but they are not sure about what it is that they actually love.

But here's the exhortation then as we close. Hopefully you will see and you definitely would see if you read the rest of Hebrews that the writer is not trying to determine whether or not you're a Christian.

What the writer is determining is whether or not you are living the Christian way. So he's not trying to determine whether or not you're in or out, whether you're saved or unsaved.

He's writing to a group of Christians that he knows is saved but whether or not their life is reflecting the salvation that Christ accomplished. He has to deal with the Samaritan problem.

The Samaritan problem being that they're worshipping a God that they do not know. But not because God cannot be known, but because they have become dull in hearing.

[26 : 54] And the reason why their faith has become weak is because faith comes by hearing. The reason they are turning back to the old patterns is because they're more familiar than the new ones in Christ Jesus.

they've chosen the easy way because it's familiar rather than the new way because they have become dull of hearing. They worship what they do not know and therefore they do not worship God properly.

They are trusting and loving in something else other than God. The focus here is to fix your eyes on Jesus. The focus here is to get you to pay attention to Jesus.

He's better in every way than any person. There's nothing embarrassing about any woman here loving Jesus more than her children or her husband or any other member in her family.

And there's nothing embarrassing here for men to say that they love God, to say that they love Jesus. There's nothing embarrassing to say I bow the knee to Jesus Christ.

[28 : 04] There's nothing weak about bowing the knee to Jesus Christ. In fact, it's the very thing that makes you into the very man that you ought to be because you're made in the image of God.

But people who have forgotten that faith comes by hearing through the ear don't hear that and therefore don't do that. Well, there are a couple of issues then that need to be corrected.

The writer of Hebrews says, go back and look at Jesus. Get Jesus right. See who he is for yourself and then you'll work out that you're turning back from someone that's a big mistake to turn back from.

You're turning back to a way that cannot compare to the beauty in Christ Jesus. You're turning back to something that cannot compete with who God is.

Hence why we hear the warning in chapter 12 which says, do not refuse God who is speaking to you. Don't refuse him. God did not give his son in vain.

[29 : 11] Do not refuse God who's speaking to you. Faith comes to the ear. Don't refuse that and fall away. Let me conclude.

Ask yourself the question why you worship God the way you do. Ask yourself the question whether or not God is to be worshipped any differently than the way that you do.

Are you convinced that the things that you say are the right things to say to God? Are you convinced that the things that you sing are actually the right things? It's made easy for us because Ian chooses the hymns so wisely that that's not a problem for us here.

But out with other songs. Are we sure that we're worshipping God properly? And that's not to question whether or not you are. It's simply to get you to ask the question.

It's simply to get you to ask yourself the question how well do I know God? It's not to question your worship or to say that you're not doing it properly at all.

[30 : 15] It's simply to get you to reflect on how well you know the God you worship. That's all that I'm asking you and myself to do.

So with this I'll finish. remember that the only way forward is to fix your eyes on Jesus. The only way to be the very image of God on earth is to fix your eyes on Jesus.

And the reason why this is true is because we become like what we worship. We will always become like what we worship. And if we're made in the image of God then it is God that we must worship.

Amen.