

May/June 2020

Today

refresh, refocus, renew

COMMUNITY



ALSO: JESUS IN HEBREWS

Dear Friends:

In the early seventeenth century, the English poet John Donne famously wrote, “No man is an island.” He went on to add, “Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.” Donne’s poem states the obvious: to be human is to be in community. God made us for life together.



Because of our rebellion against God, however, we live in broken communities, often marred by strife and conflict. The gospel tells us that through the blood of Christ we are reconciled to God and to each other. As Christians, we are one family with all other followers of Jesus. We are not alone; we belong to Jesus and to each other.

This May, as Bret Lamsma reflects on the lives of members of his congregation, he shares the beauty of Christian community from a wide variety of biblical angles. And in doing so, he encourages us to rejoice and grow in the blessings of our life together.

Then, in June, Brian Kuyper dives deep into the book of Hebrews to explore the person and work of Jesus Christ. This study helps us to build up our relationship with our Lord and Savior, who makes it possible for us to be the people of God.

May God’s Word refresh, refocus, and renew you each day!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kurt Selles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

—Kurt Selles

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**“Community”
Bret Lamsma**



**“Jesus in Hebrews”
Brian Kuyper**

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ReFrame
Media

june

Jesus in Hebrews

Brian Kuyper

When you begin reading a book, you usually expect that it will follow a plot line. There's generally an introduction followed by rising action, and the action reaches to a climax and then moves on to a resolution. In the book of Hebrews the writer seems to jump right to the climax. In the opening four verses of this book we see a bold declaration about Jesus and his superiority over everything. Hebrews opens with a punch.

Following that, the rest of Hebrews shows clearly that Jesus is far superior to angels, to priests, to the old covenant (Old Testament) system of sacrifices, and more. Because of the work of Jesus, we can see that he has fulfilled all that was prophesied about him earlier in the Bible.

This month we will be exploring the book of Hebrews together. This book was written to an audience that knew the old covenant well, so we will see a number of Old Testament references as we move along through Hebrews. As we reflect on these passages, let's ask God to show us clearly that Jesus Christ is everything we need for our lives.

Brian Kuyper is the lead pastor at a church in Taber, Alberta. He has served in two congregations in southern Alberta over the past 12 years. He is married to Brenda, and they have three school-age children.

HEIR OF ALL THINGS

In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things. . . .
—Hebrews 1:2

Hebrews begins by making some big statements in its first three verses. Each day this week we will focus on one of those statements and what it means for us.

Christ is the “heir of all things.” Prophets were sent to speak to God’s people. They brought important news and teachings from God, but they were merely messengers. Now God has come and has spoken to his people directly through his Son, who is the “heir of all things.”

This reference points back to Psalm 2:7-8, which says, “He said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have become your father. Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.’” In Jesus, God fulfills this amazing promise.

Jesus is the heir who receives all that the Father has. Peter says that this inheritance “can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:4).

So what does this mean for us? As followers of Christ, we are adopted into God’s family as his children, and we are “co-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17). As co-heirs with Christ, we are set to inherit all that Christ inherits—namely, salvation from sin and eternal life with him.

Lord, you promise us the rich inheritance of eternal life with you. Help us to keep our eyes focused on Christ, our brother. Amen.

MAKER OF THE UNIVERSE

... and through whom also he made the universe.

—Hebrews 1:2

This statement in our text for today seems almost tacked on as an afterthought. But it is so much more than that.

This same idea is mentioned in John 1:3, 1 Corinthians 8:6, and Colossians 1:16. When Hebrews says that through Jesus God “made the universe,” it is saying that Jesus is over and above all things because he created it all.

All of the Old Testament prophets pointed to Christ. When he came to live among us as a real human being, he was fulfilling all that was written about him.

The writer of Hebrews knew that some people were looking past Christ to the prophets and the Old Testament. So here the writer is starting off by describing the greatness of Christ in a few powerful statements about him. He is God’s Son, the one

who will inherit everything. He is also the maker of the universe, the maker of *everything*.

So what does this mean for us? Why is it important that Christ is the maker of all things? Not only is Jesus God’s Son, but he also made the earth with the Father. He is *truly* God. Knowing that Jesus is the maker of all things means that we can trust in him for all things. We can depend on him as the one who cares for his creation. So when things in life seem to be out of control, we can trust in the sovereign power of Jesus as Lord over everything.

Maker of the universe,
help me to trust in you for
all things. I know you are
Lord over everything, in-
cluding everything in my
life. Amen.

THE RADIANCE OF GOD'S GLORY

The Son is the radiance of God's glory. . . .

—Hebrews 1:3

When you are driving east as the sun rises, it can be really difficult to see what is in front of you. Many drivers wear sunglasses to help deflect the brilliant sunlight. Sometimes sunglasses don't even help much.

What comes to mind when you think about the sun? When we look straight into the sun, its brilliance can be blinding, but the beautiful, clear light radiating from the sun also helps us see the things around us. Sunlight also radiates heat, warming the earth each day as it gives light for plants and for growing food. We cannot separate the radiating light and heat from the sun; these properties always go together with sunlight for our life here on earth.

Similarly, we cannot separate Jesus, the Son of God, from God himself. Hebrews says, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory. . . ." Think about

what this means: in Jesus, the *glory of God* came to dwell among us, taking on our flesh and becoming one of us. The glory of God in Christ was humbled on the cross when he died to pay the price of our sin for us. Then the glory of God shone in its brilliance when Jesus rose again from the dead.

"The radiance of God's glory" came for all to see. As the gospel of John explains, Jesus came to give light to everyone in the world (John 1:9). Jesus came to draw us to himself, the light of the world, so that we could come out of darkness.

Lord, draw us to yourself as the light of the world. Give us light so that, like you, we can be a light in the darkness. Amen.

WHAT DOES GOD LOOK LIKE?

The Son is . . . the exact representation of [God's] being. . . .

—Hebrews 1:3

Have you ever been asked by a child, “What does God look like?” Or have you ever wondered about that yourself? Hebrews gives us the answer to this question: “[Jesus is] the exact representation of [God’s] being.”

What does God look like? He looks like Jesus because Jesus looks like God. To some of us this might not sound helpful, because we do not know exactly what Jesus looks like. But this is about more than just a physical appearance. We know that Jesus became a human being, so we can assume things about his physical nature. But this also means much more.

Jesus says in John 14:9, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” Likewise, we’re told in Colossians 1:15, “The Son is the image of the invisible God.” In Jesus we can see God—and this has to do with God’s char-

acter. Jesus reveals “the exact imprint” of God’s nature, as some Bible translations put it. In Jesus we see that God is loving, merciful, caring, just, righteous, and more. In the actions and words of Jesus, we see God’s character.

Jesus revealed God’s character the most clearly when he showed his love for us by dying on the cross to save us from our sin. In that one act we see God’s love, mercy, care, justice, and righteousness. If you want to know what God looks like, look to Jesus. In him we see what God looks like in all his glory.

Father God, as we look to Jesus, we can see you and experience your great love for us. Help us to show your love to others as your representatives. Amen.

SUSTAINING ALL

The Son is . . . sustaining all things by his powerful word.

—Hebrews 1:3

If you are holding the printed booklet of these *Today* devotions in your hands, notice that the pages are all held together by a couple of staples so that the booklet doesn't fall apart. If you are reading digitally, imagine a book held together by its binding. This is the image we have of Christ; he is holding *all things* together.

Earlier this week we focused on Christ as the *maker* of all things. And here we note that he is holding it all together. This image is powerful. In Christ all things were made, and through Christ all things are sustained and held together. God did not create all things and then leave them be. Through Christ, all things are being sustained and held together.

This serves as a powerful reminder that God is in control. The Heidelberg Catechism helps us see how we can

respond to this: "We can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing in creation will separate us from his love" (Q&A 28).

Whenever life seems to be going out of control, we have this assurance that God is holding everything together. Find rest and peace in knowing that Christ is "sustaining all things by his powerful Word."

Lord, thank you for holding all things together through your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us to rest in knowing this. Amen.

PURIFICATION FOR SINS

After he had provided purification for sins . . .

—Hebrews 1:3

In the opening verses of Hebrews, we learn a lot about Jesus. He is the “heir of all things,” “through whom also [God] made the universe.” Jesus “is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.” And now we read that he has provided “purification for sins.”

This points to one of the main teachings in the book of Hebrews. Jesus “provided purification for sins.” Notice also that Jesus has *already* done this for us. It is something in the past.

Purification means being made pure or clean again. When humanity fell into sin, it tainted everything about us. We are unable to do anything to make ourselves pure or clean again. We need someone far greater than we are in order to be purified of our sin.

Having been washed and made pure in Christ, however, we are clean. We do not need to be purified ever again as long as we believe that Jesus has done this already for us. We will learn more about this as the message of Hebrews unfolds.

Having been washed and made pure, we are called to *live as* washed and purified people. We are called to put our sins away and to live holy and pure lives.

Thank you, Jesus, for washing us and purifying us of our sin. Help us to live as your people who have been made pure. Amen.

SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD

He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

—Hebrews 1:3

At the beginning of history, when God had finished all of his creating work, what did he do? He rested (Genesis 2:2). Does this mean God sat back and did nothing? No, it means that God had accomplished all he had set out to do, and that he now reigns over it all.

We get the same picture here of Jesus. We have learned a lot about Jesus in these few verses at the beginning of Hebrews. "After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." Jesus had accomplished everything he had set out to do, and now he sits at God the Father's right hand.

This does not mean, of course, that Jesus is sitting around doing nothing. To be seated at God's right hand is to reign, actively ruling over all the work and development of God's eternal, universal kingdom.

Jesus became human, one of us, for a purpose: to provide purification for our sins. And when he accomplished that, the Father restored him to his rightful place on the throne in heaven. From there he reigns and rules with the Father now and till he comes again (Revelation 4-5; 21:1-7).

What does this mean for us? Jesus accomplished purification and salvation for us; we do not have to earn our salvation. And now Jesus sits and reigns at the Father's right hand, holding all things together.

Ascended Lord Jesus, thank you for your finished work and for your ongoing rule over all things. May we live in gratitude, seeking to serve in building your kingdom wherever you lead us. Amen.

SUPERIOR TO THE ANGELS

So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.
—Hebrews 1:4

Around 20 years ago lots of people were fascinated with angels. TV shows and movies captured viewers' attention with made-up stories about angels and other spiritual beings. There is something about angels that intrigues us—probably because we don't know much about them.

We are not exactly sure why the book of Hebrews has a heavy emphasis on angels. There may have been some popular speculation about them back in the time when it was written. Maybe people were trying to reduce Jesus to the same level as angels.

But one thing that Hebrews makes clear is that Jesus is *far superior* to the angels. Angels are messengers of God. Prophets also were messengers of God. But Jesus is far greater because he is God.

Our text says it rather simply. After reminding readers of all that Jesus is and has done, Hebrews says, "So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs." Then the rest of the chapter quotes from text after text in the Old Testament to show how much superior Jesus is.

The focus of Hebrews is on Jesus. Not even the angels can compare to him. And now that his superiority is established, we will begin to unpack who Jesus is and how that helps us in our daily lives.

Lord Jesus, you are Lord over all. Help us to keep that focus as we live for you each day. Amen.

WE SEE JESUS

But we do see Jesus . . . now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.
—Hebrews 2:9

“But we do see Jesus . . .” This is the first time the book of Hebrews mentions the personal name of Jesus. All along the way, we knew who the author was talking about, making references to God’s Son, but now we also see his name: *Jesus*.

So now we can also focus on the person of Jesus. In saying his name, we think of his human nature; we think of Jesus as a person.

Jesus became a human being, lower than the angels for a while—but only until he entered again into the full glory of God in heaven. He was lower than the angels for a specific purpose: to suffer death and to “taste death for everyone.” In Philippians 2 the Bible speaks of Jesus humbling himself to the point of death on a cross. Here the writer of Hebrews points out that Jesus was made

lower than the angels “for a little while” so that he could suffer death for us. As a result, he is “crowned with glory and honor.”

Jesus, God’s Son who is superior to the angels, was made lower than them for a while so that he could suffer death for us by the grace of God. And now and forever we, who were once lost, see Jesus. God’s Son, Jesus, our Savior, lowered himself to taste death for our sake so that we would not have to fear death and suffering.

Dear Jesus, thank you for lowering yourself to taste death for us. Because of you, we are not alone in our suffering, and we have hope. Amen.

FULLY HUMAN

Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. —Hebrews 2:18

Jesus is our brother. Sometimes we might not like to think of Jesus this way because we might think we're lowering his divinity, power, or authority. But this is exactly who Jesus is; Hebrews makes clear that he is our brother.

Hebrews 2 emphasizes the reality that Jesus was made "fully human in every way." We cannot stress this enough. Jesus did not simply *appear* to be human; he *was and is* fully human. As the writer explains, we needed one who is exactly like us to be able to break the power of the devil for our sake.

Referring to Jesus as our brother does not reduce his power or authority. It highlights the very real fact that he became *fully human* in order to "make atonement for the sins of the people." As a human being, he experienced temptation just as we do. He is no stranger

to our experiences. He knows what we go through because he himself went through it.

Jesus doesn't just sympathize with us as one who does not really know what our life is like. As a human he has suffered, and he was tempted just as we are. He knows what we go through, and as a result, that can help us in *our* weakness. Jesus suffered and was proved perfect through his suffering in order to make us holy. Not only do we have one who understands, but because of his suffering, we are being made holy through him.

Jesus, our brother, thank you for becoming like one of us. Thank you for your suffering, through which we are being made holy. Amen.

GREATER THAN MOSES

But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.
—Hebrews 3:6

Moses was one of the most important people in Israelite history. A follower of the God of Israel would never want to diminish Moses' faithful service. The writer of Hebrews does not want to downplay the importance of Moses. But because Jesus, the Son of God, is far greater, the writer aims to exalt who Jesus is.

Hebrews has shown that Jesus is greater than the angels. Now it also shows that Jesus is greater than Moses, and that is not an easy task.

The writer uses the analogy of a builder in comparison to a caretaker. While being the caretaker of a building can be very important, the builder of the building has greater honor. Without the builder, there would be no building to take care of.

Moses was a caretaker. Jesus—God himself—is the builder. While Moses served an important role in *caring* for God's people, Jesus is the one who *builds* them into his people. Moses led God's people out of slavery as God provided the way to freedom. Jesus frees his people from the slavery of sin. Moses pointed the way. Jesus provides the way to salvation for all of God's people. In fact, Jesus says, "I am the way. . . ." (John 14:6).

So let's focus our thoughts on Jesus—not on other servants or messengers, but on Jesus, the builder of God's house, to which we belong.

Dear Jesus, continue to build us as your house. Help us to hold on firmly to our confidence and hope in you. Amen.

ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER DAILY

See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily. . . . —Hebrews 3:12-13

We all need to pay attention when we see warning signs. But sometimes we get used to seeing warnings, and we begin to ignore them. When that happens, real danger can creep in and do lots of damage.

In the book of Hebrews we have come to a passage that serves as a warning sign. And we do well to pay attention to what the author is saying here. The writer is pointing to the history of God's people and showing how it did not play out so well. People were quick to harden their hearts and turn away from God.

So we need to learn from the mistakes of others. Don't harden your hearts to the Lord. Keep focused on Jesus.

One important lesson we find here is that in living in community together, we need to encourage each other in our walk

with God. We cannot keep free from sin and temptation on our own; we need the Lord, and we need each other. We need to encourage each other to keep on following the Lord.

When the people of God ignored warning signs in the past, they ran into real danger. Let's not get so used to warning signs that we begin to ignore them. Let's continue to encourage each other to "fix [our] thoughts on Jesus" (Hebrews 3:1).

Lord God, help us to pay attention to warning signs, keep our focus on Jesus, and encourage each other to hear your voice. Amen.

SABBATH-REST

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.
—Hebrews 4:9-10

Vacations are often a source of rest for many people. They are something that we long for after many months of hard work.

Each week we need a time of rest too. Earlier this month we spoke of God's rest on the seventh day when he completed the work of creation. That set a pattern for us that is worth keeping. In the midst of our busy lives each week, it is good to take a day to rest from our work, to take time to worship and honor God, and to give to and share with others, especially people who are in need.

The author of Hebrews points out that the promise to enter God's rest still stands. So, for all of us, this remains something to strive for and long for.

Echoing the warning signs mentioned earlier, Hebrews notes that some of God's

people hardened their hearts and refused to trust in God, so they did not enter his rest. Nevertheless, the promise of entering God's rest is still there.

The promise is for *everyone* who believes in the good news of Jesus Christ. Entering God's rest is something we may long for and desire. It is even something we can begin to enjoy in Christ now, and we are promised that it will be complete when Jesus comes again.

This is not a call to stop all of our activity and our work. Instead, it is a call to continue believing in Christ, knowing that through him we will enter God's promised rest and live with him forever.

Lord God, help us to find true rest in you. Amen.

THE WORD OF GOD IS ACTIVE

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to . . . the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. —Hebrews 4:12-13

A surgeon uses a scalpel to begin a process of opening a patient up. The surgeon does this in order to see or understand more about a problem inside the patient.

Hebrews describes God's Word as "sharper than any double-edged sword." In our world today, this picture of a sword may be difficult to grasp. The idea of a scalpel may be a little easier to understand. A scalpel can open us up and reveal what's going on inside us.

As Hebrews urges us to "make every effort to enter [God's] rest," we soon learn why we should pay attention to that warning—"for the word of God is alive and active." The all-powerful, all-knowing God knows us through and through; nothing "is hidden from God's sight."

Sometimes we try to hide and cover up the sin in our life. But nothing is hidden from God. And God's Word reveals things in us and to us that we might think could be hidden. It shows us the truth about us.

We are called to strive to enter into God's rest; we need to continue following the Lord and not harden our hearts to him. God guides us through his Word. By the power of his Spirit, God convicts us of the truth through his Word and leads us to live by the way of love, sharing his goodness and his good news with others.

Lord, help us to continue seeking to live for you, that we may enter your rest. Use your Word to guide as we seek your grace and share it with others. Amen.

APPROACHING GOD WITH CONFIDENCE

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.
—Hebrews 4:16

Priests were God's chosen servants; they served as mediators between God and his people. They worked in the temple, praying for the people and bringing their sacrifices to God. They offered sacrifices on behalf of the people to make atonement for their sins. And only the high priest was allowed to enter the most holy place to stand before God.

Earlier in Hebrews, Jesus is referred to as the "faithful high priest." Here, in chapter 4, he is called the "great high priest." This means he is actually the greatest of all high priests. He is the one true High Priest.

Jesus is the greatest because, unlike all the others, he "has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin." Because he is sinless and perfect, he is able to stand be-

fore God as the one who can make atonement for our sins.

Because of his perfect life, Jesus' atonement for our sins is real and lasting. For this reason, we do not need to be afraid to enter God's presence; in fact, we can have "confidence" when we approach God. We can be confident that we will "receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Don't be afraid to approach God. Instead, approach him with confidence, knowing that even though we cannot do this in our own strength, we can do it through Jesus, the great High Priest.

Lord Jesus, thank you for giving us the confidence to approach God to find mercy and grace. Amen.

APPOINTED BY GOD

In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest.
—Hebrews 5:5

What were the qualifications for becoming the high priest? The high priest was chosen from God's people, from the descendants of Aaron (Exodus 40:12-15), and was able to "deal gently" with those who did not know God and were going astray. This person was also called by God rather than taking the honor on himself.

Jesus did not come to appoint *himself* as the great high priest. But he met the qualifications of this role. As we have noted, he is fully human and can empathize with all our weaknesses. He understands all that we go through, even all our temptations, and yet he did not sin (Hebrews 4:15).

So God appointed him as the great High Priest. And because Jesus is the Son of God, from before the time of Aaron, God declared him "a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek,"

who served as a priest of God Most High (Genesis 14:18-20; Hebrews 7:1-3) outside the time Aaron.

At some points in the history of God's people, the high priest office was in the hands of families who took it on themselves or bought control of it. Jesus does not take this on himself but is appointed by God. He meets the qualifications, and he meets the needs of all of God's people.

The office of the great High Priest is not to be bought. It is filled by Jesus, God's Son, who is fully human and appointed by God himself.

Thank you, God, for appointing Jesus as our great High Priest. Because of his work, we are assured of your forgiveness. Amen.

THE SOURCE OF ETERNAL SALVATION

He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. . . .
—Hebrews 5:9

People are constantly searching for peace and happiness in their life. Whether they know it or not, they are searching for fulfillment and the meaning of life. They are searching to fill an emptiness in their life, even if they are not able to recognize that.

As Christians, we have been given the greatest of all gifts: eternal salvation. This gift is provided to us through the finished work of Jesus Christ. As we have learned, he is the great High Priest appointed to represent us and to mediate for us before God the Father. And in order to do that, he had to suffer, providing the sacrifice for our sin. Being proved perfect through his suffering for us, taking it on willingly in his obedience for our sake, “he became the source of eternal salvation.”

We know where we can find our salvation. It is not in our-

selves or anything that this world can offer. Our source of eternal salvation is in Jesus alone.

Having found the source of salvation, we are called to live obediently in gratitude for all he has done. We do not earn our salvation by being obedient; our obedience is an outpouring of gratitude for his suffering for our sake.

In Jesus we have the source of eternal salvation. We no longer need to search for true peace because we have found it in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Dear Jesus, thank you for your suffering. In your obedient, willing sacrifice for our sake, you are proven to be the perfect source of eternal salvation. Thank you. Amen.

GOD IS NOT UNJUST

God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him. . . .
—Hebrews 6:10

Many people worry about whether or not they are saved. They wonder how they can know if they will actually have eternal life with Jesus.

The author of Hebrews reminds us here of God's justice. And this passage is not saying that on the basis of our works we know we are saved. Rather, our work and the love that we have shown to God are the result of being saved already through the outpouring of his Spirit living in us—all because of the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Jesus assures us in Matthew 7 that a good tree can only bear good fruit. He's saying that the work that we do is not *earning* our salvation; it is *evidence* that we are already saved and that Jesus is living in us. Likewise, James 2:17 tells us, "Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

Do you ever wonder whether *you* will be saved? Remember, as the author of Hebrews says, "God is not unjust." God sees and will remember the work that you do and the love you have shown him. If you have trusted in the source of eternal salvation—that is, Jesus Christ—your good work and the love that you show are the works of God himself through you.

If you wonder whether your work is enough, remember that salvation is not based on your work. It is based on the finished work of Jesus, our great High Priest.

God, we thank you that you are not unjust. Help us to continue to bear good fruit and show your love. Amen.

ONCE FOR ALL

He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.
—Hebrews 7:27

In the Old Testament God made a covenant with his people. That covenant included a system of sacrifices that pointed to the forgiveness of sins. But those sacrifices could not fully take away sin because, as Hebrews states later, “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4). Those sacrifices only pointed ahead to the one true sacrifice that was really needed: the shed blood of a perfect human being who could offer his own life in place of ours, and that person is Jesus Christ.

We could not pay for our own sins. The only way for us to be saved was for a sinless person to die willingly in our place, for our sake. And only Jesus Christ, who is fully God and fully human, could do that.

For a time, God established the role of priests to offer sacri-

fices for his people. The priests offered sacrifices from the people to God day after day as payment for sins. And once a year, the high priest would make atonement for everyone on the Day of Atonement.

But all of that ceremony pointed to the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus, the great High Priest. As our text says, “He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.” *Once for all.* Sacrifices for sin are no longer needed. His sacrifice is enough for all. In Jesus all our sins are atoned for.

What can we do to pay for our sins? Nothing. Jesus gave the ultimate sacrifice, once for all.

Thank you, Jesus, for sacrificing yourself to pay for our sin. Help us to accept this gift of grace. Amen.

SHADOW WORK

They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven.
—Hebrews 8:5

If you walk along a city street on a bright, sunny day, you will come across shadows. The shadows won't really affect your walk. For example, you can walk through the shadow of a light pole because you know it is *just a shadow* of the pole. But it does make you aware that there is a light pole near you.

The priests that God ordained under the old covenant served in a tabernacle (and later a temple), that was like a shadow, or a copy, of what is in heaven, says Hebrews. That tabernacle and those priests were there in order to point to the *real* tabernacle in heaven and the *real* High Priest, Jesus Christ, who works on our behalf to save us from our sin and gives us new life forever with God.

Jesus represents the new covenant, and his work is far superior to that of the priests of the

old covenant. Jesus is the real deal. Unfortunately, people got lost looking only at the shadow instead of looking to the real work of God in their lives and worshiping him as the only true God.

Jesus Christ came into the world so that we would no longer need the temple priests to intercede for us; he himself intercedes for us.

And he has made the perfect sacrifice, providing forgiveness of sins once and for all. Instead of looking at shadows, we are called to look to Jesus.

Lord Jesus, help us to keep our eyes on you, knowing that you provide all that we need for salvation and full life forever. Amen.

EARTHLY TABERNACLE

This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper.
—Hebrews 9:9

Illustrations are used all the time in teaching and in speeches and sermons. Illustrations can help us understand a certain topic or point.

The writer of Hebrews explains that the tabernacle of the old covenant was merely an illustration of the true tabernacle in heaven. It was intended to help God's people understand what God planned for them. This idea has been explained in terms of shadows and copies, but now the writer is coming to the heart of the discussion.

The tabernacle was given to God's people to help draw them closer to God. And because of their hardheartedness, God sent Jesus to show them what he really intended. Jesus came to draw us closer to God.

Yet many of the people still lost sight of who Jesus really was.

The work of Christ shows that the elements of the old covenant were pointing to him and were intended to draw the people closer to God. And when Christ came, the old regulations and rules were set aside because they were merely an illustration to help God's people understand what he planned to do.

But the people did not understand. Do we sometimes get so caught up in our rules and regulations that we too lose sight of what God is doing and what he calls us to do?

Dear God, help us not to lose sight of Jesus in the ways we try to do things. Help us to serve you by following your lead, as Jesus always did. Draw us ever closer to you, Lord. Amen.

THE CLEANSING BLOOD OF CHRIST

How much more, then, will the blood of Christ . . . cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!
—Hebrews 9:14

When our kids play outside and get a bit sweaty, we will often say to them, “OK, jump in the shower and do a quick rinse-off.” Other times, when they have played outside for hours and they need more than just a quick rinse—they need a deep-cleaning shower or a soak in the tub.

In some ways, the old covenant laws of cleansing after a time of uncleanness provided just a quick rinse. It wasn't a deep-down cleaning. But the people needed to be cleansed through and through. We all need to be fully cleansed from our lives of sin.

What the old laws pointed to was someone who could provide a full, deep cleaning. That someone is Jesus Christ, whose death for our sake provided purification once for all.

The Old Testament law included ceremonial practices of washing to be clean. But the cleaning was never complete. People would get dirty again.

Jesus' sacrifice for us, however, cleans us thoroughly, providing such a deep-down cleaning that we receive new life. As Hebrews 9:14 explains, the blood of Christ, shed for our sake, cleanses “our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”

For all who trust in Christ, we are washed in his blood, fully cleansed from sin so that we may serve him!

Lord Jesus, you wash us and make us fully clean. Help us to live for you, serving you faithfully and sharing your love with others. Amen.

ETERNAL INHERITANCE

For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance. . . .
—Hebrews 9:15

When we think of an inheritance, we usually think about something a person receives from a relative or friend who has died. The inheritance is given as part of the deceased person's last will and testament.

Hebrews tells us that as a result of Christ's death, "those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance." This inheritance is the "eternal salvation" and "eternal redemption" we heard about earlier in Hebrews 5:9 and 9:12.

Some people have described the "new covenant" in Christ in terms of a "last will and testament." In some ways the language used here in Hebrews sounds like that of a last will and testament, especially when it talks about an inheritance.

In order for someone to receive an inheritance, a person

has to have died. For us to receive "the promised eternal inheritance," Jesus died for our sake. The idea that inheritance is tied to death is not only for the new covenant. In the old covenant there was also death: the death of sacrificed animals. Now that Christ has died for us, he has established the new covenant in his blood so that we can receive "the promised eternal inheritance."

Think of it! Because of Jesus' death for our sake, we have eternal life with him as our inheritance. And in Christ that new life begins even now!

Lord God, thank you for the inheritance of eternal life with you because of Jesus' death for us. Amen.

MADE HOLY

And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. —Hebrews 10:10

There are many times in which we try, either intentionally or not, to pay for our sins. We try to follow all kinds of rules and regulations. We try to be “good” people. When we are sorry for our sins, something inside makes us think we have to “make things right.” We want to try to pay God back, as if we might pay for our salvation. But we can’t. And yet, because of Jesus, we have been made holy already.

As we have learned in these reflections on Hebrews, the priests were busy every day offering sacrifices for people’s sins. And on the Day of Atonement the high priest would make a sacrifice for all the sins of the people, year after year after year.

Now we have one who has come and has offered us his own body as the perfect sacrifice, once for all. Jesus’ death

on the cross for our sake was enough to make us holy. We no longer have to offer sacrifices day after day, year after year. Christ has already sacrificed himself, once for all.

We do not have to try to earn our holiness, for Christ has already made us holy. And as we have already been made holy, our response is to strive, in his strength, to live into what Christ has already made us to be.

We have already been made holy; now, in the strength of Christ, our Savior, we can begin to be like him.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for your sacrifice for our sins, once for all, making us holy. Guide us to be like you. Amen.

CONFIDENCE TO DRAW NEAR TO GOD

Since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near to God. . . .

—Hebrews 10:19-22

In other religions, drawing near to God is not considered easy—or even allowed. In the Jewish tradition, to enter into the Most Holy Place was forbidden. Only the high priest could do that—and only once a year.

Many people have a view of God as an angry God. To even *think about* drawing near to God is not something they want to do.

That's because, deep down, we know we have done wrong. We are sinners. Our lives are stained with sin. We have offended the God who made us and loves us and wants us to have full life. What's more, God is holy and perfect, and on our own we cannot stand before him.

But because of Christ's work on the cross, he opens the way for us to be forgiven and to have new life with God. Jesus has

made it possible for us to have a direct connection with God, and that is through himself.

So here we have the encouragement to not only *think about* drawing near to God but to have the confidence to do so. Having confidence is being assured that we are doing the right thing.

Because of Jesus, because of his finished work to atone for our sins, we can approach God and draw near to him in full assurance of faith.

Lord God, thank you for giving us the confidence to approach you, because of Jesus, knowing that you love us and want full life for us. Through Christ, Amen.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO CONTINUE

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds . . . encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. —Hebrews 10:24-25

In North America and other parts of the world today, we are living in what is called a “post-Christian” culture. More and more people are rejecting Christianity and the church and saying they have no religion. It is discouraging to see people leaving the faith, and the pressures to conform to a faithless culture seem to be increasing all the time.

Reading through Hebrews gives us a different perspective. As we hear about Jesus, what he has accomplished for us, and his superiority over *everything*, how can we not be encouraged in our faith? But the pressures and challenges remain.

We are reminded and encouraged today to “hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.” Even if we experience despair and discouragement, we

are encouraged to hold tightly to the one who is faithful. All other things may fail us, but *Jesus* is faithful. His promises are true. Even when we experience discouragement and despair, he is faithful.

Let us continue to “spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” Let us continue to encourage each other, even if times are tough. We do not trust in one who is unreliable; we trust in the one who is faithful. Let us continue to be encouraged and to encourage one another in the Lord.

Lord God, thank you for being faithful. Help us to “hold unswervingly to the hope we profess” in you. Amen.

LIVING BY FAITH

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.
—Hebrews 11:1

In this chapter of Hebrews we find a long list of people whom we could call “heroes of faith.” These are descriptions of people whose faith in God showed in their actions as they lived out their everyday lives. Faith is intended to be lived out.

Abraham and Sarah trusted God’s promises to take them to a new land and to give them descendants. It took a long time for these promises to be fulfilled, but they trusted God, and he fulfilled those promises.

Moses trusted God to guide him in leading his people out of slavery in Egypt. It took a long time and a lot of hard work, and through a series of miracles God delivered the people. Then Moses served God for many more years, bringing God’s law to the people, setting up the worship of God, and teaching the people how to live God’s way (Exodus 12-40).

Rahab, an outsider, declared her faith in God and became one of God’s people when the Lord took them back into the land promised to Abraham. She became one of the great, great . . . grandmothers of Jesus. (See Joshua 2:1-21; 6:25; Matthew 1:1-6.)

As we live our lives, let us do so in faith. Often we need the confidence and assurance of what we cannot see. Our faith will be made sight when Christ comes again. He is the one who has saved us from our sin. He is the one who is faithful, so we are called to live out our lives in response to him.

Lord, help us to live our lives in faith. Empower us to respond to your call to follow you wherever you lead. Amen.

FIXING OUR EYES ON JESUS

Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

—Hebrews 12:1-2

I am a long-distance runner, so these verses resonate with me. The analogy of running the race that God has marked out for us is something I can relate to personally.

As Christians, we are encouraged to get rid of whatever is hindering us from running a good race. We need to get rid of the sin that slows us down. As we run, we have to recognize that it is a marathon and not a sprint. It is not something that will be over in a few short minutes.

When you are running a long distance, it is easy to get discouraged and frustrated that you are nowhere near the finish line. Often you cannot even *see* the finish line from where you are. But as a runner, you need to keep your eyes on the road ahead. When you start to get discouraged and look else-

where, you slow down, you begin to doubt you can finish, and you begin to struggle.

But when you keep looking forward to the finish, you remain focused. We are encouraged to “run with perseverance . . . fixing our eyes on Jesus.” He is the one who has perfected our faith. He is the one who suffered and died for us.

Whenever you get discouraged or frustrated—feeling like you want to quit—fix your eyes on Jesus. He will give you the strength to finish the race that is marked out for you.

Lord Jesus, help us to keep our eyes on you so that we can run with perseverance the race you have marked out for us. Amen.

A SACRIFICE OF PRAISE

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise. . . .
—Hebrews 13:15

There has been a lot of discussion in Hebrews about sacrifice. We have heard clearly that Jesus is the perfect sacrifice for our sin. We no longer have to bring any sacrifices to priests to offer to God.

As the book of Hebrews comes to a close, we may still find ourselves asking, “What can we do for God?” After explaining all that God has done for us, the writer does give some instructions on how we should live our lives.

Although sacrifices by priests are no longer necessary, we are called to “continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.” The offering that we bring is not an offering to try to appease God. Instead, our offering of praise is in response to being filled with joy in knowing that Jesus is the

perfect sacrifice, and that he gives us new life.

The good that we do is not to earn our salvation. The good that we do in helping others and sharing with them is a sacrifice of *praise*. In gratitude for what God has done for us, we aim to do good in this world.

We are encouraged to continually offer praise. It is something that is a part of our being, something that we cannot help doing. Our whole life—all of our actions and words—is lived in praise to God for all he has done for us.

Lord God, may everything we say and everything we do be an offering of praise to you. Amen.

BENEDICTION AND SENDING

May the God of peace . . . equip you with everything good for doing his will. . . .
—Hebrews 13:20-21

When we conclude our worship services, we offer a benediction (word of blessing) and a sending greeting. We do not simply say, “Have a nice week.” We go from our service of worship to our everyday life of worship. In order to do that, we need God’s blessing and equipping.

What a powerful way to wrap up the book of Hebrews! In giving God’s blessing, the writer of Hebrews is also sending us out with a reminder of who is going with us.

In these two short verses, the writer summarizes almost the entire book. “The God of peace . . .”—not a God of wrath and anger. “Through the blood of the eternal covenant . . .”—not a covenant that is passing and in need of a new one; it is eternal. “Brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus . . .”—death could not hold any

power over the Son of God. His sacrifice was once for all. This is the God who is sending us and equipping us.

We do not do the good that we do on our own. We need God’s help and his equipping so that what we do is pleasing to him. We need God to equip us with “everything good for doing his will.”

By God’s grace, we do everything for God’s glory forever and ever.

Lord Jesus Christ, equip us with everything good so that we can do your will and that you may receive honor and glory now and forever. Amen.



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