

Hebrews

Preached by Phil Kayser at DCC on 2020-12-6

I. Background material on Hebrews

I want to begin today's sermon by looking at Hebrews 13:22. It says, "And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words." Most of my commentaries on Hebrews agree that this verse is describing the whole book as being a written sermon.¹ Some translate the phrase, "the word of exhortation," as "the message of exhortation," while others translate it as "the homily of exhortation" and still others as "the sermon of exhortation." But most are agreed that even though it was written, it was meant to be spoken. This was a written speech. And you can see evidence of that throughout the book. In Hebrews 2:5 he writes of what he had been speaking - the word *λαλέω*, which refers to sounds or uttered words. The same is true in chapter 6:8 when he says, "though we speak in this manner." In chapter 9:5 he mentions a topic in passing and says, "Of these things we cannot now speak in detail." He didn't say, we cannot now write in detail, but we cannot now speak in detail. In chapter 5:11 he says that they tend to be dull of hearing, with the word "hearing," referring to listening with the ears. And there are other examples that could be given. Anyway, commentators point out that the phrase "word of exhortation" in Hebrews

¹ For example, F.F. Bruce says, "the phrase clearly denotes a homily." F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 389. Paul Ellingworth describes it as a "written sermon." Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1993), 732. Koester says, "Exhortation" (*paraklēsis*) was a term for Christian preaching, both public (1 Thess 2:3) and in the congregation (Rom 12:8; 1 Tim 4:13)." Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 36, *Anchor Yale Bible* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 580. See also Marie E. Isaacs, *Reading Hebrews and James: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, *Reading the New Testament Series* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2002), 163. Robert S. Rayburn, "Hebrews," in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 1125-8. Dianne Bergant and Robert J. Karris, *The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Based on the New American Bible with Revised New Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1989), 1263. Robert James Utley, *The Superiority of the New Covenant: Hebrews*, vol. Volume 10, *Study Guide Commentary Series* (Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International, 1999), 143. David Guzik, *Hebrews*, *David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible* (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2013), Heb 13:22–25. James W. Thompson, *Hebrews*, *Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 286. Etc.

13:22 is the same Greek phrase that describes Paul's preaching in Acts and that describes preaching of sermons in extra Biblical literature. So it is a generally accepted fact that this was a written sermon that was later published.

When I discovered that fact a few years ago I laughed out loud because this sermon would flunk every one of the homiletics courses I took in Bible School and later in Seminary. That's not being negative on this book; that's being negative on the seminaries. Homiletics professors would say that this sermon is too long. Commentaries say it takes about 60 minutes to read it out loud at an ordinary preaching pace. I must preach too fast because it took me a little over 40 minutes to read it out loud. But what surprises some commentaries is that he calls this sermon a short sermon with few words. This was not one of his longer sermons. In chapter 5 he said that he tried to keep the sermon simple and he couldn't give them everything that he wanted to preach to them. I tell you, I can identify with Luke, the author. He packs a lot into a sermon.

And I will also admit that the words of this verse imply that some people in his congregation might have found his sermon a bit difficult to understand. He says,

And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the message of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words.

The Greek word for "bear with" is ἀνέχω, and is defined by the dictionary as to endure something or to put up with something. It takes concentration to listen to this book in an audio format. Well, he is telling us something about how members need to be trained to listen. Good listening is a spiritual discipline.

Here are a few other ways that it would flunk a modern homiletics course. Commentators admit that he preached a fully written out sermon from a manuscript. He didn't use a one page outline or bullet points. He had every word of his sermon written out - much like Jonathan Edwards and older preachers did. That's a no-no nowadays. I have preached from a manuscript for years because it helps me to monitor accuracy, clear communication, that I am not giving undefined words, and it helps me to pass the sermon along to others just like this preacher did.

Another big no-no is that it's a twelve point sermon instead of a three point sermon. This is almost like the preaching of the Puritans. And I think the Puritans would say that its hard to get your money's worth from a three point sermon.

Another no-no in modern preaching is packing too much doctrine into a single sermon. How much doctrine? Several commentaries have pointed out that this is the most doctrinally packed book in the New Testament apart from Romans. Homileticians want you to focus on one doctrinal point. Hebrews packs them in. True preaching is not telling a bunch of funny stories strung together to entertain and drive home one point. True preaching should be saturated with Scripture. And Hebrews quotes Bible verse after Bible verse to back up his points. It takes a lot of work to give a Biblical sermon.

Yet another no-no in modern preaching is that this preacher steps on toes - a lot! If he were to be judged in a modern preaching course, they would probably say that he's not positive

enough. Of course, this is an inspired sermon, right, and God is the one who tells us how to preach, not books.

Another no-no is that this is a topical sermon - which has fallen out of favor in homiletics courses. But I have always believed that the Bible authorizes several kinds of preaching. If you analyze the sermons in the bible you will see topical, textual, expository, redemptive historical, and synthetic. If the Bible gives liberty to do topical, then we shouldn't criticize topical sermons. In fact, I plan to do a topical sermon series soon. But many trainers of preachers advocate for only one kind of preaching in their classrooms.

Now, since I mentioned Redemptive Historical Preaching, I do want to show how this book contradicts one branch of modern Redemptive Historical Preaching. This branch is found in the Radical Two Kingdom movement, where at least some people insist that it is wrong to make applications during your preaching. They call that moralism. But I would point out that Hebrews is jam-packed full of application - full of what they would call moralism. It's not really moralism. It is simply application of the truth. In fact, it is my contention that you are not even preaching until you apply the Word in a rubber-meets-the-road way.

And last (but not least), the preacher very obviously crafted the sermon to meet the needs and circumstances of his audience. He did not make it a timeless sermon (as some think of timelessness). He mentions *their* persecution by the Jewish community, the robbing of *their* goods, *their* temptation to go back to Judaism, the imminent destruction of the nation of Israel, and of the temple and of the priesthood, and other things that make this sermon somewhat dated. Do we have a temple that we are tempted to go back to? No. Do we have a state that is trying to force us to renounce Christianity? Not yet. Are we Jewish? Most of us are not. But I would argue that it is precisely because the book was so practical to the issues that they were going through back then that it shows us how to apply the Bible to our own circumstances.

And what were the circumstances they were going through? Well, Hebrews was written in AD 66 when the church was facing the height of its persecution from both Jews and Romans. It appears that the bulk of their persecution was from the Jews who were pressuring them to convert back to Judaism. And Luke was doing his level best to convince these people to cling to Jesus or they would be eternally lost. The stakes were huge. He appeals to many motivations (both negative and positive) - so much so that Jay Adams suggested that some student needs to do his doctoral thesis on the use of motivational factors in the book of Hebrews.

I mentioned that I believe Luke wrote this book. While the apostle Paul is a serious contender for the author (and I can respect that), there are a number of reasons why most modern scholars think that is extremely unlikely. First, Paul pledged to sign his name to every epistle that he wrote in 2 Thessalonians 3:17, and this book does not have his name appended to it. I doubt Paul broke his promise. They reply that this wasn't an epistle; it was a sermon. But he does indeed send his manuscript with an epistolary ending. Second, the style, grammar, and vocabulary are quite different from Paul's. This is written with such polished Greek that there are only two other books in the New Testament that are like it: Luke and Acts. And that is the third reason: There are numerous points of identity between the vocabulary, Hebraisms, style, and syntax of Hebrews with Luke's writings. In my notes I will reference a large book that gives

many other arguments as to why it is almost a slam dunk certainty that Luke wrote this book.² But he wrote it first as a sermon that he had delivered to one congregation, and then appended some notes to it before he made a copy to send to another congregation.

II. Outline of the book

If you look at your outline, you will notice that he alternates between a theological point and an application, a theological point and then another application. And each of these points logically calls these Jewish Christians not to leave Jesus to go back to Judaism. If they try to escape persecution by going back to Judaism they will suffer eternally in hell since there is no salvation outside of Jesus.

A. Jesus is God and therefore better than the angels (1:1-14)

Judaism by this time was teaching an unbiblical theology of angels that appealed to people's curiosity and purported to be able to explain many of the things that had happened to Israel through the years. But it didn't come from the Bible. It came from the traditions of the elders. Luke appeals to God's inspired revelation and nothing else.

Point number one is that Jesus is God and therefore better than angels. If these Jews abandon Jesus, they are abandoning Jehovah Himself. Verse 3 says that the Son is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person. It says that Jesus upholds everything in this universe by the Word of His power. He would have to be omnipotent to do that. And even as Messiah he now sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

There are cults that deny this doctrine and say that Jesus was merely the first created angel. But if there is one chapter in the Bible that you want to turn to in order to prove that Jesus is God, Hebrews 1 would be it. There are many others, but this is a very convenient one to use with cults. Let's read verses 5 and following:

Heb. 1:5 For to which of the angels did He ever say: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You"? And again: "I will be to Him a Father, And He shall be to Me a Son"?

God never said those words to any angel, which means that Jesus is not an angel. It's simple logic.

In verse 6 he makes another argument. All good angels in the Bible refused to be worshiped, but verse 6 says that the Father commands all angels to worship Jesus:

Heb. 1:6 But when He again brings the firstborn into the world [that would be Christ's birth], He [the Father] says: "Let all the angels of God worship Him."

And that's exactly what happened at Christ's birth according to Luke 2. This commanded worship shows that Jesus is God since it is blasphemy to worship anyone but God, and the first and second commandments prohibit the worship of anything in creation other than God.

² David Lewis Allen, *Lukan Authorship of Hebrews* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010).

His next argument is in verses 7-9, where he quotes Scripture that explicitly calls Jesus God.

7 And of the angels He says: "Who makes His angels spirits And His ministers a flame of fire." 8 But to the Son He says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions."

So verse 8 says that the words "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever" are words addressed to the Son. Jesus is addressed as "O God." Of course, as to Christ's manhood, He too has a God - the Father. The Father is God and the Son is God. And Jesus is both God and Man. But he will emphasize His manhood in chapter 2. Here he is emphasizing His divinity.

His next argument is in verses 10-12. These verses quote Psalm 102 as being directly addressed to the Son as well. And I want you to notice that the word "LORD" in verse 10 is in all capital letters. That is because in the original Hebrew of Psalm 102, the name Yehowah is used. This means that Jesus is Jehovah or Yehowah. If the words are addressed to Yehowah and if the words are addressed to Jesus, then Jesus is Yehowah. Let's read them:

10 And: "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. 11 They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; 12 Like a cloak You will fold them up, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not fail."

Verses 13-14 again deny that Jesus is an angel.

Heb. 1:13 But to which of the angels has He ever said: "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"? 14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?

It is crystal clear that this chapter not only overturns Jewish heresies about angels (which we won't have time to get into) but it also makes Jesus to be Yehowah God and therefore far greater than the angels or anything else in creation. So it stands as a perfect introduction to the whole book. That's why I have spent more time on it.

1. Application/Warning (2:1-4)

In chapter 2 he dives straight into the application of this glorious doctrine. If they are tempted to abandon Jesus and go back into Judaism, they will be abandoning the God of the Old Testament - Yehowah Himself, and will therefore face his righteous wrath. It's a very logical application. And I want you to notice that he is not overturning the Old Testament. It was *Judaism* that overturned the Old Testament with *their* man-made traditions. Luke is upholding even the civil laws of the Old Testament. Let me read verses 1-4.

Heb. 2:1 Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, 4 God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

B. Jesus is the perfect incarnate man (2:5-16)

Luke's second theological point is that if Jesus is the perfect incarnate man, then abandoning Jesus will be abandoning the only one who has perfectly kept God's law. He had to be fully God (chapter 1) and fully man (chapter 2) in order to be our Savior. And He was the perfect Man prophesied in the Old Testament to be the Messiah. Verse 5 says,

Heb. 2:5 For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels.

Unfortunately, the New King James leaves untranslated the Greek word μέλλω, which means "about to." It should be translated as, "For He has not put the world about to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels." The word for "world" is οἰκουμένη, which the dictionary defines as "the earth as an inhabited and administered region" - and the dictionary goes on to say that the meaning explicitly excludes heaven. He is not talking about heaven when he speaks of the world about to come; he is talking about this earth. οἰκουμένη is the perfect word to define the millennial world that was symbolized by the conquest of Canaan under Joshua. And that millennial world starts in AD 70 - not in AD 30; it starts according to Revelation 20 in AD 70 after the tribulation. He will get into more details about how Joshua and Canaan symbolize Christ taking over the world through the Great Commission, but for now let me summarize.

When Joshua, Moses, and the Israelites left Egypt, they left on the night of Passover. They emerged from the Red Sea on the day of Firstfruits - the same day Jesus rose from the grave. 50 days later they received the law on Mount Sinai on the day of Pentecost. Even though the land of Canaan had been promised, and even though it was about to come, it was not until they crossed the Jordan River 40 years later that they inherited Canaan. In the same way, Jesus established the kingdom, died on Passover and rose on Firstfruits, gave the empowerment of the Spirit on Pentecost, and gave great advancement to the church during the next 40 years. But it was not until AD 70 (40 years later) that the οἰκουμένη would begin to be claimed as nation after nation began to be Christianized.

And Luke says that this world (of which you and I are now living in) was not to be subdued by angels. It was to be subdued by the perfect Man, Jesus and the new humanity in Him. So verses 6-8 is a quote of Psalm 8 and it is applied to Jesus. Verse 8 ends that quote by saying,

You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. [Notice that phrase, "we do not yet see all things put under him." This is a gradual conquest of Canaan. Verse 9] 9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

They were already experiencing Christ crowned with glory and honor at the Father's right hand, but in AD 66 they still didn't see all things put under Him. Verses 10-16 shows that Jesus would have to live perfectly, suffer perfectly, redeem His people, then win them to salvation, sing praises through the assembled saints, and use those saints to advance His kingdom.

1. Application - he can sympathize and help us (2:17-18)

What's the application? Verses 17-18 says that Jesus can sympathize with us and He can help us because He is a man who went through what you and I go through. These Jewish Christians were being sorely tempted, but if they would run to Jesus He could help them to gain the victory. It is only in Christ's strength that we can stand tall and enter what Canaan symbolized.

C. Jesus is greater than Moses (3:1-6)

Next, apostate Jews claimed that if Christians didn't come back to Judaism, they were abandoning Moses. Isn't it blasphemy to abandon Moses? And Luke shows how ridiculous that claim was. He not only shows how Moses points to Jesus, but he shows how Jesus is greater than Moses, and that you don't even believe Moses if you don't believe in Jesus.

Just as the builder of a house is greater than the house, the One who commissioned Moses, gave Moses revelation, sustained Moses, and worked through Moses is obviously greater than Moses. He isn't putting down Moses at all. In fact, he says in verse 5 that Moses was faithful. But in what way was he faithful? He was faithful to the Son of God who commissioned him and He was faithful to point to the times of the New Covenant when the Son of God would become incarnate. His logic is that *to abandon Jesus is to abandon Moses and to disbelieve what Moses said.*

1. Application/Warning (3:7-19)

And the "Therefore" in verse 7 begins the application of the third point. It too is a warning. He quotes Psalm 95, which gives a vivid description of how the first generation of Israelites backslid and could not enter Canaan. He is saying, "You don't want the same thing happening to you." In verses 12-19 he says that exactly the same thing could happen if they backslide now. It's really no different since both backslidings were a rejection of the Son of God. So he gives them very practical encouragements to exhort each other to stay faithful and to maintain faith in God's promises. It's beautiful preaching.

D. Jesus is better than Joshua (4:1-10)

Luke's fourth theological point is that Jesus is better than Joshua. There were revolutionaries in AD 66 that were pressuring Jewish Christians to join them in fighting Rome and to restore Israel to the glory days under Joshua. Josephus talks about those revolutionaries. But Luke points out that they had the same unbelief of the wilderness generation, not the faith of the Joshua generation.

Turn with me to Joshua 5:13-18 for interesting background. This is a preincarnate manifestation of the Son of God to Joshua and very much relates to what Luke is trying to impress on his hearers. Joshua 5 beginning to read at verse 13.

Josh. 5:13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?"

This is what the Jewish revolutionaries of Luke's day were asking every Jew to decide. Are you for us or against us? Joshua 5:14.

Josh. 5:14 So He said, "No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come."

Joshua didn't ask for a "Yes" or a "No." He asked God to pick sides. And God says, "No. That's the wrong question. The question is not whether I am for you. The question is whether you are for Me." And what's Joshua's response?

And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?"

Josh. 5:15 Then the Commander of the LORD'S army said to Joshua, "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.

This was no mere angel. Angels don't allow anyone to worship them, but this Being who had the shape of a Man allowed worship and made the very ground holy. The point is that the Commander of the Armies was the preincarnate Jesus. And because Joshua's heart is right, he falls down and worships. He wants God's glory to be lifted up; God's kingdom to be built; God's commands to be followed.

Well, Hebrews 4 shows how Jesus is the same Commander of Armies today. It wasn't Joshua who won the battles back then, it was the Commander of Armies who won those battles. Look at Hebrews 4, verses 8-10.

Heb. 4:8 For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day.

The word "Joshua" and "Jesus" are the same in the Greek. Joshua's very name shows that Joshua couldn't save. His name means Jehovah saves. Joshua couldn't give them rest in Canaan. Instead, he too pointed to Jesus and His resurrection. Verse 9:

9 There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.

That is literally "there remains therefore a sabbath keeping for the people of God." The Sabbath was a symbol pointing to Jesus. Once Jesus came, the Sabbath would stop pointing to the future by being celebrated at the end of the week. Instead, it would point back to Christ's accomplished work by being celebrated at the beginning of the week - on Sunday; on the day of resurrection. Unless you rest in Christ's accomplished salvation, there is no conquest of the earth that will work and no Joshua who can save. Verse 10:

10 For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.

Just as Joshua took off his shoes, worshiped the Commander of Armies, and rested in His plan, we will not be successful until we embrace and worship Jesus and rest in His grace for conquest. So Joshua worshiped the Greater Joshua (Jesus) and He looked forward to the Greater Joshua (Jesus).

1. Application/Warning (4:11-13)

Notice that this is precisely the application in the next "therefore" in verses 11-13. Here comes his application.

Heb. 4:11 Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Unlike Joshua's metal sword, our sword is the Bible. Unlike the rest appointed by God (which was the land of Canaan), our conquest is of the whole world. It will one day enter into rest through the Gospel and through the Gospel alone. And Jesus, the Commander of Armies who is greater than Joshua is up for the task.

E. Jesus is better than the priests (4:14-5:11)

But we are not only following the Greater Joshua; we are also following a priest who is greater than any of the Old Testament priests. The Jews accused the Christians of blasphemy for abandoning the God-ordained priesthood. They opened their Bibles to Leviticus and in effect said, "How come you are disobeying God's Word? It commands you to submit to the priests?" It was an argument that needed to be dealt with. So chapter 4:14 all the way through to chapter 5:11 argues that Jesus not only set up the original priesthood of the Old Testament, but those priests all pointed to Jesus, and if you abandon Jesus you are abandoning the whole purpose for the priesthood. He starts by asserting that Jesus is a better High Priest in chapter 4:14-16 - verses worth memorizing.

Heb. 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Unlike the priests that these Jewish Christians were tempted to go back to, Jesus was fully God. And though Jesus was also fully human, He was a perfect human - again, unlike the priests they were tempted to go back to. Yes, He was tempted in all points like we are, yet He resisted those temptations and was without sin - unlike the priest they were tempted to go back to. So, unlike the Jewish priests of Christ's day, this High Priest is sympathetic. Caiaphas was not. This high priest will help you. Caiaphas would not. This High Priest was the source of grace. Caiaphas was not.

And in the first verses of chapter 5 Luke points out a number of ways in which Jesus was superior to all the priests of the Old Testament. He was the priest anticipated in Genesis from a different line than Levi - a priest who was also a king.

1. Application/Warning (5:12-6:12)

The application is quite pointed and scary. It needed to be scary in light of the false teaching that was luring these Christians into apostasy. Luke makes clear that if you abandon Jesus in order to go back to the priests of the temple, then no matter what privileges you have received in the covenant so far, you are completely without hope; you are headed to hell. Let's read chapter 6:4-6.

Heb. 6:4 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

Notice that the reprobate within the church can be enlightened, partake of communion, receive gifts of the Holy Spirit, and even perform miracles without being saved. Did you know that Judas had spiritual gifts and performed miracles? He did. You see, many benefits of the covenant reach to everyone in the church - even to those who are not yet saved. There are benefits to being a member of a church. For example, you are protected from Satan to a huge degree. But church membership does not save you. And I will point out that any people who might fall away have not lost their salvation. Luke says that they weren't saved in the first place. As 1 John 2:19 words it, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us." Here's how Hebrews 6:9 words the same truth:

Heb. 6:9 But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.

He is saying that if you truly are saved, you will persevere. And Luke goes on to expand on that theme in verses 10-12 - that the truly saved will persevere:

10 For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. [In other words, God is not unjust to cast away any who are truly saved. But perseverance is an evidence of that salvation, so Luke goes on to say, in verse 11:]
 11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end,
 12 that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

F. Jesus better than Abraham as the priest after the order of Melchizedek (6:13-8:6) with scattered applications

In the next big section Luke answers the charges of Jews who claimed that you needed to abandon Christianity in order to be faithful to Abraham. Who didn't want to be a faithful son of Abraham? And I don't have time to show it, but Luke basically uses the same logic he used earlier. He shows how the Son of God saved Abraham, preserved Abraham, and provided for Abraham, and is therefore greater than Abraham. Indeed, Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, which shows not only that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham, but that he was greater than Abraham's descendent, Levi. Of course, Luke points out that Jesus is either the literal Melchizedek (a preincarnate theophany of the Son of God) or Melchizedek at a minimum was a type of Jesus. Either way, it proves that to abandon Jesus in order to go back to Judaism, you would be abandoning Abraham, whose faith looked forward to Jesus. In effect he is saying, "Don't let these Judaizers fool you - they are not followers of Abraham themselves. If they were, they would have submitted to Jesus." So this whole book teaches us how to do presuppositional apologetics. We don't have time to get into that, but it is fantastic. You could do an hour study on Luke's method of presuppositional apologetics.

G. Jesus makes a better covenant - the new covenant (8:7-13)

Next, Luke answers the slander of those who said that Jesus and Christians were violating the covenants of the Old Testament. And Luke says, “Nonsense. You are the ones who are violating the Old Testament.” Luke basically proves that you would be disbelieving those Old Testament covenants if you abandoned Jesus because all of them promised the coming of Jesus and pointed to Jesus and anticipated the New Covenant, which was the covenant of fulfillment - as Jeremiah says. The New Covenant enfolds and fulfills them all.

1. Application/Warning (8:13)

His application in chapter 8:13 is,

Heb. 8:13 In that He says, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

Notice the phrase, “is ready to vanish away.” The Old Covenant did not vanish away in AD 30 when the New Covenant was established. The New Covenant that would replace the Old Covenant was ratified by Jesus in AD 30. That made the Old Covenant destined to end, but it didn’t end it. Luke says, “what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” Every vestige of the Old Covenant vanished away when the temple was destroyed in AD 70. There was an overlap of covenants from AD 30 to AD 70. The New Covenant started in AD 30 and the Old Covenant ended in AD 70.

H. A better sanctuary and sacrifice (9:1-10:18)

Moving on. To Jews who were tempted to go back to the beautiful temple in order to worship God as God dictated in the Old Testament, Luke does the same thing he did earlier. He points out that you don’t believe anything that the old temple stood for and symbolized if you reject Jesus. You have missed the point of the temple. In any case, both the the earthly tabernacle and temple was replaced by a heavenly temple that is far better. And by the way, he also points out that the heavenly temple was the *pattern* for the building of the earthly one. Well, that means that we aren’t losing anything when we lose the physical temple. And the earthly sacrifices are made obsolete by Christ’s final sacrifice of Himself. He sums up the entire sacrificial system, and we keep the intent of that ceremonial law when we cling to Jesus.

1. Application/Warning (10:19-39)

And you get another incredibly scary application in chapter 10:19-39. You can see that Luke steps on a lot of toes in his preaching. To sacrifice animals and go back to Judaism after all that Jesus has done is to trample underfoot the blood of Christ and to insult the Spirit of grace. Verse 31 says, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” This chapter needs to be read by the gracists of today who refuse to acknowledge God’s judgments in the church. But it was certainly a powerful argument against Judaism having any claim to God.

But I do want you to notice that he clarifies once again that he is not talking about losing your salvation. You can’t lose your salvation. But even though that is true, there are many people

who will end up in hell even though they *thought* they were saved. So his clarification in verse 39 is, “But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.” If you draw back and apostatize, you will end up in hell, but we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul. If you truly believe, you will persevere. If you are truly saved, you will persevere.

I. The Old Testament heroes of faith looked forward to our time (11:1-40)

Next, Luke gives a beautiful litany of Old Testament heroes of the faith that all pointed to Jesus. While the Jews of Luke’s day loved the heroes of the Old Testament, Luke points out that they didn’t follow the lead of those heroes. Those heroes all pointed to Jesus, not to themselves. They were building God’s kingdom, not their own. They were fighting God’s battles, not their own.

1. Application (12:1-2)

And his application in chapter 12:1-2 keeps his central theme going:

Heb. 12:1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [he’s referring to all those heroes of the faith in chapter 11], let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

He keeps pointing them to Jesus, and urging them to persevere. He says that we are already in the time of the kingdom; Jesus is already seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Judaism has nothing to offer. The only question is, are you willing to cross the Jordan with the Greater Joshua and follow the Commander of Armies into the dangerous calling of overturning everything that stands against the kingdom of heaven.

J. God’s theology of family anticipated your hardships (12:3-11)

His next point is to give a theology of family so that they can appreciate that the troubles they are experiencing is not an evidence that Christ is not for them. It is an evidence that He loves them, is disciplining them, and wants them to grow up. These Jewish Christians thought that if they went back to Judaism and became secret believers that they could avoid all trouble. But Luke insists that this is a misplaced and dangerous idea. He wants them to evaluate whether they are legitimate children or illegitimate.

1. Application/Warning (12:12-17)

And the application presses home the need for perseverance, not caving in. Beginning at chapter 12, verse 12:

Heb. 12:12 Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

Heb. 12:14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: 15 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; 16 lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. 17 For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

K. We have a better mountain (12:18-24)

To the Jews who kept emphasizing all that was involved in two mountains (Mount Sinai and the temple mount - Mount Zion), Luke shows how the Jews of his day weren't living up to the meaning of those two mountains at all. Instead, true believers today are caught up to the heavenly mountain, worship before God's very throne, and have the reality that is being missed by the Jews in the temple - completely missed. Both of those mountains were designed to lead us to Jesus. The law at Mount Sinai was a pedagogue to lead people to Jesus as the only hope of salvation. Apart from Jesus the moral law only condemns us. The Gospel ceremonies at the Temple Mount also taught them that Jesus alone could save them and make all things new. So the ceremonial law taught them the Gospel and led them to Jesus. The question is not the nature of the physical mountains; the question is whether you have the reality that those two mounts symbolize. It's a brilliantly constructed book. It's a powerful argument against those Judaizers and against apostasy.

1. Application/Warning (12:25-29)

And his application quotes the "shaking" passage from Haggai 2 and shows how everything that was affected by the Fall in this universe will eventually be reversed by Jesus. I preached on this extensively in Haggai, so I won't touch on it much right now. But why would you want to go back to what was about to be shaken out? Everything of the old economy will be shaken and removed so that what cannot be shaken will remain forever.

Now, the shaking process can be uncomfortable, and we need to be willing to have our own lives shaken so that what doesn't belong is gone and what belongs in the kingdom stays. Christ is in the universe shaking business. But He is into shaking your life as well. And what alone will be unshaken? Look at verses 28-29.

Heb. 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. 29 For our God is a consuming fire.

Point by point Luke is decimating the arguments of Jews who were trying to convince the Christians to apostatize. And application by application he was motivating them to persevere.

L. The church is called to minister even in hardship following Christ's example (13:1-12)

Luke's final point of the sermon is that they shouldn't be surprised by suffering. The generation that followed Joshua into the conquest suffered a lot. But it was suffering that advanced the kingdom. It was a glorious privilege to suffer if it meant that Canaan was won for their children.

The church of today has been called to faithfully minister even in the midst of hardship. We are called to be soldiers. It's a fantastic answer to Judaistic legalism, but it is also a call to endurance. And using the image of Jesus carrying his cross outside of Jerusalem and bearing the shame and scoffing of the leadership, he says (this is verses 13-17):

1. Application/Warning (13:13-17)

13 Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. 14 For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. 15 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. 16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

Heb. 13:17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

M. Conclusion (12:18-25)

I believe that everything up through verse 17 had already been preached at one congregation, and when Luke sends the next congregation a copy of what he had preached, he adds verses 18-25 as some additional personal notes and an additional blessing. Some people think that it is additional greetings to his first congregation. I think the evidence points to the fact that he is forwarding a sermon that he has written to the second congregation.

We have covered a lot of territory, and you can see that it is impossible to do justice to the book in one sermon. But it is a fabulous sermon, and I want to pronounce his blessing upon you by way of conclusion. And you'll find this blessing or benediction in verses 20-21.

Heb. 13:20 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.