

attention pleas

hebrews

We are heading into the New Testament today. We're going to be studying through the book of Hebrews a chapter at a time and it promises to be a thought-provoking section of Scripture.

When starting a new series I like to do an introductory study to highlight where we're going to be going and get us all thinking in a certain way. Because when you come to any book or passage of Scripture there are a lot of different perspectives you can take. Because Scripture is living and powerful and limitless in its ability to minister to us.

For our series here on Wednesday mornings, what stands out most to me is the author's passionate pleas for God's people to **pay attention** to their spiritual lives and not drift away from the Lord.

Here's what he says in chapter 2 verse 1:

Hebrews 2.1 - Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.

Or, in the NIV:

Hebrews 2.1 (NIV) - We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard so that we do not drift away.

That's the big exhortation the author is making to his audience throughout this letter - to stay on the path leading to righteousness and not to stumble off of it.

He pleads with the hearers not to stop moving forward in the path of the Lord.

Hebrews 12.1b-2a - ...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, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.

He's concerned and vehement on this issue.

So who is the author of the book? Well, that's one of the big arguments about Hebrews. There's also a debate over who the audience is too, or if it's even technically an epistle. But the big question is who wrote it.

Most often this book is attributed to Paul the Apostle. But, as you read the commentaries you find that there are no fewer than 11 potential authors. Most say Paul, some say Apollos. Some say Luke or Peter or Clement or even Philip the Evangelist. There's a lot of speculating and theorizing. Historically it most often gets hung around Paul's neck. Some would disagree because when this author references the Old Testament he does so quoting the Septuagint,

which is the Greek translation of the Jewish Bible and Paul elsewhere quotes it in the Hebrew version. But, I tend to agree that it was probably Paul, only because you can make a case for it from Scripture. It doesn't really matter who wrote it, because, ultimately the Holy Spirit authored this book, so we can have confidence in what we're reading, but if someone demands to attach a name to the letter, I guess I'd say Paul.

As Warren Wiersbe points out in his commentary, Peter indicates that Paul wrote an inspired letter to the Jews scattered abroad in 2nd Peter 3, verse 15.

There it says:

2 Peter 3.15-16 - ...consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in ALL his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do *also the rest of the Scriptures*. (emphasis added)

So, Peter there seems to indicate that Paul wrote an inspired, Scriptural letter to this same audience he was writing to, and if it's not the book of Hebrews, then that might suggest that we're missing a book of the Bible and that's not where we want to land.

But it really doesn't matter. The Lord inspired and authored this book because He wants us to receive the message that the Holy Spirit gave to Paul or someone else, that we should not give up. That we shouldn't grow weary in our faith. That we must stay the course, near to Jesus Christ so that we can receive and experience all the abundant power and transformation and blessing that the Lord has for us.

That's the message.

Toward that end, Hebrews covers a substantial amount of ground doctrinally and practically. It's a jam-packed book. We're going to be called to pay attention to our faith so that we don't drift away and so that we stay in line with the Lord's intention for our lives.

We'll be told to pay attention to the softness of our hearts, because a hard heart is one that departs from God. That's in chapter 3.

We're told to pay attention to our spiritual maturity. As the Lord ministers to us and grows us and blesses us, it's still on us to allow Him to sanctify and mature us. We talked about this a few weeks ago in one of David's Psalms, but our spiritual maturity is up to us. We have a part to play in allowing the Lord to grow us up. In that Psalm a few weeks ago we saw the contrast between a baby who hasn't been weaned and a child who has. And here in Hebrews, in chapter 5, the author is going to say, "You guys should be growing more and receiving more from the Lord, but you refuse to be weaned. You refuse to mature in the Lord." And so he calls us to pay careful to attention to that maturity.

We'll be called to pay attention to walking by faith in our daily lives. Hebrews is known for it's Hall of Faith passage in chapter 11, but those stories are not recounted just for entertainment's sake. They're used to illustrate the fact that the life of a Believer is to be completely shaped by our hope of heaven.

We'll be encouraged to pay careful attention to our relationships here on the earth. First with other believers. Several times we'll talk about how we support and encourage one another to stay in step with the Lord and how we work together to keep each other from stumbling off road.

But also we'll be instructed about our interactions with strangers and how, apparently, God sometimes sends angels as secret shoppers to interact with us.

Lots of practical stuff in this book.

But there are also a lot of interesting and difficult doctrinal issues too. There are more than a few verses and concepts in this letter that Christians actually divide over and we'll think about those.

For all the ground that Hebrews covers, and it's a lot, it does so by developing one single theme and idea: Jesus Christ and His work to give us unrestricted access to God.

Charles Erdman writes in his commentary:

"In no other portion of the New Testament is the treatment of a single subject so long sustained. Nor is any subject more vital to man. The great reality under discussion is that of the possibility of free and unrestricted access to God."

Over and over again these chapters return to the greatness of Jesus Christ and the greatness of His work for us. And what we find is that it is a fastening to Jesus that propels us forward through life, into the victory promised to us from Heaven.

That's why the practical side of this book is all about paying attention to our Christian walk. Staying on that path laid out for us by the Lord. Because the Lord wants to take us somewhere. He wants to take us to victory and blessing and sanctification.

He wants to:

Hebrews 12.12-13 - ...strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

God says, "This is what I want to do for you! THIS is the way to inheritance. I have made a straight path. I have cleared the way and I've set you in the direction you need to go."

It's like the way God sent hornets into Canaan before the people of Israel and then He sent fear on their enemies. And then He parted the Jordan river. He knocked down the walls of Jericho. God clears the way for His people to get to the promises He's made to them. And, along the way, He strengthens us and boosts us and repairs what's unhealthy.

But the problem is, God's people often step off that straight path into the thick of the jungle and try to hack their own way. Even though God's path is straight, sometimes it's impossible to

see ahead. So then the struggle is what we're going to allow to direct us when we cannot see: The Lord and His wisdom, His Spirit, or our own fears and our own understanding.

This weekend I was at a wedding reception and one topic that came up at the table was the different pilot ratings you can get. Specifically a couple people at the table were educating me on IFR vs. VFR certification. VFR is visual flight rules. With that rating you're up there flying and you're able to see that the sky is above you and the ground is below you. You fly solely by reference to outside visual cues.

The problem is, VFR isn't enough to fly in clouds or storms. For that you need an IFR certification, which is instrument flight rules. Flying not by sight but by the the readout of your instruments. Here's a quote from an article about flight ratings:

"Instrument flight rules permit an aircraft to operate in instrument meteorological conditions (IMC), which have much lower weather minimums than VFR. Procedures and training are significantly more complex as a pilot must demonstrate competency in conducting an entire cross-country flight in IMC conditions, while controlling the aircraft solely by reference to instruments."

In life we like visual flying. Seeing is believing. We're naturally more like Thomas or Gideon who said, "You make the fleece wet, then I'm down to go." But the Lord says:

John 20.29 - "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

And here in Hebrews the Lord says, "Don't give up! Don't get off course."

Hebrews 10.23 - Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

God has given us a flight plan for life that gets us to the city of gold. Along the way there's turbulence and clouds and even storms and for those occasions, the author of Hebrews pleads with us to stay the course, to stay on the consecrated way that Jesus Christ has carved out for us.

We're to pay attention to our Christianity so that God can strengthen us and get us where we're going.

Hebrews 10.37-38a - "For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith;

So let's live by faith. Not faith in our own smarts or success. Not faith in works. Not faith in religion, but faith in Jesus Christ. Who He is. What He's done for us. That's the message of this book. That's the key. That's the propellant that keeps us moving forward in the way we're supposed to go.

Throughout these chapters the writer is going to again and again and again direct us back to the greatness of Jesus, because Jesus is the answer. That's kind of the old Sunday school

joke. If the Sunday school teacher asks you something you don't know the answer to, just say 'Jesus!'.

But, in a spiritual sense, that's what this book is going to encourage us to do. To find confidence and direction in Christ alone. His greatness. His work. His sufficiency for life.

Because, as the song says:

*We have found our hope.
We have found our peace.
We have found our rest in the One who loves.
He will light the way.
He will lead us home.
As we offer all to the One who saves.*

That's Hebrews. I'm excited to get into it. We'll dive in next week with Chapter 1 - Jesus the Superior.