

# HEBREWS



Day 303

## “Angels All Around”

October 30 - Hebrews 1: 1-14

**H**e was so odd looking. Kind of like a hobbit, though back then I didn't know what a hobbit even was. He met me unexpectedly on the rooftop of the cafeteria at the community college. I was sitting and reading my Bible and there he was, disheveled, hurried at first, and apparently lost. He asked for directions, then immediately asked me what I was reading. I told him I was reading the Bible. He asked me what it was about. I told him the story as best I could.

Then he asked me a very penetrating question: “Would you die for Jesus?” I had only been a Christian for about a year and honestly didn't know how to answer. As I mulled over my response, I looked up and he was gone—in the opposite of the way I had directed him.

That question was a catalyst for renewed dedication to Jesus Christ.

Who was this odd fellow? Later on I thought that just maybe he could have been an angel sent from God to challenge me. I don't know that for sure. But I'll tell you what; it certainly was a weird experience. And, it pushed me closer to God. Angel? Maybe, maybe not. If he was a genuine angel, I can tell you that the outcome was a good one. Later on in the book of Hebrews we read that we should entertain strangers because sometimes they will be angels in disguise. A bit spooky, eh? God uses angels.

Angels are “ministering spirits.” They are our allies in the spiritual journey. They help us in ways that are usually hidden. I have heard story after story through

the years about the oftentimes strange intervention of an angel. Just recently someone told me an unbelievable story. She was T-boned on a busy highway. The car had smashed into her door and she was so injured that the paramedics were calling the accident in as a fatality, thinking at first that no one could have survived. She was not dead though, far from it. She remembers seeing the paramedic and hearing him tell her that to get her out of the van he would have to pull her in a direction that could be very painful. About that time another man in street clothes was with her, sitting in the passenger seat. He put his hand on her shoulder and told her everything would be all right. That reassurance was enough to give her the courage to acknowledge the medic.

After she came out of surgery and had gotten her mind back together, she asked someone about the accident and mentioned the man who was sitting with her in the front of the van. The person told her that was impossible, because her side of the car had crunched into the passenger side and there was no passenger side left. Remember how the man was there at just the right time to give her the encouragement she needed to go on? He was ministering to her in a way that facilitated her recovery. An angel? Probably.

In Hebrews Chapter 1 there is an emphasis on angels. Angels had formed a pretty big part of Hebrew history. Often in the Old Testament we have the Angel of the Lord leading the nation in some way or another. A discussion on angels would be very common-

place for the Jews. They believed in them and had record of their involvement in the life of the nation. Many New Testament scholars believe that various mentions of the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament are pre-incarnate visitations of the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

As magnificent as angels are, (God calls them “winds, His servants flames of fire,”) they are still far inferior to the Son. The Son receives worship from the angelic host because He is the firstborn (a term used not for birth order but for preeminence and place of position and authority), the beloved Son of the Father. It is their relationship that defines the role of Father and Son. Those are functional terms to describe the closest of relationships. They are separate, yet also one, as Jesus declares in John 10:30. But the Father also says that the Son is God: “But about the Son He says, ‘Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom,’” (1:8). Because the Son is God, He deserves and gets total submission from the heavenly host.

Jesus is God’s ultimate and final revelation. Even the last book of the Bible is titled: The Revelation of Jesus Christ. In the past God used mouthpieces to make His will known, but now God has arrived in the flesh to make Himself as clear as He can be made known. You get God when you get Jesus, you miss God when you

miss Jesus. Jesus is the great light Isaiah talked about, who would come into the world to illuminate (with truth and light) everyone in the world. “Those who sat in darkness saw a great light,” the prophet declared (Isaiah 9:2). Jesus is that light. Jesus said, “He who has seen me has seen the father,” (John 14:9).

Hebrews is all about the superiority of Christ. He is above everyone and everything. He is all in all. He is everything. The writer begins with angels and will describe His superiority over all of creation, and over the Jewish religious system and the offering of sacrifices. Hebrews makes Jesus our great prophet, priest and king.

When you’re done with Hebrews I think you’ll love it for life. It has meant so much to me over the years. Just a short word of warning going in to this medium sized book: Be careful not to judge all of the parts before you have read the whole. I think Hebrews may be one of the most misquoted books of the Bible. Verses from the book are often taken out of context to prove things that, I believe, the writer of the book never intended. I’ll explain more as we enter in to the most holy place where Jesus is, and where we can talk to God face to face.

Rejoice in Jesus Always.

Pastor Steve



## “Are You Afraid? Let’s Talk”

October 31 - Hebrews 2: 1-18

**I**n the mind of a kid (and in most adults) death is an enemy. Death is a robber who takes away what is precious to us. He comes at horribly unexpected times, blindsiding us. I can remember as a kid, I could work myself into tears thinking that my mom and dad could die in a car accident. If I heard a siren while they were out, I had them dead and buried in my mind be-

fore the night was even young. When we fear death, we try to avoid it at all costs. It’s like the big bully on the playground. As long as he’s not in the vicinity, we feel safe.

Death is man’s big dilemma. We spend billions of dollars every year keeping people alive, and medical research continues to grow beyond our wildest

expectations. Yet, we still have the death problem. The mortality rate stays the same. Death still knocks, sooner or later, at everyone’s door.

If you have had a death or two in your family, then you know how it feels. Once you are over the shock of the situation, then the hard reality sets in. You have to live without that familiar voice in your life. It robs life of life, doesn’t it? I have heard people say more than once, “Life will never be the same again.” I don’t know if it’s easier to have gone through the experience once already, or to have never gone through it, when we are faced with the death of another person we love. I don’t think that experiencing that pain once necessarily prepares you for another one. Every death is so personal and different that it is hard to say that we could ever be braced well enough. Death is death. It sucks. That’s how you say it in Greek.

Let me ask you: are you afraid of dying? Do you panic a bit when the subject of death comes up? Would you rather avoid the subject?

The Bible has much to say about death. The Bible says that “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord,” (Romans 6:23). The Bible says, “It is appointed unto man once to die and after this the judgment,” (Hebrews 9:27). 1 Corinthians 15 is another place to turn on this subject. But here in Hebrews 2, we have a classic passage on the victory of Christ over death and the devil. One of the many benefits of being “in Christ” is the freedom you can experience from the fear of death or the devil.

I think one of our problems with death is that we have no control over it. Most people, if they were in control of their death, would probably opt out. They would find an exclusion clause and start living again. The fact that at the end of life a person must submit to something outside themselves is frightening. There are a certain number of folks who have talked themselves into a blissful experience after death and have assuaged their fears somewhat. But the jump into the unknown makes most men feel a bit intimidated. We do pretty well when we know what to expect, or when we can hold the reigns to some extent. But when it comes to death, no one can tell us how it’s going to be because they do not know.

The doctor cannot say without reservation, “Now,

you are going to go down a long tunnel and meet a great light and you’ll feel all tingly and warm.” He can’t say that for sure. Some people will share their wishful thinking to bring some reassurance, but if the person asks whether they know for sure, what are they going to say? They simply do not know; they have not been there and done that. The truth is that at the point of your death you are completely out of control. It is not in your hands or the doctor’s hands or the government’s hands, it is only in the hands of the Almighty. He holds the keys of life and death. He determines a person’s years and decides the number of breaths he will take. That is God’s business and not ours.

People fear death because they have to trust God with it. If they do not have faith in God’s Word, then where will they place their faith when death comes knocking? God has experienced death in human terms. Jesus became a man. He took on flesh and blood like every other man and experienced the bumps and bruises of life like all of us. His death, though, was different because of its effect on things above and below and in-between. His death was the deathblow to death and the master of death, the devil. The cross was the crushing blow to the powers of darkness. Colossians says that He spoiled principalities and powers at the cross. He made them useless there. There, at the cross, was a victory of epic proportions. Let’s go over the verses in Hebrews one more time.

“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death,” (2:14,15). Jesus knows all about death and victory over it. He has been there and He was not captured by it. He nullified it. In death we can take His nail-pierced hands and find the same victory. He died so that we could look forward to death. We can approach it with optimism, buoyed up by our belief that He sovereignly holds the keys to the unknown. It is unknown to us but known to Him.

The devil is still busy today trying to convince people that he is in control of the mysteries of the death experience. He does all kinds of goofy stuff through occult practices which are just an attempt to deceive

people. Only Jesus has the answer to the death problem. Paul said in another place, “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” If I had a choice, I’d rather be with the Lord, he says; but that is up to the Lord so whether I am alive or dead I will serve the Lord.

All of us will die as we lived. Out of fear, some men die a thousand deaths before they die. Others live in faith, find victory over death, and are swallowed up in the victory of Christ, going on to live with Him forever.

“Father, this verse gives us the liberty to pray for a person’s liberation from the fear of death. God, open up the heart and mind of each and every person reading this right now and deliver them from the bondage of the fear of death. Replace it with a faith and confidence that you are ultimately in control of our death day. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”

God’s blessings have taken care of the death issue,  
Pastor Steve



## “True Belief”

November 1 - Hebrews 3: 1 - 19

**G**oodness is God’s Gift, It is hard to believe, but whole generations have perished in unbelief. That is a tragedy. There is usually a remnant, just a small portion of the whole who do not cave in to the status quo. But when the majority go down the road of destruction, the small group who do not take the same route are made outcasts and considered irrelevant by the masses.

Noah and his family are an example of this. He labored 120 years, building a boat that had no practical purpose, unless God was truly speaking to him about a coming cataclysmic judgment. Jesus said that His coming would parallel the times of Noah. He said people would be going about their lives, doing the things they were used to doing, when He returned in judgment. Noah and his family were saved because he dared to believe God’s Word and didn’t go with the crowd. I would think that maybe after 50 or 60 years of labor with no flood in sight, he would have felt some hesitation and temptation to join the others, but he stayed the course despite being “different.”

The Hebrews this letter is addressed to knew

something about being different from the crowd. They were Jews who had acknowledged Jesus. Since their initial contact with the gospel of salvation through Jesus, they had experienced many difficulties. At first they put up with the difficulties and supported one another, but now they were wavering for a number of reasons. I can think of four of them:

1. Both the Roman rulers and the Non-Jesus Jews in Jerusalem increased their persecution. This resulted in the loss of property and rights on the part of these “believers.”

2. Even though they had acknowledged Jesus, their commitment appears to be a halfway obedience. They had not yet counted the cost to give up all to follow the Savior.

3. They had not had enough solid teaching about Jesus to give them the kind of spiritual stability on the rock of faith in Jesus. Remember, Jesus said to Peter that He would build His church on Himself and that the gates of hell could not resist it.

4. The strong Jewish tradition of this group pulled them back to what they were used to doing religiously. When the heat is turned up, we tend to revert to

what we are comfortable with. In the face of the dangers of putting your faith in Jesus, and the pressures that family members and friends put on them, many were vacillating.

This scenario happens in our day, as it did back then. Some folks will acknowledge Jesus, and then backpedal when the heat is turned up. They will sometimes fall away because their fledgling faith is not built on the Word and the evidence. When an anti-Jesus voice comes along and raises a question they cannot answer, they are shaken in faith and fall down. I remember that when I was new in my faith, my parents put a bit of pressure on me by saying that I was going through a phase. I told a cousin about my new found faith and she pooh-poohed it by saying that she had been baptized and had gone through it too. I couldn’t get over how she made my faith feel invalid, like it wasn’t really vital, but just another inconsequential part of life.

The Hebrews writer answers the questions of wavering souls by continually bringing us back to Jesus. He began with the superiority of Jesus over angels and over death and over the devil. Now he says that Jesus is superior to the hero of Jewish faith—Moses. Judaism is built on Moses. That’s why, I think, the author brings up the illustration of a house. He says that the builder of a house is always considered greater than the house itself. This may be an allusion to Moses being the builder of Judaism. But the author of Hebrews says that God is the builder of all things. This is an allusion to Jesus being God. If you read it again, you’ll see that he wants us to look to Jesus who is the creator of all things (see the beginning of Chapter 1 again). Anyway, the focus is on Christ’s superiority to good old Moses. This would be very significant to any Jew who had grown up reading Moses’ words and hearing them read week in and week out. These new

professors of faith needed to be instructed on the greatness of Jesus because they didn’t know what they had gotten into; they were unaware of how great their Lord was.

The writer then reminds them of their own history. They are warned not to be like their ancestors. They are accused of unbelief and of not listening to the Spirit. If you connect this with Chapter 2, where it says they neglected the great salvation of Jesus, you can see God’s concern for these people. When Moses led the nation out of Egypt and headed for the promised land, they ended up spending 40 long years in the wilderness because of their unfaithfulness, wandering from place to place. The general population—well, actually everyone but Joshua and Caleb—were buried in the wilderness. They died because they were unbelievers. They had everything, but they didn’t respond to the grace of God. They saw the miracles and experienced God’s constant provision, but still turned their back on the Lord.

The application for us is to treasure our faith as a precious gift. We must act on our faith, and live by faith. We also enjoy the company of those with genuine faith. When true believers converse, the emphasis is not on the exterior things, like church life or rule-keeping or pleasing others. It is on the interior, where God has done a work that has changed us; it is the place where we hear His voice and follow Him. We should have no interest in following in the footsteps of those who took advantage of their spiritual privileges for their own benefit. Rather, we ought to be thankful for every gift God has given and share those gifts with people who haven’t experienced the grace of God yet.

Let’s serve God from the heart with all sincerity. God’s blessings are attached to real faith,  
Pastor Steve

**“Better Than Sealy”**

November 2 - Hebrews 4: 1-13

**N**ow we are moving into the circulatory system of the book of Hebrews. Now we can see where true spiritual life comes from. The book is full of life-giving truths that are couched in rebukes for mishandling the truth about the Christ. Remember when your dad got on one of your brothers or sisters for something and you were listening because you didn't want the same judgment? Well, Hebrews is like that. We are learning from the mistakes of others and our hearts ought to be saying, “No, not me, I don't want to fall into that sin,” and, “God, help me to keep my eyes on Jesus.”

Did you get a good night's sleep last night? I think that to some degree our rest is an indicator of how things are going for us in our minds and hearts. When we are sleeping restlessly, it is sometimes caused by unresolved issues that are affecting our spiritual lives. Paul said in Ephesians 4 that we shouldn't let the sun go down before we resolve something that is causing anger. If we do, he says that we will be giving the devil an opportunity to take advantage of us. In 2 Corinthians Paul says that unforgiveness is one of the devil's tools to distract us from God's purpose for our lives. And when we have anger or unforgiveness looming over us, it is more difficult to rest peacefully.

About a year ago my wife and I decided we needed a new mattress. I liked the idea of a new one but hated the prospect of having to go test them out. Have you done this, it feels so...weird. There you are in the store, with hundreds of mattresses, and you lie down on one. Then the salesman asks you questions and your wife asks you questions and you're thinking you'd just like to leave. I was good with the very first mattress I lay on. After we had it delivered, we discovered that the one we got was way too firm. A couple of two-by-fours would have been softer. We went back to another store and began the process all over again. This time my wife was determined to lie

on every mattress. Needless to say, I hadn't realized the kind of effort we would have to put into the sleep process. But once we found the right one and paid the greater amount of money, boy, was it worth it. I have slept so well on this mattress. Now I'm glad that I didn't settle for any old mattress because the quality of my sleep is much better now.

I say all of that to highlight what Hebrews says today. God has a special rest for the person who will live by faith in Him. This rest is likened to the rest God had after he created the world and everything in it. God rested on the seventh day. He took a day off, not because He was tired, but to look back and enjoy what He had done. It was very good to Him to look with admiration on His own work. He was pleased with the creativity of His new endeavor.

Now God wants us to enter into the rest that Jesus Christ gives. It is a rest based on the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. Through Him we can enter it. We are no longer scrutinized based on our works but are freely accepted by God in Christ. All of our sins have been forgiven. What is a greater release for the soul of a man than knowing he is freely and fully forgiven? He no longer has the hammer of the law hanging over him, because Jesus fulfilled the law on his behalf. That is true rest. The basis for our rest—the finished work of Christ on the cross—will take up a large portion of the rest of Hebrews. It is on the ground of His blood that we can cease from striving with our own works for acceptance and instead strive to let go of our own works and focus on the work of Christ for us.

There are two more important thoughts before we finish this chapter. First is the priority of God's Word and the second is God's omniscience. I'll explain that one in a minute. Here we go talking about the importance of God's Word again. Hebrews says that it is the Word of God that can penetrate a person's soul

and reach into the very heart of a person. Get this: the Word of God is alive. It is not an inanimate thing with no power in and of itself. It has the power to change a person's life. It can reach into the deep recesses of a person's inner being and make a difference. Remember, Jesus said that His words were spirit and they were life. I think the Hebrews writer is connecting God's peace or rest with His Word. It is the Word deep in the heart of a person that gives true rest. Think about Psalm 119 again: “Those who love your law have great peace.” Do you see the correspondence?

The other thought, which fits into this perfectly, is that all things, including the hearts of all men, are

laid bare before the Lord. He sees it all. He knows why we are not getting a good night's sleep. He knows about that hidden thing and He waits for us to bring it before Him. He also knows those who have the peace that He gives. He sees into their deepest parts, and lives there by His Spirit. Remember Isaiah 26: “Thou will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee because he trusts in Thee; trust in the Lord forever because the Lord is an everlasting rock.”

Sweet dreams.

God's blessings make us rested,

Pastor Steve

**“Christ is our Great Priest”**

November 3 - Hebrews 4:14 - 5:10

**T**oday's reading in Hebrews showcases the priesthood of Jesus. He is the great high priest who offers Himself to God as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. Belief in Him gives the forgiven sinner access into the halls of grace in the Father's house. He is both the one who offers, as priest, and he is the offering himself. He comes to the holy place not with the blood of bulls and goats, but with His own blood to offer a once-for-all sacrifice.

Also, the Hebrews writer is emphasizing that if you let go of Jesus, you forsake the one way of salvation. Jesus intercedes for His own, just as he did when he prayed His high priestly prayer in John 17, but he now prays for us from heaven. It is a place marked by His blood. It was through His suffering and His perfection He became a high priest who could put away our sins once and for all.

Jesus' duties are very practical for us. We need His intercession for us if we would come, as the book invites, very boldly to the throne of God. It is only through Jesus that we can enter. In 1 John the Bible

says that His blood continuously cleanses us from all sin. It is an ongoing function of the miracle blood of the Savior.

I delight in the work of Christ on the cross because it means the blessings of eternal life for the helpless and spiritually bankrupt son of Adam or daughter of Eve. We come not on our own merit, but in the merit of Christ. If a person were to disregard the work of Christ in order to come to God in his own way, the results would be very bad. Man, on his own, is only deserving of death; he cannot make a way to God apart from Jesus.

Do you pray in Jesus' Name? It is not so much the formula of the prayer, but the authority of it. You can say all of the right words, but if your prayer does not carry the worthy authority of the Lord Jesus it will fall on deaf ears. Come to God through Christ, and pray with thanksgiving for the great work of Jesus for you. You will then know the authority that touches the unapproachable presence of the Holy.

Those that are Christ's have the privilege of com-

ing to God with the authority of Him. We are His and so we can come to His Father (and ours) through the way He blazed. We come to God with prayers in line with the will of Jesus because when we pray we are thinking about ways to grow closer to God and we are wanting to please the Lord. We also know that when our prayers are not answered as we'd wish, then we

can fully trust the will of Jesus so that things will be worked out in His way and in His good timing.

All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name, To Him Be All Glory!

God's blessings are mediated by the Priest,  
Pastor Steve



## "Here's An Object Lesson"

November 4 - Hebrews 5:11 - 6:12

**H**ow do you learn? Educators are finding out that a good number of students need an object lesson in order to grasp a point. If they can see it and touch it and examine it and smell it, then the chances are much better that they will comprehend what you are trying to teach. If you think back and try to remember your favorite teachers, I'll bet they did object lessons regularly.

God is the Master teacher. He uses all means necessary in order to teach us so that we can grow spiritually. Remember, Jesus often spoke in parables in order to make a simple parallel between something everybody knew about, to something they needed to know in the spiritual realm. A little later on in Hebrews we read that "we are all taught by God." God is our instructor. I can remember looking forward to having class with certain teachers. Every time their classes were in session I was there, because I enjoyed the way they taught and the authority with which they taught.

God's classroom is the school of life. Every morning when we wake up, God takes His place at the podium and conducts class. You and I have the opportunity to listen and take notes, or we can screw around and not get a cotton-picking thing out of it. God teaches every day. He doesn't stop because of a few screw-ups. The Word of the Lord goes out into all the earth—day to day God's speech is uttered. When

the final exam is given there will be no excuses; God has made His lessons clear for all to learn.

Do you look forward to learning from God? Paul told the Thessalonian believers that they were "taught by God to love one another." There is God Lesson 101. He is teaching us to love the unlovely. He wants us to experience the kind of love that He embodies. Think back to those teachers who you wanted to emulate. You'd do almost anything to be like them and copy their traits. I have had a handful of teachers like this; they made a very important contribution to my thinking. I think if I could pick up even just a couple of things from them then I'd be a happy man. But there is Someone far higher than them that we are called to emulate. Paul says in Ephesians 5 that "as dear children, be imitators of God."

I'd like you to think about what that would mean to you today. In what ways has God taught you already? If you are like me, the lessons are sometimes lost in my "busy" schedule. So let's take a moment to reflect on the great lessons our Father has already taught us. Let's list a few:

1. The greatest object lesson is the cross.
2. God has a definite plan for our lives. Jesus illustrated this by talking about the Vine and the branches. Take a look at a tree and be reminded.
3. God is in the control room of the universe. Pha-

raoh and Moses are our reminder that this is certainly true.

4. Trust is so important. Like a child in the arms of his loving parents, we must trust the Lord.

5. Life is short. Picture the leaf, the grass, and the steam of a kettle.

6. Eternal life is a gift. Remember the Prodigal Son.

7. God keeps His promises. Remember the rainbow.

...and countless more...

Now let's take a look at Hebrews 5:11-6:12. There were people being addressed in the book of Hebrews who were off-center about the teaching of the Christ, the Messiah. They had been enlightened about the truth in Jesus, but had continued to attach themselves to their old traditions, which were contrary to the gospel. Temple sacrifices would be one example here. You could not continue to make animal sacrifice and still hold on to the crucified Jesus, the final sacrifice.

The writer makes it clear why he is being so hard

on some by saying to the rest, "Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case—things that accompany salvation," (Hebrews 6:9). There were those who had the cross in focus, and there were those who didn't. The apostles didn't want them to be discouraged. Instead, they were to remember that God was for them, that He knew their trials, and that it would be worth it in the end if they continued like those in their own history who walked by faith in a patient way.

In days of old it was idolatry that pulled the people away from God. In the days of the Hebrews it was a misapplication of the cross that tripped them up. Either way, it is God's way that gives life. Any other way "produces thorns and thistles (and) is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned," (Hebrews 6:8).

I trust for better things in your case, dear friends.  
God's blessings bring true salvation,  
Pastor Steve



## "An Odd Fellow"

November 5 - Hebrews 6:13 - 7:10

**M**ay Your Day Be Bright,

How many times have you heard that "God works in mysterious ways?"

That's not just a cliché; it is a true statement. God's way of doing things doesn't always match the "conventional" way. God has surprises up His sleeve.

Life is not very predictable. If it were, it would be boring, wouldn't it? We need wonder and amazement and awe in our lives in order for us to look forward to what's next. If you believe Jesus is alive and at work in your life, like a carpenter working on a house, then you will be pleased as your project progresses to the next phase.

I try as hard as I can to see what God is doing in my life, especially when things aren't going my way. The other night I was dealing with a difficult conflict when I recognized the battle going on in me—the same one that Paul talks about in Galatians 5. I could feel myself vacillating from ideas "in the Spirit" to the things related to being "in the flesh." "Do I concentrate on love or on enmity?" "Do I give in to bitterness or will I take the path of joy?" These were the questions swirling in my head. Just the fact that I was dealing with the issues was a good thing for me. It made me feel more in control of the outcome. I could give way to the flesh or the Spirit. Paul said that I should walk in

the Spirit and not yield to the influence of the flesh. It helped me to see that even my current difficulties are a part of God's progress in my life.

In today's reading Hebrews introduces this unusual character, a man who illustrates that God works in every way and in mysterious ways. His name is Melchizedek. He may throw you for a loop if you don't know his background. We first meet Melchizedek in Genesis, when he comes out after Abram has won a battle against multiple kings. Melchizedek pronounces a spiritual blessing and then receives a cash offering from Abram's spoils. Who is this guy?

Hebrews says that he is a king and a priest. He is an example of the dual roles Christ fills. He is "without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the son of God, he remains a priest forever," (7:3). Melchizedek's priesthood would be a forerunner of the priesthood of Jesus. He is a god-like figure. Who but a god would be "without beginning of days or end of life?" Again, to the Jews, Melchizedek would be ingrained in their thinking since Genesis was a book they knew from an early age. The writer is saying that Melchizedek and Jesus are similar. And their similarity is in the permanency of their priesthoods. They would be priests forever. Remember, the Hebrews author has already called Jesus "the apostle and high priest of our profession" (3:1). It was so important that these Jewish believers realized that Jesus was the end of the temple priesthood as they knew it.

Both Melchizedek and Jesus were kings and priests, and were possibly also similar as prophets. The New Testament doesn't necessarily indicate that Melchizedek was a prophet, but in Genesis 14, after Abram's victory, Melchizedek pronounces a prophetic blessing over him. Take that with a grain of salt, I'm pushing it a bit. The point is that Melchizedek's priesthood is a picture of the priesthood that would end all priesthoods because "Jesus is a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

Another reason this is important is that Jesus was not from the tribe of Levi, the tribe designated to offer sacrifices and serve the temple. That doesn't disqualify Him though, because He has authority based on His connection to the priesthood of Melchizedek. Melchizedek set the precedent for a non-Levitical priesthood way back in Abram's day. Make sense?

Jesus is our priest. He is our advocate with the Father. He gives us access into the holy place because of the offering of His blood. Our acceptance with God is based on His righteousness and not our own. We can come to Him freely today and receive mercy and grace and help when we need it.

Do you need it today? Are you spiritually battle weary? Let your Great High Priest take you into the presence of the holy, holy, God, and you will find wholeness there.

God's blessings sometimes come in unusual packages,  
Pastor Steve

God, and not some far out concept of Him that would only give us a facsimile of His power and His person.

God turned the light on His truth to a greater and greater degree throughout history until He finally brought the full measure of His revelation in the person of His Son. Remember how the book opened: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe." Jesus is the culmination of God's bright light of revelation. I see this progression like a dimmer switch. In the beginning things were pretty dark, and then the Lord began to turn the knob, so that it got a bit brighter all until he had it at full brightness once His Son entered time and space.

The Law was designed to point out where a man had fallen short of the perfection of God so he could deal with his isolation from the Almighty. This is especially true of the parts that dealt with the Levites who were responsible for the temple service, which allowed the worshipper access into the courtyard of the Lord where he could be made right with God. However, the Law was imperfect because it did not provide a lasting solution to the problem of sin. The worshipper would only be temporarily relieved of his guilt, until he sinned again. Then he was right back into the fix that brought him to the priests the first time. The blood of the animal sacrifices covered sin but was not able to put away sin once for all. This made the Law a burden to the person who truly desired to make things right with the Lord. Think also about the insecurity of not really knowing if you were covered or not. What if you had missed some sin that you were not aware of and

were actually alienated from God because of it, even though you were ignorant of the fact?

That is why those who attempt to live under the burden of the Law today are in the same predicament. You can try to pull yourself up and do the right thing, but no one can do the right thing all of the time. That is why Paul stated in Romans that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The idea behind "fallen short" is the ongoing state of falling short day in and day out. All sinned in Adam and all continue to fall short of the perfection of a God who is so pure and holy and perfect that man cannot stand in His presence and lift his head up.

The Hebrews writer puts the spotlight on the permanence of Christ's priesthood, as opposed to the temporary fix of the Law's sacrifice system. He makes it clear that the Lord has all of the credentials necessary to be a go-between for us so that we can lift our heads to the Most Holy. Jesus' resume is the guarantee of a covenant that will seal our relationship with God on the basis of His own blood, not on the wobbly wheels of our own righteousness. Don't you love this verse: "Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens," (26). He is our hope, a much better hope than the Law gave us. This is a rock solid covenant. This covenant is based on the finished work of Jesus on His cross, His blood, and His substitutionary suffering for us miserable sinners.

"Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (7:25). Enough said!

God's blessings are given by the Great High Priest,  
Pastor Steve



## "A Better Covenant"

November 6 - Hebrews 7:11-28

**G**od's Word is Alive,  
In the beginning things were very good.  
Then they went sour. Man saw to that. Then  
God stepped in to improve the situation, and through-

out the centuries He has been revealing better and better snapshots of Himself. We were made to experience God and live on God. Through His revealing process, God allows us to assure ourselves that we have

**“Newer and Better”**

November 7 - Hebrews 8: 1-13

**D**on't we all hope for something better? You might “have it all” in others' eyes and still desire something more. Something inside of us longs for newness. Regretfully, some take this too far and trade in their old spouse for a new one before they have tried to renew their love. Once you've experienced something new, you long to experience it again.

I bought a brand new VW in 1985. I loved that car. My son drove it before a deer came along and totaled it. That was a tough day when we had to go to the wrecking yard and pay our last respects to a car that had over 300,000 miles. That day I was thinking back about all of the good memories I had driving it. And I was reminded that all things in this life fade away or are totaled in one way or another. Newness never lasts no matter how hard we try to keep it that way.

In Hebrews 8 the author continues his discussion of the priesthood of Jesus. The benefit of this priesthood is that it entails a new covenant, guaranteed by Jesus Himself. The terms of the covenant weigh heavily on what God has done in Jesus and what He does for those who believe in the new covenant.

The old covenant could never take away sins, because the effect of the sacrifice was only temporary. The new covenant has a lasting effect, based on the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins. The old covenant was based on the work of a priest, who had to offer a sacrifice for his own sins and then another for the sins of the people. The new covenant is based on the “once for all” sacrifice of Jesus, which takes away the sins of the believer forever.

Jesus gives us promises that ratify the new covenant. These promises are better than those of the old covenant, because the person bringing an animal for sacrifice really couldn't be completely sure that he had made atonement for all of his sins. Plus, he had to continuously come to offer sacrifice because

of the regular sins all humans are prone to. It was a daily, bloody mess. The new covenant is not based on law-keeping but on the grace of God.

Let's note what God does for us under the new covenant. First, God writes His Word in our hearts. In other words, He gives us a heart for Him. That's why your heart is warmed when you learn a new truth in the Word. It just confirms the truth that God has written inside you.

Second, God is now our Father; He is not some vague entity or abstract metaphysical being, He is a personal God who loved us so much that He gave His Son as the guarantee of the covenant.

Third, we are given knowledge of God. This is a supernatural thing. God is only known by those to whom He reveals Himself. Jesus said, “All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him,” (Matthew 11: 27).

Fourth, He gives us forgiveness of our sins. He doesn't even remember them any longer. That is an example of complete unconditional love.

The cross keeps our faith new. I encourage you to make it a daily habit to meditate for a few minutes on some aspect of the cross. It was at the cross where the new covenant was ratified. Today I invite you to think about Jesus' beatings, or the mockery, or the crown of thorns, or the spit dribbling off of His face, or the scourging, or the crucifixion, or His last words on the cross. You name it, wherever you focus around the cross, you will experience a renewed appreciation for the grace of God and the new covenant He created.

Meet you at the cross.

God's blessings are blood-red,

Pastor Steve

**“How Much More”**

November 8 - Hebrews 9: 1-15

**T**he Top Of The Day To You, Once you have gone over some good ground it is a good practice to think back and remember the benefits of that territory. Those who have visited the Grand Canyon or Yosemite or Sedona can recall the majestic eminence of those places and remember the impact that view had on them. This is true of previous Scriptures we have covered.

In Romans we learned that redemption in Christ is superior to all other states of affairs, even those that existed before the fall of man. Christ's righteousness is not even to be compared to the righteousness of the first man, because the Lord is so much greater than he was. And so it follows that the sacrifice of the “last Adam” (Christ), has a much greater positive effect than the sin that Adam originally introduced, whose negative effect spread to all men. In other words, our status in Christ takes us not back to square one, but way beyond that place.

Someone might criticize this, saying that Adam's original environment was perfect and ours today is far from it. This is a good point, except for the fact that our redemption in Christ gives us an inheritance reserved in heaven. This inheritance, according to Peter, “...can never perish, spoil, or fade...” (1 Peter 1:4). Yes, earth is no longer paradise, but what we have now in Christ is greater than what Adam had. We will see Jesus, our Creator, face-to-face one day, and be like Him in His perfection. Now that's something to look forward to!

Hebrews is all about the superiority of Jesus. He is superior to the angels and Moses (the giver of the Law) and the Levitical system of offerings and feasts and priests. He is the culmination of the promises in the Bible of a coming Man who would fulfill all that the Old Testament stood for. The law and the sacrificial system and the need for a priest were all completed in Christ. He is all in all, the beginning and the end.

Hebrews compares the potency (the efficacy, if you will) of the blood of animals to cover sin with the blood of Jesus. The entire system of forgiveness laid out in the Law was based on the shedding of blood. The offender would bring his animal, usually a lamb or goat, to the entrance of the Tabernacle and confess his sin over the animal as he laid his hand on its head. The priest would then cut the animal's throat, pouring the blood on the altar of burnt offering. The sacrifice would clear the offender's conscience, but only temporarily, because the current offense was the only offense covered by the blood.

I can hear someone saying, “Are you kidding me? God wanted the life of an innocent animal in place of some guy's petty sin?” The answer to that question is “yes,” and the reason is that God takes sin seriously. Remember, Adam and Eve were “banished” from the Garden of Eden because they disobeyed God's Word. They “only” ate from a piece of fruit, but that bite was a statement of independence from God and of man's desire to be his own god apart from his Creator. We can try to minimize sin all we want, but the Lord has made it clear from His Word that sin is an affront to a Holy God who made us in His image and wants us to be one with Him.

Let's quote Hebrews 9: 13 and 14 and make a few final observations.

“The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”

Jesus was the final sacrifice. No others were necessary after Him. As a matter of record, within 40 years of His crucifixion the entire system of sacrifice in Judaism was abolished after the Romans toppled

the city of Jerusalem. That was the exclamation mark on God's promise to put an end to sin. If you read the book of Daniel with the idea of Jesus' final sacrifice in mind, they can mold together in your thinking. Here are Daniel's comments:

"Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him," (9:24-27).

We'll be exploring these ideas again when we get to the book of Revelation, but here take special note of verse 24, where it says that sin will be put away. That is the difference between Christ's sacrifice and the sacrifices under the Levitical system. Christ's sacrifice puts away sin and all of its relatives once and for all. You know sin's first cousin, guilt? Well, he is dissolved by the blood of Jesus. Another relative, shame, is answered by the blood of the Lord Jesus too. And the conscience is cleared because the sin that weighs the inner you down is put away once for all in the sacrifice of Jesus.

The result is unadulterated service toward God. When your conscience is clean you can serve God with a pure motive, working for him out of gratefulness for what He has done for you.

Come to the cross today, would you?

Let His blood purify your heart and give you the freedom to love and serve God from a renewed position. The blood of Jesus puts sin away once for all. Would you celebrate that truth today? You can. Let's do.

God's blessings are so much more than we deserve,  
Pastor Steve



## "The Blood Of The Covenant"

November 9 - Hebrews 9: 16-28

**H**ave A Wonderful Day,  
I was only in Cub Scouts for a short time, but I remember why I thought it was fun to be a scout. There is something about putting on a uniform that makes a person feel special. I remember there was a handkerchief with a sliding emblem that had a bear on it. Then there were badges that represented certain things, like what troop you were with or what rank you had earned. There was a scout

handbook that you went through to find out about the ongoing journey a scout should take.

I remember that on the days we had meetings, we'd wear our uniforms to school, and we wore them like a badge of honor. We thought the girls were especially impressed with a man in uniform. Anyone within view would identify us by those navy blue duds and believe we had been set apart for some special reason.

To this day I am still impressed with the men and women in uniform who serve our country. Don't they look sharp? But imagine the contrast between a fresh Naval Academy grad in uniform and someone who was serving in a war . The one is prim and proper and neat and squeaky clean, and the other is gritty and sometimes dirty and often tattered and torn. Both are impressive, because both represent something important and special; both are set apart for a special purpose.

The Bible is a story of God setting people and things apart for special reasons. God called Abraham, for example, from his native land to go north and west into a promised land, a land that would one day be set apart as the inheritance of his offspring. God set apart Moses from birth to one day be the deliverer of an oppressed Israelite people. Once Moses led the people out of bondage they constructed a place of worship for God in the wilderness and set apart all of the furnishings and equipment of the Tent of Meeting for the special purpose of worship. Inside the Tent, and later in the Temple of Solomon, was a golden box which contained the tablets given by God; a bit of manna, the food from heaven; and Aaron's rod that budded, a sign of God's favor on the priest who was called for the special purpose of bringing the people into the presence of the Holy One.

Centuries later when the Christ appears for salvation, He prays that His people would be "sanctified," (set apart) as they follow in His footsteps as He had "sanctified Himself." Jesus was set apart from all

eternity as the Lamb who would give His life for the sins of the world.

This imagery brings us back to the original Tabernacle, where the blood of innocent animals was offered as atonement for people in need of forgiveness. Blood was the foundation of the entire system. Blood was used to set apart the whole place where sin was atoned for. Blood was even sprinkled on the building and the altar and the book of the covenant. God's covenant was an agreement based on the death of an innocent life; based on blood. I have often tried to visualize the bloody mess and stink and laundry problems the temple workers must have endured. God was going to great lengths to impress on the minds of His people that blood was necessary for the forgiveness of the soul.

And so the writer of Hebrews says, "But now He (Jesus) has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself," (9:26). Hebrews is the book of finality. In Christ the entire sacrificial system is completed. He is the end of the sacrificial law for those who believe in His blood. His blood is enough.

You, as a believer, are set apart for a special purpose by the finished work of Jesus. His blood sets you apart like nothing else. Peter says that we were not redeemed with gold or silver but with the precious blood of Jesus, a Lamb without spot or blemish.

God's blessings are completed in Jesus,  
Pastor Steve



## "It's Over"

November 10 - Hebrews 10: 1-18

**R**emember, the book of Hebrews lays out the gospel for Jewish believers and Jesus confessors. The writer needed to emphasize the

work of Christ in comparison to the Jewish system of worship. It would have been so natural for these Jewish believers to attempt to fit Jesus into their system,

rather than let Him revolutionize their lives His way. Traditions are hard to shake off.

This is a common problem, no matter what background you are from. We tend to put Jesus in the categories we are used to. For example, if we grew up in a very strict disciplinary environment then we may tend to see Jesus as a demanding teacher who expects us to dot every "i" and cross every "t." If we grew up in a laid-back situation where there were very few rules, we might see Jesus as a laissez faire buddy-type who is most concerned about our happiness. People who are meek by temperament will often view the Lord as a gentle Shepherd or a lover of kids. Those who are more aggressive will see Jesus getting the job done in the temple or focus on His scolding of the Pharisees. In other words, we seem to view Jesus from our own situation.

In this chapter of Hebrews we have many significant phrases that can energize your life if you grasp them and let them sink into you. The author says things like, "make perfect," and "once for all," and "to take away," and "for all time," and "made perfect," and "no longer." Just reading those words tells you that something is final. Something has been taken care of indefinitely. You shouldn't have to worry about it any

longer, because it has been taken care of permanently.

Fortunately, the finished product the writer is talking about here is our salvation in Christ, the perfect sacrifice that makes us perfect because of Him. If you can grasp that last sentence, then you can put to bed that nagging thought that somehow, no matter how hard you try, you just don't cut it. "Because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy," (10: 14). The sacrifice was perfect because the man was perfect. The sacrifice was perfect because Jesus was doing the will of God. Don't forget Isaiah 53 where the prophet said, "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him." Why? We'll answer that question in Hebrews 12. Don't peek. We have some pretty deep water to cross before we get there.

So, in the light of the one perfect sacrifice, what would it mean to disregard it and begin to offer animal sacrifices as a part of your worship? That will be our focus tomorrow. Keep going over the Word. It's a lamp and light. Make it your delight and you will never go astray.

God's blessings give us reassurance,  
Pastor Steve



## "A Dreadful Thing"

November 11 - Hebrews 10: 19-39

**H**ello Friends,  
"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left," (Hebrews 10:26).

Now there's a hard pill to swallow. Who hasn't "deliberately" sinned after coming to the knowledge of the truth? I have. Does that mean there is no hope for me? No. Do you want to know why? Because I have a great high priest who forgives me for my sins by

means of His own blood. So what in the world is the author saying here? Good question!

Remember the context of the book of Hebrews. These were "believers" who were mixed up about where Jesus stood in relation to their Jewish practices. They had made a good start but were now waffling (10:32-35). God is reaching out to them and warning them of the grave danger of rejecting His way through His Son.

It is clear that the sin referred to here is very specific. "How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?" (10:29). It is a rejection of the person and work of Christ that damns a man.

To "trample the Son of God" would be to disregard the high status with which Jesus spoke about Himself and His relationship with the Father. The Apostle John recorded something that fits here. "Though He had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in Him," (John 12:37). John says that this was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. Then he records, "Therefore they could not believe," (12:39). Why? Persistent unbelief. They reached a point of hardness where they were unable to turn. John unveils their motives when he says, "for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God", (12:43). I'm sure it must have looked quite awkward that some of these Hebrews, who had joined the crowd at first, were turning their back on the true great high priest and were instead moving back under the law.

To treat the blood of Jesus as an "unholy thing" was the real crux of the matter. Non-Christian Jews saw the cross as a failure and a mockery of God. How could Jesus be the Messiah and be crucified? They didn't buy that He was who He said He was. They believed a man was justified before God through keeping the law of Moses; circumcision and animal sacrifice being the two great hallmarks of that law. They so emphasized circumcision that it became the number one issue with them.

Paul says in Galatians 6 that circumcision is nothing and that it only puts the glory in man's court rather than giving it to God. When we put the cross in perspective, we give the glory to God, Paul says. If circumcision saves, then the cross is unnecessary. The cross, seemingly a failure, is actually God's greatest act of love for lost sinners. Therefore, Paul says he will boast and glory in the cross of his Lord Jesus Christ. To return to an emphasis on circumcision and animal sacrifice is a rejection of the only means of salvation.

Without the cross there is only judgment to look forward to.

Isn't the expression to "insult the Spirit of grace" unusual? It speaks volumes about what is going on here. They are rejecting the work of the Holy Spirit, who brings the grace of God in Christ to the world. He, the Spirit, convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. But some resist and do not receive the gracious gift of God.

Instead of yielding to the Spirit, they sought to establish their own righteousness by being perfect law keepers on their own. This was a rejection of God's gift in Christ. And again, the result was the glorification of man rather than God. This is a slap in the face of God. Elsewhere Paul wrote, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes," (Romans 10:1-4). How insulting it must have been to God to have His great work rejected by His old covenant people.

In our day and age, of course, there are no animal sacrifices to go back to. Some people today go that route when they claim to be followers of Jesus, and they talk about Jesus, and they even go to church, but their heart is far from God and they do not repent of their sin. As a matter of fact, they coddle their sin and treasure it above faith in Jesus. This mixture of sin and a supposed relationship with Jesus puts them in mortal danger of being in the Hebrews 10 class. It is not an enviable place to be, for the consequences are disastrous. For them there remains no sacrifice for their sin.

God is looking for a people of faith. "But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved," (Hebrews 10:38,39). This is the subject of the entire next chapter; it is the famous hall of faith, a catalog of people who lived by faith.

God's blessings are in the Walk of Faith,  
Pastor Steve

**“Faith Is...”**

November 12 - Hebrews 11:1-16

**R**ise Up, O People of God, Faith is real. Faith is not imagined or made up or a leap in the dark. Faith has substance. You can get your hand around faith and examine it, the way you would examine some natural phenomena. Faith is not ambiguous or open for various interpretations. Faith is concrete.

Faith in the right person and things can be the greatest motivator. Faith gives us purpose, because we all need to believe in what is true. By faith we can see what is true, and the result is great hope. Faith answers the questions that every person muses on from time to time: how did we get here, why are we here and where are we going? Most people think faith is something you muster up inside yourself in order to maintain your stability. When someone says, “keep the faith,” they mean, “hang in there,” or “don’t give up.” But that is not what the Bible means by faith.

The Hebrews were having trouble “keeping the faith.” Faith for them had been reduced to a series of self-propelled motions. Faith was minimized, because the object of their faith wasn’t the Sovereign Almighty God but rather themselves. They had traded in faith in God for faith in their own works. You can only function this way as long as you can continue to compare your works with another’s. Paul uses this reasoning in Galatians 6. He says that they wanted others to be circumcised, not to please God but so that they could boast about their recruitment of others.

People regularly join churches for the wrong reasons. They may do it so that they can find prospects for a business they are in. Sometimes they do it so that they can find a mate. They aren’t necessarily interested in Faith, but in using others to promote their own thing. Remember, God knows the heart and He distinguishes between the sincere and the

insincere. He weighs hearts. All that glitters isn’t gold, and God knows the difference. When people use the prevalence of hypocrites to argue against The Faith, they are ignorant of the fact that God knows already who has true faith and doesn’t. So what is faith?

Faith is trust in the unfailing promises of God. Think with me about what the author of Hebrews has tried to convey so far. Jesus is superior. He is the sole object of our faith. His identity and His promises are the foundation for faith. If you invalidate Him, you are departing from The Faith.

Back in chapter 6 God made it clear by saying: “So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, He guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things (the oath and the fact that God keeps His promises), in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek,” (Hebrews 6:17-20).

The men and women of faith held up as examples of faith in chapter 11 all lived pre-cross. We, like them, look to the sure promise of God to anchor our souls in truth. When that anchor secures your faith you will find a substantial and lasting relationship with God. “Without faith it is impossible to please Him,” (verse 6).

Can you ultimately trust the promises of God no matter what kind of wind is blowing through your life right now? Jesus said that a life built on Him could weather the storms (Matthew 7).

God’s blessings are substantial,  
Pastor Steve

**“Unpredictable”**

November 13 - Hebrews 11, Part II (17-40)

**I** attended the baptism of a friend the other night. A few years back, this person didn’t even think that God was real. Yesterday, I was having lunch with another friend who had cancer surgery about six or seven years ago. Back then he thought that maybe he’d be alive five more years at the most. He said that he felt like he had been blessed. I also spent time at the home of a sweet lady who had just learned that her beloved uncle had died. He was older, but his death was still a bit unexpected. She said that her dad had told her way back when not to question God’s will. LIFE IS UNPREDICTABLE.

Some people spend the bulk of their life trying to make their life better. I guess it depends on what you mean by better, but I think self-preservation or self-advancement is a dead end when all is said and done. Don’t we really thirst for a purpose that transcends ourselves? Remember, Jesus frequently called people to “deny themselves.” He made it pretty clear that choosing to follow Him was going to be a change of direction. There would be a change from one allegiance to another, namely, from self to Jesus. Of course, once a person turns to the Lord he finds the kind of life that a person could only dream of. I remember when I was a kid, thinking about the possibility of knowing God. I used to lie in bed and dream of what that would be like. Now that I know Jesus is real it is still hard to believe that God has made Himself known to me. I feel so unworthy. God is good.

The life of faith is not a cakewalk. It is more like an adventure. Maybe a journey would be a good way to describe it. As soon as you pray that God would take your life and do with it what He wants...10, 9, 8,...3, 2, 1, blastoff! You are now somewhere in space and He is in the control room. It doesn’t usually make for a neat and tidy existence. There are bumps and bruises along the way. This is verified by the examples set forth in Hebrews 11.

I think these bumps along the journey are the reason so many people become disillusioned with their faith. When they came to the faith, someone must have told them that life would begin to be easier for them. Then when the opposite happened, they reasoned that Christianity really didn’t work. They were given the impression that Christianity was for themselves and their comfort and affluence, so when it didn’t turn out that way they threw in the towel. If they had read Hebrews 11 early on they may have had a different expectation about the Christian life.

Faith is trust in the promises of God, based on the work of God in creation and redemption. This trust will lead believers down roads that can be very dangerous at times. For example, Job, who for some reason is not mentioned here, but is used by James in his epistle, is our model for developing patience. Patience is one of those virtues that most closely identifies us with the Master. So if God is going to work patience in us, then He will no doubt allow us to go through circumstances that will try our current level of patience.

The examples in chapter 11 are not about perfect lives, but about men and women of faith. They believed the promises of God and acted on them even when their circumstances were of the contrary. Let’s quote some here:

“I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions (like Daniel), quenched the fury of the flames (like the three Hebrew boys in Daniel), and escaped the edge of the sword (like Jeremiah); whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead (like in Elisha’s day), raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused

to be released (like James in Acts 12), so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison (like Paul in Acts 16). They were stoned (like Stephen in Acts 7); they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword (like Paul in Rome, church tradition says). They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the

ground.

These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect," (11: 32-40).

Welcome to the journey. You'll be blessed even when it's bumpy.

God's blessings can be on a dangerous road,  
Pastor Steve



## "Get The Spoon"

November 14 - Hebrews 12: 1-13

**S**ome kids are disciplined out of anger and that is not a good thing. Some kids were beaten by a parent and they still bear the scars, both physically and emotionally, from that trauma. Some kids were never spanked and turned out poorly or well. Some kids were spanked and turned out like saints. Discipline is not an easy business.

Because we, as parents, discipline our kids for the wrong reasons from time to time, it doesn't negate the importance of correction. If kids are left unattended they will usually end up spoiled and undisciplined. There are always exceptions to the rule, but by and large if a kid runs the place, he will begin to make unreasonable demands that put the parent at his beck and call. And God never intended for us to have child-centered homes. When the kids run the place the parents will be continually exhausted.

Good parents discipline their kids for good reasons. They desire for their child that he will go God's way. Therefore, a little bit of pain now, in discipline, will go a long way in helping the child to learn how to live life in a God-glorifying way. Everybody benefits when a child is well disciplined. The child learns his limits and grows in the framework in which he was

created. The parents will experience the freedom of trust and pride when the child responds to their discipline properly.

God is a good disciplinarian. The word "disciple" and the title of "disciplinarian" go together. A disciple is a committed follower of Jesus. He is interested in learning the Jesus way of doing things. The Apostle John was well aware of this relationship when he wrote his epistles. He says, "Whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked," (1 John 2:6). God's purpose is to make us like Jesus. God does it because he loves us and wants the best for us. If we kick and scream and resist His discipline, where will that leave us? If you are a parent, how do you feel when your kids will not listen to you when you are trying to correct them? Pretty crummy, huh?

The Hebrews needed to learn these things because they were dealing with persecution for belief in Jesus. That's why the author tells them to focus on Jesus and remember His suffering. He says, "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood," (12:4). In other words, persecutions and struggles are inevitable, but God

has a purpose in it all, just as He had in Jesus' life and death.

Are you facing some struggles in your life right now? Do you feel the pain of some disappointment at home or at work? Do you sometimes wonder why being a Christian is worth it? Occasionally, do you feel like maybe life was better before you got on the discipleship pathway? If so, you are not alone. This has been the temptation of believers down through the ages, including those in the Hall of Faith in Chapter 11. It's all worth it, though, because it is part of the

process God puts us through to be like His Son. So don't "grow weary and lose heart," but look to Jesus who Himself suffered so greatly for us. Once again, the Bible reminds us of the centrality of the cross to our faith.

You'll find the strength to go on by looking to Jesus for strength. He authored our faith and He will complete it. Simply let Him work in you today. You are His poem.

God's blessings are seen after a spanking,  
Pastor Steve



## "A Consuming Fire"

November 15 - Ezekiel 28:1-29:21 and Hebrews 12: 14-29

**L**et's try something a bit different. Allow me to encourage you by simply making some observations in our reading today. This will be like a notepad where I will write down important ideas that apply to our Christian walk. I am including Ezekiel because of its relevance to Hebrews today. I would encourage you to read the Old Testament too. Take the time today to read the section in Ezekiel and take a look at my notes below.

Notes:

Why do seacoast towns, like Tyre, tend to exalt themselves?

The natural beauty draws people and captures their attention

Port cities are in the best location for trade on the oceans

When we exalt ourselves we are acting like Lucifer, the "guardian cherub" who was blameless until rebellion was found in him.

God humbles the proud. "Lord, I humble myself today before you."

God judged Israel for leaning on Egypt and Egypt for deceiving Israel

God is primarily interested in HOLINESS. He is holy/a consuming fire!

God of Old Testament same God of New Testament, even scarier

Hebrews needed to see how God's holiness related then and now

Spiritual Jerusalem, Mount Zion, is home to the believer in Jesus

God lives there; myriads of joyful angels; a list; perfect spirits; a bloody Jesus with better blood

God shakes everything until the only the immaterial remains

We have God, so we are thankful and worshipful  
Cross Bible references:

On Lucifer:

"Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world- he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard

a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death,"

Revelation 12:7-11

On God shaking things up:

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar and the

heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells," 2 Peter 3:11-13

God's blessings make us holy like Him,

Pastor Steve

to frustration because those who live under the law must meet all the standards of the law, and that's impossible. And so in Hebrews we see the contrast between the old system and the new. There is the dichotomy between the role of the priesthood in Israel and the role of the Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus. No wonder the writer says, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess His name" (13:15).

Jesus is the dividing line. He defines what is true and it is by His authority that the old fades away and disappears. I have always found it ironic that the Jews, probably by default, stopped offering sacrifices sometime after A.D. 70 because Jerusalem had been devastated by the Roman legions. Why would they do

that? Without blood sacrifice there is no forgiveness of sins. Well, Jesus is the end of the law to those who believe, and so He had ended the need for a sacrificial system. Now "no one comes to the Father but through Him."

I hope the book of Hebrews becomes one of your favorites over the years. It is a Bible book that I have come back to over and over again. It has improved my prayer life because of the "free access" it offers through the blood of Jesus. Jesus says, "Come to me." And I say, "Lord, I come."

God's blessings are at the hand of the Good Shepherd,

Pastor Steve



## "Keep On Keeping On"

November 16 - Hebrews 13: 1-25

**W**e need each other because we need encouragement. One of the many outcomes of the Fall in Genesis 3 is that we quickly become discouraged. Sometimes it's because we do not think we have made enough progress in our lives. We feel like we should be further along on the journey. Do you ever feel this way? Maybe you've made some progress, but it seems like you have a million miles to go. The Bible was meant to build our encouragement and patience so that we, like the Biblical characters, might one day inherit the promises.

Hebrews has been a very demanding book, but I hope you have seen its overarching emphasis on Jesus and what He has done for us by dying for our sins. He has brought us to God. He is the priest of a new covenant and the mediator of that covenant through His own blood. Through Jesus we have ready access to the Father's presence, where we can find grace to help us when life is difficult. Has life been tough for you lately? If so, then take heart; you can come to God to find the strength you'll need to carry on.

The Hebrews author wraps up the book, which he

calls "only a short letter," with a variety of reminders for this Jewish crowd. He has been tough on them because of what's at stake here: believing in Jesus. He wants them to hang together, work with the leaders, protect the sanctity of marriage, put Christ in His proper priestly role, and to pray for the work of the gospel.

Which of those "exhortations" stands out the most to you? I like the imagery of Jesus as a Shepherd. Think about that. He is the Good Shepherd who lays His life down, becoming "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." He is the final sacrifice for sins and supercedes all other sacrifices, past or present or future because of His own righteousness. This same righteousness He shares with us through our faith in Him.

Another important area is the difference between law and grace. Another way to put it is between law and gospel. The contrast is stark. The law is there to show us we need the grace of God. Only by grace can a person stand before a perfect God and not be consumed. Law and self-righteousness will only lead