

# Sermon Series on Hebrews

1.

By John Atkinson (June 2000)

Sermon Eight

Hebrews 12

Hope

## Background Outline

In the first address I dealt with the key theme of the sermon recorded in the book of Hebrews - Jesus is incomparably better than all that went before Him. In the second address in this series we looked at the issue of rest in God as a fundamental aspect of true spirituality

We saw how the preacher to the Hebrews stressed that two things keep us from this Sabbath-rest

A Unbelief – the refusal to believe and

A A Hardened Heart – a heart used to refusing God.

In the third address the preacher to the Hebrews looked at Jesus our High Priest in terms of Jesus' submission to His Father, even to death. He called us to enter into God's presence with confidence, because of Jesus our High Priest.

In the fourth section the preacher paused to deal with the problems of stagnation and apostasy.

In the fifth address we looked at Jesus our high Priest in the priestly order of Melchizedek.

In the sixth address we asked the question "Has the New Testament replaced the Old?" and "To what extent do we take the instructions in the Old Testament as personal obligations?"

In the last address I dealt with the introduction to the great Faith chapter of the sermon to the Hebrews - Hebrews 11. This chapter on faith is introduced by;

The three reminders are a summary of what has gone before:

1. We have confidence (10:19)
2. We have a new and living way (10:20)
3. We have a great priest

The four challenges

1. Enter the Most Holy Place & draw near to God (10:19-22)
2. Hold fast to the hope (10:23-25)
3. Remember the earlier days (10:26-35)
4. Persevere (10:36-39)

We then looked at the beginning and end of the Faith chapter .

A. The Meaning of Faith (11:1-3)

B. The Promise (11:39-40)

A                    A                    A                    A                    A                    A                    A

## Sermon Eight - Christian Living (12:1-13:19)

- A. Christ Our Example (12:1-3)
- B. Discipline (12:4-11)
- C. Exhortation to the Christian Life (12:12-17)
- D. Mount Sinai and Mount Zion (12:18-24)
- E. A Kingdom That Cannot Be Shaken (12:25-29)

## Introduction

If the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hebrews is the Faith chapter then the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter is the Hope chapter, In this chapter the preacher applies, in practical terms, what has gone before.

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Theology is important, what you believe is important, but it is the practical outworking of what you believe that will be the ultimate test.

You have company...

“Since we have so great a cloud of witnesses...” or as Eugene Peterson translates it, “...all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on...” This crowd is what we call the communion of the saints. They are not there to be worshipped or to be prayed to, they are there cheering us on by their example. When times are hard go over their example again, and above all look at Jesus. His example in the face of violent suffering is there to encourage you. The word encourage literally means “to give courage to someone.” We have courage because we have this great heritage of Faith in the face of adversity.

Discipline for the long-distance race.

There are three things that the preacher identifies that are necessary in order to reap the full benefit of their example

**A let us** throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, **A let us** run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

**A let us** fix our eyes on Jesus,

The Christian life is purposeful, and it has direction. We are not aimless.

**A** As with any long-distance running the first thing that we need to get rid of is anything that may weigh us down or trip us up. When last did you see a long distance runner with any significant baggage? What are the things that might weigh you down in this race?

Fear of change, social pressure, guilt over some past or present sin, patterns of living that get in the way of your devotion to God.

**A** The preacher tells us that the race has been marked out for us. It is not up to us to invent how we live as Christians. It is not a case of, as Old Blue eyes used to sing, “I did it my way” on the contrary the race is marked out by God Himself.

This is demonstrated in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians:

*Eph 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--*

*Eph 2:9 not by works, so that no one can boast.*

*Eph 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, **which God prepared in advance for us to do.***

**A** We do not lose our way but keep our attention firmly fixed on Jesus who began and completed this race of Faith that we are participating in. This kind of “*Fixing your attention*” does not mean that we are unaware of the distractions and hindrances around us. What it means is that we do not make them our focus. The classic example of this is the account of Peter walking on the water.

*Mat 14:29 And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus.*

*Mat 14:30 But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"*

Discipline for God’s Children (12:4-13)

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The preacher points out that a caring father disciplines his children because they are his and he seeks what is best for them. On the other hand an illegitimate child goes without this kind of care. The use of the word illegitimate here does not mean a child born out of wedlock. In Jewish law the term means something quite different. It refers to the child born from a marriage that is prohibited by Jewish Law (Lev 18). This child is known as a *mamzer* and is prohibited from marrying a Jewish person without undergoing a formal conversion to Judaism. So the point that this Jewish preacher is making to his Jewish audience is that anyone who refuses the godly benefit of discipline is not really a full member of the community, but an outsider. They are not true sons.

To accept hardship as discipline from the Lord is to accept the fullness of His love.

Pursue Shalom and Tsedakah

Pursue peace (shalom) and the holiness without which no-one will see God. These are two great themes of the Old Testament – peace with your fellow human beings and peace with God. Right relationship with God and right relationship with your fellow human beings. The psalmist expresses the relationship between these two elements of spiritual life in the following way

*Psa 85:10 Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other.*

Therefore we dare not treat God lightly (12:18-29)

The preacher uses one last great contrasting image – the two great mountains of the Hebrew Scriptures. Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. The Mountain of Sinai is seen as representing the life of the people of God before the coming of Jesus whereas Mount Zion speaks of the heavenly Jerusalem now transformed by the residence of the risen Lord Jesus there.

Sinai was a place of God because Israel met God there. At the festival of Shavuot (Pentecost) the Jewish people remember this encounter with God when He gave them the Torah. This event was accompanied by fire, smoke and the earth shaking.

Mount Zion on the other hand was the place that David took the Ark of the Covenant and the Temple was established. It is the place where God's presence dwelt. This is where God later poured out the Holy Spirit on the festival of Shavuot. (Pentecost). This is home – it is where all believers belong because the risen Jesus is there.

The Unshakable Kingdom (12:25-29)

Though the mountain at Sinai shook at the presence of God and the people feared the voice of God mediated through Moses who was on earth – the voice of warning that speaks now is from heaven. The preacher concludes that the most appropriate response is one of reverence and awe.