

God Has Spoken

Father, I approach this pulpit before Your Throne with complete and total seriousness of the utter responsibility it is to speak for God and to speak to Your people, to speak for their salvation, to speak for their edification, and sanctification. I come before you in the name of the perfect Son, the perfect representation of who You are, Who has revealed You to us. I pray in His name that You would bless this specific time this morning as we study Your Word. I pray for Your people that are here this morning that You would encourage them and strengthen them in their faith. That looking at the message of the Hebrews, looking at the Christ of Hebrews, that we would be encouraged and exhorted to press on. I know the struggles that many have. There are struggles I'm sure I don't even know about, but they are waging war against the soul, and I pray that You'll bless. I pray that You will honor and glorify Your Son through the ministry of Your Word this morning. For we pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

It's very good to be back with you. I'm so appreciative to the elders and to the church as a whole who gave me time off to work on the house. And hopefully, this coming week we'll be moving in and getting settled and start to have a "normal" again. We're certainly looking forward to that.

You know, it's on these extended times away from my normal routine as a preacher, my normal routine spending my week focusing on the Word of God and prayer and meditation and study, it's these extended times away from those routines doing things that, I guess, I would say, normal people would have to do you know like focus on other energies on painting and leaks and cleaning windows and all those things, my mind totally preoccupied, I am reminded of how important the preaching ministry is to me personally. I've often said, only have jokingly, that God made me a preacher to keep me saved because it is the awesome responsibility that I sense I have as a pastor that stands up before you who is to speak for God, and that, as I said, almost sends chills down my spine. To speak for God to his people for their edification for their strength, that is a solemn responsibility that you can't take lightly. And that responsibility makes me repent, keeps me studying, keeps me praying, keeps me trusting Christ and relying upon Him in essence keeps me saved, and I think that pastors that take this responsibility seriously have that benefit.

I was actually sharing with Jeremiah Bradford, the young man and his wife who lost their daughter some months ago, and he visited with me awhile back after this, some weeks after, months after the death of his daughter, sharing with me the struggles that they still go through going home to an empty room. The confusion in their mind, how could this happen. The frustrations. The disappointments. Even the bitterness, anger at God. But he said something and I knew exactly what he was talking about. He said, "But I have to deal with those things because I have to get up and preach. I can't let those things go unresolved." And it forces him to deal with his sin. It forces him to come to terms with God. It's just a peculiar blessing, I think, of the pastoral ministry.

John MacArthur calls preaching through the Bible, "a rich and rewarding divine communion." And I take it very seriously, so when I get away from my routine, when I get away from daily study, meditation, most of my time in prayer, and I do the things that normal people have to do, I'm amazed at how quickly I become cold, lifeless, and spiritually, you know, calloused. I'm thankful for the pastoral ministry. I can't count the number of Saturday nights I've had to come to Lori and say, "Honey, I'm sorry. I'm sorry for being harsh. I'm sorry for being unkind" because I can't imagine standing before you speaking for God while I'm out of fellowship with Him because I have unbroken fellowship with my wife. So I can't imagine how horrible and sinful person I would be if I wasn't a pastor. God put me in this position to, if you will, keep me saved. The more and more I come to understand the words of Paul to Timothy, what did he say, I Timothy 4: 6, "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this," and then notice what he says, "for by so doing you save both yourself and your hearers." Keep a close watch on yourself and on your teaching so you'll save yourself, and I'm realizing that more and more in my own life.

It was during these extended times away again from my normal routine that I became very empathic with the plight of many if not most of you who don't have the luxury of spending your days studying God's Word, meditating on Scripture, praying. Your days are spent on your calling on your vocation, and I am reminded about just how important Sunday morning worship service is for you for your salvation for your renewal in the faith, for your renewing your strength, for bringing you to a renewed repentance, so that through the faithful ministry of God's Word I will save not only myself, but as Paul said I will save the hearers of the Word also. So I trust that God will continue to bless the ministry of His Word.

Well, this morning as has already been mentioned, we're going a new study through the Book of Hebrews, and if you have your Bibles, I would like you to turn to Hebrews chapter 1. In my personal estimation, the Book of Hebrews is one of the twin peaks in the mountain range of the New Testament right up there with the Book of Romans. It is an imposing, massive book. I have a personal affinity to the Book of Hebrews. I remember as a young man I had just been married, gotten out on my own. My father who is also a pastor at that time, a senior pastor, was preaching through the book of Hebrews, and I specifically remember distinctly being stirred up, being revived inside through the ministry of the Word through the Book of Hebrews, and I trust that may be true for some of you.

Richard Phillips who was an associate pastor with James Montgomery Boyce, some of you may be familiar with him says, "The Book of Hebrews offers a singular and matchless presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ." And as I've gotten into the Book of Hebrews I'm amazed of the complement that it is to the Gospel of John which also presents to us Jesus Christ. And we see here in the very first verses "God has spoken to us...He has spoken to us in His Son." John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." There are so many affinities and it's such a complement to the Gospel of John, so I'm looking forward to it. It's interesting, you know, all through the Book of Hebrews the word Gospel doesn't appear one time, and yet the whole book is Gospel because the whole book is about Jesus Christ.

The book is so rich and so deep that one of the great theologians, John Owen wrote a seven volume commentary on the Book of Hebrews. Seven volume commentary. I've been looking for that to try to secure that for myself and couldn't find it. It was hundreds of dollars. It's still in print. You can get it, but it's hundreds and hundreds of dollars. I'm so thankful for the digital age because I found a company; they have put all the works of John Owen on CD, and I got the CD for 19.95. So, I'm thrilled to death. It has all his works including everything on Hebrews. It's a remarkable, remarkable resource. You know, he wrote seven volumes just to tell you the depth and the theology. Seven volumes. I was reading through his words. Did you know that he had an exhortation? I didn't even know what an exhortation is, but it's basically an elaborate, glorified introduction. He has an exhortation of 681 pages just to introduce the study of the Book of Hebrews. Six-hundred and eighty-one pages and that isn't double-spaced or big font. That is single-lined 681 pages. That is about three to four times the size of the

normal book we get today that is double-spaced and about 180 pages. Six-hundred and eighty-one pages to introduce the Book of Hebrews.

For many, however, the Book of Hebrews is very perplexing and difficult to understand. The late William Barkley, a beloved if not somewhat liberal Bible commentary wrote, "When we come to read the letter to the Hebrews, we come to read what is for the person today the most difficult book in the New Testament." That's quite a description. "The most difficult book in the New Testament." There are many reasons why that may be true. I'll get into a couple of them, but I think one of the reasons Hebrews is so difficult to the modern reader is because Hebrews will challenge the insipid, shallow, complacent, worldly, atheological nature of evangelicalism more than any other book in the New Testament. If you're looking for a cute, little sermonette, you're not going to find it from the book of Hebrews. If you're looking for some gospel that's going to promise you prosperity and health and wealth in this age, you're not going to find it in the Book of Hebrews. It's not a message that we probably want to hear, but it's a message that we desperately need to hear as a church today not only our church but the church at large.

I think you could say that the Book of Hebrews is the inspired version of *Pilgrim's Progress* that great Christian classic because the Book of Hebrews really shows and shapes our understanding of the Christian experience as a pilgrimage on the way to the Celestial City, our Heavenly home, our Promised Land. And it is a pilgrimage, a pilgrimage fraught with all kinds of dangers, toils, snares, temptations, trials. The temptation will be to turn aside. The temptation to fall away, the temptation to drift away is very real on that pilgrimage we call Christianity, the Christian faith.

Before we begin our study of the book, I think it's very important for us allow something of an introduction. I want to speak for a moment about the authorship and then look at the recipients of the letter and then ultimately the occasion of the letter. Let's talk for a moment about the authorship, the authorship of the Book of Hebrews. It is anonymous that is it's not stated in the text. It's commonly assumed that it was the Apostle Paul. Many of our old English Bibles had above or for the title for the Book of Hebrews "The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews," but there is no such subtext that exists in Greek. It is anonymous. It doesn't state who wrote the book of Hebrews.

When I refer to Hebrews, you may have noticed this if you have sit under my ministry for some time at all, that I'm very careful to say the author of Hebrews because in my estimation, you can be quite certain that Paul did not write the Book of Hebrews. That Paul is not the author of Hebrews. For some, that may be surprising, but there are a number of reasons why I don't believe Paul wrote the Book of Hebrews. Number one, Paul considered himself the apostle to the Gentiles. Certainly, he had a ministry to the Jews, but in Paul's letters, he always identifies himself. Doesn't he? He even begins, "Paul an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ." Paul blatantly asserts his apostolic authority in all his letters. Not in the Book of Hebrews.

The literary nature of Hebrews is quite different than the other works of the Apostle Paul. I think one of the most important things that identifies this as someone other than the Apostle Paul occurs in chapter 2 verse 3. Chapter 2 verse 3. Speaking about the Gospel, the salvation we have in Jesus Christ, look what he says, "How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation. It was declared at first by the Lord and it was attested to us by those who heard." The other here claims to be, if you will, a second-hand believer. He heard the Gospel from those who heard the Gospel which is completely contrary to the Apostle Paul. Listen to what Paul says in Galatians 1:12, "For I did not receive it from any man, I did not receive the gospel from any man nor was I taught it, but I received it through revelation of Jesus Christ." "I am a first-hand recipient of the Gospel," whereas the writer of Hebrews says, "We have received it from those who heard it, and we have received it, and it had been tested by signs and miracles." So I don't think it is the Apostle Paul.

When we consider who wrote the book, we know that number one he would be a Jew. He was very familiar with the Old Testament. He used the Septuagint which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. He used it richly, lavishly. There are more quotations of the Old Testament in the Book of Hebrews than in any other New Testament book in the Bible. He uses the Septuagint lavishly. He has an intimate knowledge of the Old Testament sacramental system. He is very well educated and incredibly eloquent. One of the reasons that the Book of Hebrews is so difficult is because the Greek in Hebrews is some of the most complex Greek in the New Testament. I put off for a number of years going through the Book of Hebrews because I'm not going to get a hold of it. I'd read it and I just couldn't read it. It's very complex.

When I was in junior high in grammar school, we did this exercise which I probably hated but was extremely beneficial. We had these sentences in Greek, "Billy kicked the ball," and we were to go through all these sentences and we were, maybe some of you are familiar with this I hope, underline the subject once and then underline the verb twice. Now it would get more complicated if you had a compound sentence because you had to find the main subject and main verb. Let me just give you an idea of how complex the Greek is in the Book of Hebrews. Turn in your Bibles to Hebrews 1. I want to read the first four verses. "Long ago at many times and at many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. In these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son whom He appointed the heir of all things through whom also He created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the Word of His power. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high having become as much superior to angels as the name He has inherited is more excellent than theirs. "

So where's the main subject and verb in that? Well, it's a bit misleading because in our English translation there are two or three sentences there. In Greek, there's not. There's one sentence. Those four verses are one sentence, and there is one independent clause in that entire, I was going to say mess of words but it's not a mess. In all those words there is one independent clause. There's one subject and one main verb and then you have like 7-10 dependent clauses that are hooked all over the place.

You know what it is if you want to do the exercise with me? You know where the subject is? You go to verse 1, "Long ago at many times in many ways God." There's the subject. It's the main subject of the entire sentence, God. Now, our English versions looks like "spoke" there is the main verb but it's not; it's a participle. "God having spoke to our fathers by the prophets in these last days..." verse 2, "has spoken," there is your main subject and verb. God has spoken. God has spoken in His Son. That's the main thought in those first four verses. God has spoken in His Son and then there's about seven independent clauses that describe the Son. It's phenomenal. It's beautiful. Whoever wrote this book is an incredibly eloquent, incredibly intelligent, writer of Scripture.

One candidate that has been offered in history, Tertullian suggested that Barnabas was the author of Hebrews. If you know about Barnabas in the Book of Acts, he's called the Son of Encouragement. The son of encouragement, that's important. He was also a close associate of the Apostles and of Paul. We think Barnabas could be a good candidate because the Book of Hebrews is one big exhortation, one big

encouragement. If you look at the very last chapter, chapter 13, it's almost comical what the author writes. Hebrews 13 verse 22, this is how he describes his letter. This is how he describes it, "I appeal to you brothers, bear with my word of exhortation," with my word of encouragement for, this is the comic part, "for I've written to you briefly." Thirteen massive, theological laden chapters, "I've written to you briefly," but I ask you to "bear with my word of exhortation," so some have suggested that it is Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement.

There's another candidate that I share excitement over with others. Luther was the one, Martin Luther was the one who advocated this candidate and that's Apollos. Apollos. We find a very unique description of this man, Apollos, in the Book of Acts. I'd like you to turn there just to look at it briefly, and I think when you look at this description of Apollos, his character, his ministry, I think, personally, that it matches up identical with the Book of Hebrews. Acts 18 verse 24, "Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria," Alexandria was the university town. It was the city of education, so Apollos is an educated man. He's a native of Alexandria. He "came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus though he knew only the baptism of John." And it's very interesting in the Book of Hebrews; the author of Hebrews speaks of baptism in the plural, baptisms because as you read here it says Aquilla and Priscilla had to explain to him the "baptisms" because he was preaching the baptism of John alone. Verse 27 says, "And when he wished to cross Archaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus." I think Apollos fits the bill for the author of Hebrews. Here is an eloquent, learned man, whose ministry is to the Jews and he proves from the Scriptures. He is able to take the Old Testament Scriptures and prove that Jesus is the Christ.

But the fact remains we don't know for sure who wrote the Book of Hebrews. We can say with Origen, God knows and that's enough for me. We know that it is inspired written to us from God, given to us from God.

Let's speak a moment about the audience about the recipients. It's obvious by the title it is written to Jews to the Hebrews. You know as much as I love John MacArthur, I disagree with him because as he speaks about the recipients of the Book of Hebrews, he actually says that there are three groups of Jews

that the author has in mind, and that those three groups are important to understand in discerning the message of the Book of Hebrews. He says the first group he's writing to Hebrew Christians, the second group he's writing to Hebrew non-Christians, but they were intellectually convinced that Jesus was the Messiah and then the third group were Hebrews who non-Christians who were not convinced, and he believes as you read through the Book of Hebrews you need to have in mind which group of Hebrews the author is writing to. Again, as much as I love John MacArthur, I disagree with him. I believe the Book of Hebrews is written to one group of Jews who have professed faith in Jesus Christ. Now for sure some of them may have only professed faith in Him intellectually and not with their heart. Some of them may have heard the message of Hebrews and were not convinced that Jesus was Messiah, but that who the writer is targeting is those Jews who have made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ, but for one reason or another they are being tempted to fall away. Drift away. Go back into Judaism.

One of the big questions is where did these Hebrews live, and there have been basically two schools of thought on that. The author who we don't know is writing to Hebrews we're not sure where they live, but there have been two schools of thought. One school of thought is that these Hebrews lived in Rome that there was an enclave of Jews in Rome, and that's who the author is targeting. I just have a problem with that. When Paul wrote his letter to Romans, he saw the church as Jew and Gentile, but it's so uncharacteristic of the Scriptures to polarize the church to target one aspect. I'm going to write to the white people. I'm going to write to the black people. I'm going to write to the Jews. I'm going to write to the Gentiles. If you're in Christ, you're one. So I just have a hard time believing that the author here is targeting on aspect of the church. I think he is targeting an enclave of Jews in which the makeup of the church is Jewish.

And the other candidate is not Rome, but Palestine probably Jerusalem itself. The author of Hebrews is writing to Jews that have professed faith in Christ, and their living very close to Jerusalem. They're very acquainted with the temple and temple worship. For these Jews, Judaism was not just a religion for them it was a way of life. It was their heritage. It was their people. It was who they are. Just imagine what it would be like to live in close proximity to the temple. I mean, all of God's revealed revelation all of His revelation has come here in the temple. The whole history of God's people is just wrapped up in this temple. It was where the shekinah glory was. It's where great kings served and priests. Just imagine how attached you would be to the temple. They lived next to the temple; they saw all of its

grandeur all of its glory. They routinely took part in its worship. They were intimately acquainted with all the heritage that it stood for the Jewish people for hundreds, thousands of years.

But here's the situation, I believe these Jews were facing one of the most precarious, distressing situations of their life. The time had come when it was no longer possible to be a good Jew, a patriotic Jew, a good citizen of Israel, and be a faithful follower of Christ. It was no longer possible. They were being forced to decide. The Jewish authorities, the Jewish leaders, the Jewish priests, they were no longer willing to peacefully coexist with Jesus worshippers. You see, these Jewish Christians had become an offense, and affront to Judaism, and they were being forced to decide. Will I be a good Jew? Will I be a good citizen? Will I be a patriotic Jew or will I follow Jesus Christ? You see, their Christianity was affecting their family ties. To follow Jesus meant that very likely mom and dad, grandpa and grandma were going to disown them. We are no Jew. Jews don't accept Jesus. Their Christianity was affecting their friends. Their neighbors, people they once shared close friendships were now wanting to have nothing to do with them. In short, their Christianity was affecting their very way of life.

I want you to look at Hebrews chapter 10 for a moment. Hebrews chapter 10. You know we all often go to verse 25 to encourage people to keep going to church. Verse 25, "Do not neglect to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near." "Don't forsake the assembling of ourselves together." In our day and age it would be, "Hey, don't sleep in on Sunday mornings." "Don't spend so much time out late Saturday night that you sleep through the service." "Don't travel all the time so that you never are at church." That's kind of how we interpret it, but that's not the problem that was going on in this culture. You know what was going on? Well, you can read here. Go down a few verses to verse 32. The reason they were forsaking the assembly was because it was costing them dearly to be associated with other Christians. "But recall the former days when after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings sometimes being publically exposed to reproach and affliction and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one." Their whole lives and livelihood were being affected because they were claiming Jesus Christ. Some of them were going to prison. Maybe the house church leaders if they opened up their home, they would find themselves in prison. Their homes were being plundered; their goods taken. They were going into places where, "We

don't rent to Christians. Sorry, you can't live here if you're a Christian." Their whole lives were being turned upside down.

Certainly these Jews weren't alone in this kind of persecution. Many Gentile converts had faced this very same conflict. You see this in the first century as well. There came a point where it was no longer possible to be a good citizen of Rome and a faithful follower of Christ. You know, Rome was incredibly tolerant of religion, very tolerant of religion. They accepted virtually all religions with one caveat, as long as you worship Caesar, you're okay. As long as you acknowledge Caesar as lord you're fine, and that was the problem of the Christian faith. We can't acknowledge Caesar as lord, Jesus Christ is Lord, and because the Christians, these Gentile Christians, refused to acknowledge Caesar as lord, these Christians were looked upon as subversive. They were enemies of the state. They were unpatriotic, and they were persecuted much like the Hebrews.

This type of conflict isn't new to our modern world either. Go back to the era of World War II there's a number of German theologians, pastors that faced this very situation in Nazi Germany. I'm thinking of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and another lesser known man, a pastor by the name of Martin Niemoller. Martin Niemoller was a Lutheran pastor. He was initially what they called a national conservative. In many ways I would liken him to a modern day, what would we call, Republican, conservative Republican. Martin Niemoller was a pastor. He was a national conservative, and initially he was a supporter of Adolf Hitler because Adolf Hitler advocated a strong Germany both militarily and economically, but of course, it didn't take very long for Pastor Niemoller to realize the real agenda of Adolf Hitler. He began to see more clearly the horrific error of Nazism, and he began to oppose Hitler and he began to oppose Nazism. And you know what Martin Niemoller found out very quickly? He found out that in Nazi Germany it was no longer possible to be a good German, a patriotic German, and a faithful follower of Jesus Christ, and he was put in prison.

There is an incredible book out written years ago; I highly recommend it to everyone to read. Erwin Lutzer wrote this book probably a decade or two ago, it's called *Hitler's Cross*, and in this book he documents how by and large Christians in Germany capitulated to the Nazi machine, and very few were willing to pay the price and stand up and be a faithful follower of Christ rather than good, patriotic German. And he speaks specifically of Martin Niemoller who chose to be a faithful follower of Christ instead of a good German. He gives this one story of when he was in prison, there was another pastor

that came by I guess he had some type of a prison ministry. This pastor came by to do his rounds and to visit the prisoners, and when he came into the prison, he saw Martin Niemoller in the prison, and he was surprised. He said, "What are you doing in here?" and Martin Niemoller replied, "What are you doing out there?" You see, he had capitulated. He didn't want to suffer. He was willing to toe the party line even if it meant not being faithful to Christ. One of the most chilling pictures in Lutzer's book was a black and white photo. It's taken from the back of a Protestant Church looking up towards the pulpit area as you are looking at me, and there you have the pulpit in the center of the picture and draped on each side of the pulpit are huge Nazi flags with their swastikas. You see the fact is in Nazi Germany most professing Christians chose not to suffer and chose to go right along their country. They wanted to be good patriots.

The matter of fact is the situation that the Hebrews faced is being faced in much of our world today. Right now in China, Christianity is viewed as subversive. Genuine Christianity, unadulterated Christianity can only be found underground in house churches. The same is true in Burma, North Korea, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Indonesia, Serbia. Katie Chin, she's in Serbia right now. The dominate culture, the dominate religion is Orthodox, and evangelical Christianity is a threat to Orthodoxy. It's a threat to established religion. If you're an evangelical, you're not Serbian. These are all places with being a good citizen and a faithful follower of Christ are perceived by the governments as being mutually incompatible.

Let me tell you something, something very interesting. The situation that the Hebrews faced, the Chinese are facing, Burma, North Korea, Morocco, all these nations are facing, this is a situation, generally speaking, that no generation in the United States of America has ever had to face. We've never had to choose between being a good, patriotic American and a faithful follower of Jesus Christ, but one of the reasons why I believe the Book of Hebrews is going to be so important not only for us, but for the church at large is because I believe that if not this generation, almost certainly the next generation, our children, it may very well be impossible to be a good, patriotic American and a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. It may be impossible. This generation may face the same dilemma that the Hebrews faced. Are you going to be a good American or are you going to be a follower of Jesus Christ? Are you going to be a good global citizen or are you going to be a follower of Jesus Christ? Once you begin to understand and begin to fathom a situation like that in which you are forced to choose against

your own countrymen, you are forced to choose against your own traditions and governments that you love, you will begin to understand the enormous pressure the Hebrews were under.

I don't think there's a person in this room that doesn't love this country. That isn't proud to be an American. That wants and desires a strong America, economically, politically, and militarily, but how distressing that day will be when our love for our country will ultimately clash with our love for our Lord Jesus Christ. I really do believe that there are dark clouds on the horizon. I can't help but wonder how many churches, how many Christians will capitulate to the system just like in the days of Nazi Germany. I can very clearly and quickly see the day when Church Incorporated that is Church, Inc., that is organized religion, religion that is recognized under the states and laws of the government, the Church, Inc. will no longer be compatible with authentic, faithful Christianity. I wonder how many churches today will be willing to forfeit their tax-exempt status when they refuse to acknowledge homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle. I wonder when that's going to happen. I don't know how many of you are familiar with this whole tax-exempt status and the government recognizing charitable organizations, but in order to be a charitable organization recognized by the government, so that people give funds to it, so that their dollars can be deducted from their taxes the government has some very stringent requirements, and one of the great, one of the most stringent requirements is that tax-exempt status must not discriminate against.

We went through this as a school several years ago when the school became its own 5013c tax-exempt status. We had to state publically in the newspaper for like 3 weeks that we do not discriminate on the basis of gender, on the basis of race, color, sex. We are non-discriminating. Of course, we have no problem with that. That's great. But do you realize that it's only an administration away, it's only a congress away before they add to that little list sexual orientation. When they add that to the list, churches are going to be faced with this same dilemma as the Hebrews. Are you going to capitulate? You going to worship almighty dollar to make sure you keep that tax-exempt status or are you going to be faithful to Christ? It's just a matter of time in my opinion. Now God may intervene; there may be a miraculous revival which we should pray for in our country, but right now humanly speaking, I don't see it. Will we be faithful? Once you understand this dilemma, once you understand the dilemma the Hebrews were under, that it was very difficult for them and their families for their jobs and their religion to follow Jesus Christ. They were being tempted to say, "You know, I think we ought to just go back just go back to the Temple worship. It's just too hard." Once you understand that dilemma then you will

understand the Book of Hebrews. The Book of Hebrews is don't fall away. Don't drift away even in the face of persecution. Do not give up.

You see, as Christians we are on a pilgrimage. It is a pilgrimage fraught with many dangers, snares, trials and temptations, and the one great need in the Christian life is to not give up, to persevere. It is the universal struggle that we all face to one degree or another. We grow tired. We grow weary. We grow cold. We grow hard. It's a spiritual war. It's a soul struggle. We live in this world that constantly vies for our affections, as we start to fall in love with the world the love for the things of God grows cold. We get involved in sin, and the deceitfulness of sin makes our hearts hard and bitter. We grow frustrated and discouraged because of trials and tribulations. We want to give up, slack off, walk away. We want to quit.

In the preface to his incredible commentary on the Book of Hebrews, Andrew Murray wrote *In the Holiest of All*, "Those who through sloth remain babes in Christ and do not press on to maturity are ever in danger of hardening their heart of coming short and falling away." Did you hear that quote? "Those who through sloth remain babes in Christ and do not press on to maturity are ever in danger of hardening their heart of coming short and falling away." I want you to consider for a moment all the popular Christian authors out there today that are selling thousands and thousands of books to the general Christian population. I'm thinking of guys like Rick Warren, Bill Hybel, Max Lucado, Joel Olsteen, all these guys. Can you imagine any of them saying anything like that ever in any of their books? "Those who though sloth remain babes in Christ and do not press on to maturity are ever in danger of hardening their hearts of coming short and falling away." They don't even think that way let alone write that way. But if you don't think that way then you don't understand the peril of the Christian existence and you certainly won't understand the message of Hebrews.

What's amazing about modern Evangelicalism today is that the danger of falling away has become almost completely overlooked. We don't even think about it. That's why the message of Hebrews is so difficult to some people because Hebrews addresses it as a real potential, a real danger. We have people say, "Hey, I believe I'm a Christian. I believe once saved always saved, but what's all this falling away stuff? What's this about? It's not for me. I'm a Christian. Oh, this may be for other people. It's not for me." It is for you. It's for me.

When you look at the Book of Hebrews, you consider the situation that they're in. These are people who have made professions of faith in Jesus Christ. It's not written to people who are beginning a relationship with Jesus. It's written to a people that have already begun a relationship with Jesus. If you will, it's written to people who have already begun the marathon. They've already started the race. They've got four or five miles under their belt already. They still have a long way to go, and it's the writer of Hebrews who says to them, "Don't give up. Keep running." Because while you're running, you know what's happening? You're seeing people stop. You're seeing people go back saying, "It's not for me." You're seeing people get sidetracked into things like Vanity Fairs saying, "Well, that's a lot more fun. I'll come back later." And the writer of Hebrews is saying, "Don't drift away. Keep running. Don't give up."

You see, the Book of Hebrews could care less that you said a prayer when you were five. The Book of Hebrews could care less that you came to Christ joyfully and with great power and with great emotion. You've begun well but that's not the end. You must continue. You must press on. You must end well. That's what the Book of Hebrews is about. Jesus spoke this way. You look at the parable of the sowers. Go back and read Matthew 13 about those who received the Gospel. They received it with great joy, and the little seed popped up and everything's good until the old sun starts beating down on it. And the afflictions came; it withered up and died. That's the situation the writer of Hebrews addresses.

Considering that John Owen took 681 pages for his exhortation, I hope you can pardon me for one introductory sermon that didn't even get to my text this morning. But I think this is an important foundation for us to understand the Book of Hebrews.

I will close by simply saying there is one anecdote to falling away. As Andrew Murray stated, "Our one need is to know Jesus better," and that is what the Book of Hebrews is about, to present to us Jesus in all of His glory. God has indeed spoken, and He's spoken to us decisively in His Son who is the exact image, who is the radiance of His glory and the exact expression of who he is, and then Hebrews goes on to describe who Jesus is and what He's done for us. I trust as we go through the Book of Hebrews we will be encouraged to press on, to cling to our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ even in the presence of trails and temptations.

Will you stand with me for closing prayer? *Our Father, I come before You. I pray that You will bless this study. You have spoken, spoken to us decisively through Your Son. I believe that we may be a generation that will eventually face some of the very same dilemmas that the Hebrews were facing. It already happens in micro-scales. Families get upset when we get serious about the Lord. Traditions get upset. It happens Lord, but we hear Jesus saying, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. He who loves country more than Me is not worthy of Me." I pray, Father, that you would give us an understanding of this message, that we would love the Book of Hebrews because it points us to Jesus Christ, that we would love Him as we see His supreme excellences. Bless this, Father, for the sake of Your people for it's in Jesus name we pray. Amen*

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