

Hebrews 11

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[0 : 00] If you could open your Bibles to Hebrews. Hebrews chapter 1. We'll be working our way toward Hebrews 11, which Murdo read for us.

We're starting at the beginning. Don't worry, we won't go verse by verse. Hebrews chapter 1. The theme of Hebrews, many of you here this morning, and we looked at that for a bit.

Some of you might not have been here this morning. The theme of Hebrews summarized for us is see how great Jesus is, therefore persevere.

We saw this morning how this is written, this was written to struggling Christians, Christians who are being tempted by public shame, tempted by insult because of Jesus, tempted to shrink back from their public profession of faith in Christ.

And that the author of Hebrews puts in front of their eyes the surpassing beauty of Jesus to encourage them to cling to Him, to push on, to not shrink back despite the difficulties.

[1 : 25] This morning, however, we did not look at how the author shows the surpassing greatness of Jesus. I talked about it quite a lot. Hopefully we saw some glimpses of it, the fact that Jesus is surpassing, but we didn't really look at how he shows that he is surpassing.

So I hope that we can focus on that tonight. Focus on a few instances in the book of Hebrews, ways that the author presents the surpassing greatness of Jesus, so that we can have a fuller picture of this Lord who has saved us.

So for instance, in Hebrews chapter 1, let me read to you the first three verses. The opening of the letter. 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.

The Son of God, the Son is the radiance of God's glory, and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. That's Jesus.

[2 : 58] You see, the prophets are great. God spoke through them. God truly revealed himself through the prophets, and the author here is not downplaying the importance of that, or the truthfulness of the prophetic word in the Old Testament.

The prophets are great, but can they compare to Jesus? When he presents Jesus like this, this Son of God, not simply a prophet, though God is speaking through his Son.

Think about it. As the people looked in Jesus' eyes, his disciples, the crowds, the children, the women, the men, the religious leaders who didn't like him, as everybody looked in his eyes, as they listened to the words coming out of his mouth, as they smelled his breath, they're looking at the one through whom the universe was made.

That's staggering. C.S. Lewis helpfully captures a bit of this in *Mere Christianity*, a book he wrote back in 1952, I think.

C.S. Lewis says this, I'm trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Jesus. I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, or we could put the word prophet in here.

[4 : 20] I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man, and yet said the sort of things that Jesus said, would not be a great moral teacher.

He would be either a lunatic, on a level with the man who says that he's a poached egg, or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice.

Either this man was and is the son of God, or else a madman, or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God.

But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that option open to us. He did not intend to.

Jesus is not simply a great moral teacher, and he's not just a prophet. He is the radiance of the glory of God, and he is the exact imprint of God's nature.

[5 : 37] He, Jesus, upholds the universe by his word of power. He made purification for our sins, and he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

Prophets were great. They spoke God's word, but Jesus is so much better than the prophets. That's the very opening of this letter.

You can probably detect the theme that is going to play out in the rest of the letter. So let's shift on to the next one. Jesus is greater than angels. I'm going to read verses, chapter 1, verse 3 again, or the second half of it, down through verse 14.

After Jesus had made, had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven. And so he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

For to which of the angels did God ever say, you are my son, today I have become your father? Or again, I will be his father, and he will be my son.

[6 : 52] And again, when God brings his firstborn, Jesus, into the world, he says, let all God's angels worship him. And speaking of the angels, God says, he makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire.

But about the son, he says, your throne, oh God, will last forever and ever. And righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom.

You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore, God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy. And about the son, he also says, in the beginning, oh Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.

They will perish, but you remain. They will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe. Like a garment, they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.

To which of the angels did God ever say, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool at your feet? Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

[8 : 11] You see, angels are amazing. God says some amazing things about them. In fact, they're helpers of Christians, and that's an astounding thought. But, they're not the son of God.

Not even angels. Angels actually worship Jesus. Jesus. And did you notice what Hebrews said that's so striking about Jesus? He says in verse 8, about the son, about Jesus, God says, your throne, oh God, will last forever.

And again, verse 10, he also says about Jesus, about the son, in the beginning, oh Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth. In the Old Testament, oh Lord, was, is the name Yahweh.

This is the great one God. God, oh Lord. And he says, that's about the son. Angels are great. They're not the son of God.

They're not Jesus. Jesus is so much better. We shift on. What about Moses? The author of Hebrews turns this on to Moses after this.

[9 : 21] If we could read chapter 2, verse 17. Verse 17. Down into chapter 3, verse 6. Look at what the author says about Jesus and about Moses.

Starting in verse 17, we'll build to Moses in a few verses. For this reason, Jesus had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God.

that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house.

Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself.

[10 : 32] For every house is built by someone and God is the builder of everything. Moses was faithful as a servant in God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future, but Christ is faithful as a son over God's house.

and we are his house if we hold on to the courage and hope of which we boast. So Jesus is greater than Moses.

Did you catch what it said, what the author said about Moses? Moses was faithful, yes. He's great. He was faithful as a servant in God's house.

God's house are his people where God dwells. Moses administrated God's people with God's words and he did it faithfully from within God's people.

But then he says about Jesus, Jesus is also faithful but he's a son, not a servant, and he's over, not within God's house, which is us.

[11 : 40] Jesus is the master of the house, not just a servant within the house. Now, a practical implication can be pulled out of this that C.S. Lewis again summarizes very well.

The fact that we are God's house and that Jesus is the master of this house, greater than Moses ever was. C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* says, imagine yourself as a living house.

God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what he's doing. He's getting the drains right, he's stopping the leaks in the roof and so on.

You knew about those jobs that they needed to be done and so you're not surprised. But, presently, he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense.

What on earth is he up to? The explanation is that God is building quite a different house from the one that you thought of. Throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor here, running up towers, making courtyards, you thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage.

[12 : 54] But he is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it himself. It seems that the recipients of Hebrews had forgotten that God is the builder of the house and that Jesus is over God's house.

They kept going back to Moses, back to the temple worship. They seemed to be shrinking back, shrinking away from confessing Christ, mainly because they didn't like how he was managing the house, how God was rebuilding the house.

So that leads me to the question for us, what are our expectations of what God is doing in us, of how God is rebuilding us as a house personally and us as a house corporately?

What are our expectations of how Jesus should manage his father's house? So Moses was great, he's faithful, he's God's servant, but Jesus is so much better.

Now, what about Abraham? What about Levi? See, that's where the author goes, and I'm not going to talk about these, I'll just list some of them, because he starts going through all of Israel's practices, all of the Old Testament items and people, and every time, he talks about how nice they are, how good they are, their purpose, and then he talks about how much greater Jesus is.

[14 : 26] Abraham and Levi, Jesus is greater. The priests offering sacrifices and gifts, Jesus is better. What about the law that administered regulations and justice for God's people?

Jesus is better. What about the whole Old Testament ministry, the old covenant that God made with his people? Jesus is better. What about the gifts and sacrifices themselves? Jesus is so much better than these.

What about the repeated animal sacrifices? Let me read you a passage and you determine what the author thinks. The repeated animal sacrifices, turn with me to chapter 10.

You see, we're not going verse by verse. We're skipping a little bit. Hebrews chapter 10. Verse 11. Starting in verse 11. Day after day, every priest, this is in the Old Testament rites in Judaism of that day, day after day, every priest stands and performs his religious duties, again and again, he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

[15 : 43] But, when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he, that's Jesus, sat down at the right hand of God.

And since that time, he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. Because by one sacrifice, he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

What do you think? The priests offer sacrifices according to God's command. Jesus is so much better. They had to offer him over and over, and the sacrifices didn't even take away sin.

Not really. But Jesus offered himself once, and that was it. Once and for all time, never to be repeated, and that actually took away sin.

He has made perfect forever, those who are being made holy, us. You remember the theme of Hebrews? See how great Jesus is, therefore persevere?

[16:44] Well, look at what verse 19 says. After showing how great Jesus is as the sacrifice, and as the priest, he says in verse 19, therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, and he carries on.

We have confidence now by the blood of Jesus that the priests never had. All of these were great. The priests, the sacrifices, all of it was great, intended by God for certain purposes, but time and again, Jesus is so much better.

Now, the last comparison that I'm going to draw our attention to, it's not the last one he makes here, but the last one we're going to look at is chapter 11, which Murdo read for us.

It's a famous passage. Most people know it as the faith chapter. The point of that chapter, however, is not primarily about faith.

That's at the heart of it, that is at the heart of it, but primarily, that chapter itself is about Jesus is greater than all of the faithful people in the Old Testament and subsequent Jewish history.

[18:09] Jesus is greater. Now, that's not a point that is often made. It's not one that we often see from this passage. Remember, if you're struggling, if you're tempted to shrink back from Jesus and not push on and persevere, this chapter is incredibly important for you because the author does list so many people who have gone before us and have lived faithfully, by faith, they clung to hope that they would receive what God had promised.

Despite the suffering, despite the humiliation that many of these people faced, Abraham, Isaac, moving on down, that list of judges and other faithful people like Rahab, despite the pressures that they had, they were faithful, clinging to that promise.

But, do you know what the author summarizes about this whole chapter? Let's look at the end of it. The very end of chapter 11. It's a glorious passage about the faith of all of these people.

And this is his conclusion in verse 39. These, these Old Testament saints, these people were commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.

They're commended for their faith, and therefore they can spur us on to be faithful, but they did not receive what was promised to them. He actually had said that earlier too, right in the middle, verse 13.

[19:52] He says of the first half, all of these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised. They only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.

And then he concludes the entire chapter about faith by they were commended, but they didn't receive what they were promised.

Think about Abraham, for instance. He mentions Abraham. Abraham was promised what? God would make him the father of many nations, that kings would come from him, that his descendants would number more than the stars in the sky and the sand and the shore.

That's what he was promised. He had one child, the child of promise. Now, he saw the beginning of God's fulfillment, but he did not receive the fullness of what God had promised.

promised. And you could say that about any of the people, which is exactly what he does. None of them receive the fullness of their promise. So what is he really getting at?

[21:02] A very helpful word comes in the very last verse of this chapter, verse 40. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us they may be made perfect.

Made perfect. It's a word that comes up over and over in Hebrews, all throughout, be made perfect. We've already seen that Jesus, by his sacrifice, has made perfect those who are being made holy.

Well, here he says it again, they were commended for their faith, but they were not yet made perfect. That word, that idea, has to do with something being brought to completion.

Being finalized, brought to the proper end, the goal, being made complete, or full, or perfect. They had not yet received what had been promised to them, they were not yet perfect.

Now, I repeat that over and over because he uses that same word just after this, in the beginning of chapter 12. Now, it's unfortunate that chapter 12, the number 12 was put where it is.

[22 : 18] Usually, the guy who put the chapter and verses there, which was like a thousand years after the Bible was written, usually he gets it really well, really good, but sometimes he doesn't.

Chapter 11 should not end at verse 40 because verses 1 to 3 of chapter 12 is actually the finale of this chapter. This chapter is just like a whole host of writings in the ancient period, both Greco-Roman and Jewish.

You can see examples of this type of chapter all over the place. It's called an encomium. It's a tribute to somebody where usually what happens is they want to pay tribute to somebody very special, a king, an emperor, a high priest.

That's one of the Jewish writings of this period, did an encomium to the high priest. And what it does is it goes back and it gives sort of the genealogy of this person. And it lists something special about each notable person in this genealogy, if you will.

But it's driving towards the one at the end that is greater than all of the ones who led up to him. That's the purpose of this type of writing. The author has borrowed this structure, this type of literature.

[23 : 40] You know, sort of like what we might do. We borrow the haiku, but do a poem to Jesus. We borrow the type of writing to communicate. Well, he's done that too. He has made this encomium, this tribute.

He's not just listing faithful people. He's driving somewhere to the climax. What is the climax? All of these people were great, commended by God, be like them, but they didn't receive the finale.

They weren't made perfect. Read verses 1 to 3 of chapter 12. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. now I want to draw your attention to another part of this verse.

[25 : 06] It's not in most of your translations, it will be in some of them, the ESV doesn't get it the best right now, I'm sorry, the NIV doesn't, the ESV I think does, where it says this, let us throw off everything that hinders, let us run with perseverance, the race marked out, let us fix our eyes on Jesus.

That gives three statements of let us do this, let us do this, let us do this, like three distinct things. Well, the way that the author actually wrote it, and some translations get this, let us throw off these things that hinder, let us run with perseverance, two things, but then it says, fixing our eyes on Jesus.

It's not another let us do. What the intent is, is you've got these tasks, throw off the things that hinder you, run with perseverance, the whole time doing these things, you are fixing your eyes on Jesus.

That is the manner in which you do these other things. It's not a third task. That's the way that you throw off hindrances, the way that you run with perseverance.

You do that by fixing your eyes on Jesus because he received the final goal. He is the pioneer of the faith and the perfecter of the faith.

[26 : 35] He achieved the end through his perseverance. He secured it and he now sits on the throne reigning over all things. Do you see the logic of the whole chapter with its conclusion?

See how great these people are. You're surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. They were faithful despite suffering but they didn't receive the end.

Fix your eyes on Jesus because he is the perfecter of this and is seated on the throne. See how great they are but see how much greater Jesus is than all of them.

Fix your eyes on him. Consider Jesus.

He endured such opposition from sinful men yet he's now been crowned with glory and honor.

Consider him so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

[27 : 44] As a conclusion to this let me read to you a passage from Hebrews chapter 4. Hebrews chapter 4.

I'm going to read just parts of it so you can turn there if you want. 4.13 4.13 4.13 4.13 4.13 4.13 All of these things are great that he's illustrated but Jesus is better than all of them.

Chapter 4 verse 13 and I conclude with this passage nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. that's terrifying isn't it? Except for the next statement since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens Jesus the son of God let us therefore hold firmly to the faith we profess for the high priest that we have is not unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but has been tempted in every way just as we are yet was without sin.

Therefore even though our God is a consuming fire solely because of the greatness of Jesus therefore let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

[29 : 26] now therefore let's draw near to the throne of grace in Jesus' name as we pray together. to support him inau azale card to because of