

## THE DIFFERENCE JESUS MAKES

### Studies in the book of Hebrews

#### 3. Bold I approach (Hebrews 10)

In the early nineteenth century, a Church of Scotland minister called Robert Murray M'Cheyne was told by a friend of a believer who was struggling greatly in his faith.

This believer was haunted by a deep awareness of his own sinfulness –  
And of his great weakness in living for Jesus –

And gradually, he sank into real despair, believing himself cut off from God completely.

On hearing of this man's struggles, M'Cheyne was moved to write to him, even though they had never met –

And at the heart of his letter, M'Cheyne gave this discouraged believer the following advice:

*"For one look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ."*

I want to suggest this morning that, with that advice in a letter to a struggling believer, M'Cheyne was in fact echoing the advice that stands at the very heart of this letter to the Hebrews.

Like M'Cheyne's letter, Hebrews was written to Christians who were struggling and discouraged –

Though this time, it wasn't just an individual, but a whole community that was struggling.

*"For one look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ."* –

Why is that good advice for a local church to follow?

Why is that good advice for every Christian to follow?

It certainly goes against the grain of our modern sensibilities.

Our world assumes that the one thing we should be certain of –

The one thing we should be concerned about – is *ourselves*.

Newspapers – television – magazines – books – films – songs –

All fuel our modern-day *self-obsession* –

The belief – that goes largely unchallenged – that what really matters in life – is **you** –

Is *me*.

*"Am I happy? Do I feel fulfilled?"*

*Do others see me the way I want them to – in the light of who I really am?"*

We live in a self-obsessed world, that claims to revolve around us –

*"because we're worth it...!"*

And we need to be clear –  
Christians are not immune to this self-obsession.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, John Calvin argued that ‘true and solid wisdom’ consisted of two things –  
“*the knowledge of God and of ourselves.*”

In practice, I think we instinctively spend more time on the second sort of knowledge than we do on the first...

We’re a lot more concerned about *knowing ourselves* –  
The things we need to be happy and fulfilled –

Than we are about knowing the God who made us.

We are a lot better at looking at ourselves –  
Than we are at looking at Jesus.

And it seems that this isn’t just a problem felt by 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians –  
The writer of Hebrews identifies this tendency in his 1<sup>st</sup> century readers, too!

We’ve seen already in this series in Hebrews that the Christians this letter is addressed to are a discouraged and disillusioned group.

In the face of the hostility and ridicule of the world around them –  
And a growing awareness of their own weakness –

they appear ready to give up on following Jesus –  
And instead to return to the lives they lived before –

(For many of them, this would mean a return to Judaism and the observance of the Law of Moses...)

The writer of this letter *knows* his readers –  
(Look down at 10:32 to see that he has known them for quite some time...)

He is *painfully aware* of their struggles and discouragement –

As you read over this letter, it becomes clear that the writer *loves* the Christians he’s writing to *deeply*.

And it is because of that love that he is writing to them!

What he wants them to recognise is that a huge part of their struggle and discouragement has come from the failure to look beyond themselves –

And lift their eyes to *Jesus Christ – the one who called them to follow him!*

The Hebrews Christians were looking too much at *themselves* –  
And not looking enough at *Jesus!*

And the result is –  
*They have lost heart!*

They cannot see how they can carry on –

They cannot see how ordinary, weak and sinful people like them could possibly matter to God –

Or why God would choose to stick with them, when they are so shaky and wavering in their faith.

You see, that's the big problem with looking at yourself too much.

Ultimately, *you will never be satisfied with what you see...!*

The world around us tells us that the more we understand ourselves, the more we will see our great potential –

Our hidden reserves of strength –

Our inherent goodness.

The assumption is that if you just get to know yourself well enough –

Then you will like what you see...!

BUT –

The experience of the Hebrew Christians has been very different –

And I would argue from Scripture, one that is far truer to life.

The more they've experienced life in this world –

The more they've seen of the reality of life in a fallen world, rather than the ideal –

The more they've seen of their own *hearts* –

Then, what has stood out for them is not their *goodness* –

Their hidden potential –

Their hidden reserves of strength –

No – what has stood out is *their sinfulness* –

That mysterious tendency in all of us to be our own worst enemy –

That deep selfishness that sabotages and spoils every attempt to be truly loving and selfless –

And *their weakness* –

The realisation that they are not the steadfast, trustworthy, faithful people they liked to think of themselves as in their better moments –

That, instead, they are so often *faithless* –

Prone to wander –

And frightened about the future, and whether or not they can really trust God that the life he calls them really *is* the best life for them.

Looking at themselves, the Hebrew Christians have become overwhelmed with a sense of *their sin* and *their weakness* –

And as a result, they have almost lost heart...!

What the writer of Hebrews urges them to do –

What this letter urges every Christian in this room to do –

Is instead of looking merely at *themselves*, and believing that life is all about *them* –  
***They need to look at Jesus – and take hold of the life that he has won for them!***

***For every look at yourselves –  
Take ten looks at Christ!***

That advice is not given so they can *hide* from their sin and weakness, as if they could just think about Jesus and their sin and weakness will just go away...

No – in a profound way, the writer of Hebrews *agrees* with his readers:

“Yes, you *are* all sinful! Yes, you *are* all weak!”

But instead of despairing about that –  
*Look to Jesus!*

*Take your sin and your weakness to him!*

Jesus alone can overcome both your sin – *and* your weakness –  
So, *hold fast to him* –

*And take hold of the riches he has won for you!*

That’s the message the writer has for his readers in chapter 10 of this letter –  
And it’s the message this letter has for ***us, today!***

So – let’s look at it together now...

Now, I need to be honest with you this morning.

We had a very short reading from Hebrews 10 just now –  
But in reality, our passage this morning is really all of Hebrew chapters 7-10...!

The eagle-eyed among you will realise that we haven’t actually explored chapters 7-10 together yet –

In fact, we’ve jumped from chapter 4 last week – to chapter 10 this week.

But we will need to have some idea of what the writer has been telling his readers about Jesus and the difference he makes to those who trust in him in chapters 7-10 –

If we’re going to understand the significance of chapter 10 and verses 19-25.

You see, in a sense, these verses mid-way through chapter 10 of Hebrews are the very *heart* of the letter...!

In these verses, the writer is applying the great truths about Jesus as

- ***Our priest*** –
- ***And the sacrifice for our sins***

That he outlines in some detail in chapters 7-10.

So – as we look at Hebrews 10, we’ll also look back at some of the teaching of chapters 7-10.

First of all, in vv.19-20, the writer urges his readers – including *us* – to recognise that, in his death on the cross, Jesus has overcome the sin of everyone who puts their trust in him.

And the result of that is –

We can approach the holy, living God – with *confidence* that we are accepted by him!

Read vv.19-20.

- **Through his blood, Jesus has washed us clean from our sin (vv.19-20 & chs. 9-10)**

In these verses, the writer is looking back at his argument in chapters 9 and 10.

In that section of the letter, he reminds us that Jesus Christ is the sacrifice for our sins –

And that, as the perfect Son of God, his blood shed for us has the power to wash us clean from every hint of sin in our lives.

Turn for a moment to Hebrews 9:13-14.

Here, the writer is looking back at the Old Testament sacrificial system.

In that system, the only way the Israelites could approach God was if they first offered up sacrifices –

In the shape of goats and calves.

In offering up an animal sacrifice, an Israelite was acknowledging that he was a sinner –

That he had failed to honour and love God in his life –

And that his sin was punishable by death.

However, the God of Israel, in his grace, would accept the death of an animal in the place of one of his people –

And in response, he would not treat them as their sins deserved.

What the writer of Hebrews wants us to see is *just how far Jesus’ death in our place on the cross out-strips what animal sacrifices were able to do!*

Read Hebrews 9:13-14.

The blood of animals in the temple sacrifices could make God’s people ‘outwardly clean’ –

But it could do nothing about their ‘consciences’...!

It could do nothing about the state of *their hearts!*

BUT –

When Jesus offered himself as the ‘unblemished’, sinless sacrifice for our sin on the cross, his blood shed for us there has the power to ‘*cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*’ (v.14)

There’s an old hymn that sounds fairly quaint to our ears today, but that captures the force of what Hebrews is saying here –

*‘There is power – power – wonder-working power, in the blood of the Lamb!’*

***Jesus’ blood has the power to cleanse us from our sin!***

His sacrifice on the cross was the *perfect* sacrifice.

It came at the end of a life of perfect obedience to his Father –

At the cross, Jesus willingly took the punishment we each deserve for our sin –

And so, thanks to his blood shed for us, everyone who trusts in Jesus has been washed clean of their sin.

We can often get a little squeamish about this sort of celebration of ‘the blood of Jesus’ –

And many of our modern songs seem to avoid the phrase, perhaps for that reason.

The Old Testament temple certainly wouldn’t have been a place for the faint-hearted.

Standing there on any given day, we would have witnessed the deaths of countless animals as sin-offerings –

And we’d have seen enough blood to make a butcher blush...

BUT –

Animal sacrifices in the Old Testament weren’t just some barbaric ritual –

They were put in place by God to demonstrate the *severity of sin*.

Look at the second half of 9:22 –

*‘without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.’*

Forgiveness of sin is not cheap!

God can’t just turn a blind eye to our sin and the damage it does.

He is a holy God of perfect justice –

And the Bible tells us that the penalty for sin – is *death*.

Animal sacrifices were a constant reminder of that in the Old Testament.

But they were also much more than that –

They pointed ahead to Jesus – the *ultimate sacrifice* – and *God’s solution to our sin!*

Hebrews 10:1 tells us that –

*“The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves.”*

And v.4 makes clear –

*“It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin.”*

To take away our sin – it took the willing sacrifice of the Son of God!

Only his blood can make us clean!

And – back to vv.19-20 of chapter 10 –

***That is just what it has done!***

If you're trusting in Jesus this morning, then you can know something –  
*Jesus' blood has washed you clean!*

And because you are now clean in God's eyes, you can approach God with *confidence* –  
Not in ourselves or our own performance – but in the knowledge that Jesus has won  
our forgiveness for us!

Our sin is no longer a barrier –  
Jesus' blood has washed us clean!

And the writer of Hebrews is determined that his readers understand that!

We saw last week that sin is deceitful.

And if it cannot convince us that it can make us happy –  
Then it will be content to tell us that it has formed an *insurmountable barrier* between  
us and God.

“God could never accept you!”, sin tells us –  
“God could never forgive *you!*”

Perhaps a number of the Hebrew Christians had begun to believe that –  
Perhaps a number of the Christians here this morning have begun to believe that...

Perhaps you've begun to *fear* God's holiness –  
Or to *resent* God for it.

*That's why we need to see the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus!*

As Christians, we're not kidding ourselves that our sin doesn't matter to God –  
That God has turned a blind eye to our selfishness – our thoughtlessness – our small  
cruelties to one another...

Just as the animal sacrifices in the temple reminded the Israelites of the severity of their sin –  
*So the cross of Jesus should remind us!*

BUT –  
Thank God, the cross of Jesus not only reminds us of the reality of our sin –

It gives us the only assurance we can ever have – that our sin has been finally dealt with...!

Because Jesus' blood was shed on that tree –  
Because he cried out, 'It is finished!' and died in our place –

*We can know that our forgiveness has now been won for us!  
In his death, Jesus has washed us clean from our sin!*

The Hebrew Christians had begun to believe that their sinful hearts meant that God could  
never accept them –  
That they could never live in relationship with him –

But – vv.19-20 tell them –  
*They are wrong!*

*They had reckoned without the blood of Jesus!*

The other great obstacle to their confidence in the Christian life was *their ongoing weakness*.

Perhaps God could forgive them for their past sins because of the cross of Jesus –  
But what about *the present*?

What about their *present weakness*?

Many of the believers this letter was written to were stumbling along, at best...  
12:12 refers to their '*feeble arms and weak knees*' –

They didn't feel like glowing advertisements for victory in the Christian life –  
Instead, they were limping along and unsure whether they could keep going.

BUT –  
The writer of this letter isn't ready to throw in the towel on their behalf just yet...!

*Why?*  
Because – again – he believes they have lost sight of Jesus – their great high priest!

- **Through his intercession, Jesus can sustain us in our weakness (v.21 & chs.7-8)**

Read v.21 aloud –  
*'we have a great priest over the house of God...' – or 'the household of God.'*

In that phrase, the writer reminds his readers that, thanks to the sacrifice of Jesus, they are now members of God's household –  
God's *family*.

And as his children, God has not left them alone in their weakness –  
He has given them a great high priest to sustain and strengthen them as they live for him!

The writer explored this at length in chapters 7 and 8.

In those chapters, he introduces us to the obscure Old Testament character of **Melchizedek**.

Now, these can be daunting chapters to understand –  
But I think a useful summary of them can be found in 7:24-25 (read aloud)

Here, the writer reminds us that the same Jesus who died on a cross for us –  
Now lives *forever!*

*'He has a permanent priesthood'*, like Melchizedek in the book of Genesis –  
Who appeared out of nowhere, 'without beginning of days or end of life' (7:3)

And, because Jesus lives for ever, his mercy and grace towards us didn't end at the cross –  
No – he is '*able to save completely – or forever – or to the uttermost...*

*'those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.'*

If you're a Christian here this morning, you need to see this.

The same Jesus who died on a cross for you and rose again 2,000 years ago –  
Is alive *today* –  
and is bringing to bear all his power and mercy to help you live for him and overcome  
sin and temptation today!

He will not stop sustaining you –  
Until you enjoy the fulfilment of your salvation, living in close relationship with God  
and free from sin in the new creation!

*What Jesus has begun in you – he **will** finish –*  
If you humble yourself and go to him in your weakness.

It's one of the great paradoxes of the Christian life that it is when we are aware of our  
weakness, in and of ourselves –  
That we are actually in a healthy place.

If we convince ourselves that we are *strong* –  
That we can do it on our own – that we can achieve great things for God on our own –

*Then we are in terrible danger.*

“Don't look at yourself”, the writer of Hebrews urges us –  
“Look at Jesus, your great high priest – and ask *him* to sustain you and work in and  
through you, as you depend on him!”

We have a great priest over the house of God – Jesus –  
And he is able to save us completely, if we go to him and humble ourselves before  
him!

So –  
vv.19-21 of Hebrews 10 summarises the teaching of chapters 7-10 – and lifts the eyes  
of weary, discouraged believers from *themselves* –  
and fixes them on **Jesus!**

All too often, the Jesus we believe in is *too small* –  
And his achievements for us are all too easily forgotten by us.

We are like people living on top of a goldmine, whose riches we never think to tap into.

We live as if we are poor –  
When in reality, thanks to Jesus, we are spiritually **rich!**

So the writer of Hebrews lifts our eyes to Jesus –  
How his death has overcome our sin –  
And how his indestructible life can overcome our weakness.

And then finally – in vv.22-25 –  
He reminds us that another great gift that Jesus has given us –  
Another great treasure that he has won for us –

Is *his church!*  
*Is one another!*

- **Through his people, Jesus spurs us on (vv.22-25)**

Look at the repeated phrase in these verses –  
*“Let us – Let us – Let us...”*

If we are going to tap into the riches that we have in Christ –  
*We need one another to do that!*

We easily forget that – apart from Philemon, Timothy and Titus, none of the NT epistles were written to individuals...

They were written to *churches!* To *communities of believers*, who would then seek to apply the truths of the gospel to *one another!*

If you're a Christian here this morning, then look around you –  
*You need these people, if you are going to live your life for Jesus!*

*You need these people, if you are going to enjoy the life Jesus has won for you, here and now!*

And that is a message we need to hear in an individualistic age like ours...!

Think back to where we began this morning.

If your only concern is with *yourself* –  
With *your personal walk with God* –  
With the *state of your heart* –

You will quickly find yourself trapped in arid introspection.

Jesus has brought you into the family of God –  
And one of the great consequences of that is that fellow-Christians are there to remind us that the universe does not revolve around *you...!*

God is not just concerned about *me* –  
He is committed to building a people who belong to him – and actually, I am only one small part of that.

Don't get me wrong –  
I'm a precious part! Precious to God!

But still, only one member of his global church...!

And so, it is only living in relationship with other Christians that I will experience all the riches of the new life Jesus has won for me!

Through his people, Jesus spurs you on to:

- **Delight in God (v.22)**

*“Let us draw near to God” –*

As a child draws near to her father!

Jesus has cleansed us from our sin –

Jesus will sustain us in our weakness –

So, let’s encourage one another to ***go to God!***

To grow in our knowledge of him!

To grow in our gratitude towards him and praise of him!

In the words of C.S. Lewis, let’s go ‘further up and further in’ to *who the living God is –*

*What he has done for us in Christ –*

*And what he **will do** for us in Christ!*

*“Let us draw near to God.”*

Let’s also spur one another on to:

- **Delight in the future (v.23)**

In the *“hope we profess”*, of a glorious new creation won for us by Jesus –

Free from sin and death and evil.

We explored something of that new creation last week, in chapters 3 and 4 –

So all I want to draw our attention to here is the very simple basis for confidence we can have that God’s purposes for his people *are* good.

*“He who promised is faithful.”*

God is faithful!

The future doesn’t depend on you –

It depends on *him!*

Take great strength from that!

And finally, let’s spur one another on to:

- **Delight in loving service (vv.24-25)**

Read v.24 aloud.

The motivation behind all that God has done for us in Jesus –

Is *love*.

And so the way in which God's people can grow in their understanding of the love God has for us –

Is if we demonstrate love *for one another!*

*As God has loved us – let's love one another!*

*As God has forgiven us – let's forgive one another!*

*As God is patient with us – let's be patient with one another!*

'Good deeds' in v.24 are simply the tangible evidence of love –

Giving our time and gifts to one another in service.

- Cooking meals for those who need them
- Setting out chairs on a Sunday morning, so we can meet together like this
- Praying for one another – listening to one another – laughing and crying with one another

Jesus has called us to a life of love as his people –

And to truly understand and experience his love for us, we need to love one another!

We need one another – so *don't give up meeting together* (v.25) -

Whether on Sundays or during the week.

We can't live for Jesus on our own –

We need him to spur us on through his people!

Don't let discouragement –

Or shame concerning sin –

Or preoccupation with other things, stop you meeting with God's people!

We *need* one another!

We will not grow in our knowledge and love of Jesus, if we refuse to live in community with his people.

This section in Hebrews 10 seeks to summarise the teaching of the letter so far –

And to open our eyes to all that Jesus has won for those who trust in him.

- *Cleansing from our sin*
- *Sustaining power in our weakness*
- *And the gift of the people of God, to spur us on in faith, hope and love!*

The overall message of this passage is clear –

Don't allow ***an awareness of your sin – and an awareness of your weakness*** – pull you away from the living God.

*Jesus Christ has overcome both –*

*Through his blood and his intercession for us!*

***Look to him –***

***Hold fast to him, even as he holds fast to you –***

***And do not turn your backs on Jesus!***

I finish with another excerpt from the letter I opened with –  
By Robert Murray M'Cheyne to a struggling believer –

Words I believe the writer of Hebrews would warmly echo...

*“If you only knew [the heart of Christ] as it is, you would lay your weary head with John on his bosom. Do not take up your time so much with studying your own heart as with studying Christ’s heart.*

*“For one look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ!”*