

The background of the entire cover is a close-up, slightly blurred photograph of Hebrew text. A dark quill pen with a yellowish-brown feather is positioned diagonally across the middle of the image, pointing towards the bottom right. The Hebrew text is written in a traditional script, with some characters clearly visible like 'אכלת' and 'על בדמ'.

HEBREWS:

*The Supremacy & Sufficiency
of Christ (Part 1)*

Tabernacle Baptist Church, Penarth
7 Small Group Studies

The Book of Hebrews

The Supremacy & Sufficiency of Christ

(Part 1)

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Introduction and studies 2, 4 and 6 by Jonathan Bugg

Studies 1,3 5 and 7 by Roger Grafton

Introduction from Pastor Jonathan

Of all the various ways one could start to introduce the book of Hebrews, it seems most right that we start with the Supremacy and Sufficiency of Jesus. Although this book tackles some deep and difficult subjects and encourages us in how we live out our Christian faith through difficult times, they are all underpinned by the fact that we can have confidence in Jesus Christ. How does one encourage those being persecuted, those who are struggling through the difficulties of being Christian in a hostile world, or those who may even be letting go of their faith, other than point to the one this is all about? This is a book which unashamedly points to Jesus and demonstrates his constancy and dependability, his uniqueness and sacrifice, and yes, his supremacy and sufficiency, so that in everything we might encounter in life, Jesus is the answer.

Other than what the letter says, there is little else anyone can be certain of. No one is really sure who the author was, with some suggesting Paul (although fewer and fewer think this), some Apollos (who seems to be the scholars current favourite) and even some suggested it might have been Aquila's wife, Priscilla, but there is a singular use of a masculine participle in Hebrews 11:32 which many have accepted as putting Priscilla out of the frame. The only thing known about the author is that they were a 2nd generation Christian writing to 2nd generation Christians. We can know this because in chapter 2:3 the author states they never actually heard Jesus in person by saying: "This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him".

No one is really sure where it's intended target audience was located, or when it was written. Some say that failure to mention the Temple in Jerusalem suggests that it had already been destroyed which would date the book after 70AD. Others however, suggest that despite the traditional title given it, if it were in fact for a broader audience including Gentile believers (who would have become familiar with the Old Testament scriptures quite quickly) then failure to speak of the

Temple is not so strange and so it could have been written earlier.

Most Bible translations describe Hebrews in their preamble as a letter or epistle. However, even this seemingly innocuous title is disputed. The written style and flow of the work, as well as the absence of the usual greetings and introductions customary to a first century letter all lend heavily to the argument that this may well have been the notes of a sermon rather than a letter.

The flow of this work takes us from the revelation of God through Jesus, the High priestly character and office of Jesus, to loyalty to God through persevering faith and our orientation for life as Christians in a hostile world. Whoever wrote it, to whomever it was originally written (or preached), whenever it was written, it remains a book of depth, warning and encouragement. Consequently it is my prayer that God will bless us all as we study it together, deepening our faith and hardening our resolve to stand firm in Christ.

Pastor Jonathan

Note: These notes are being used by the Church alongside an evening sermon series on the same subject. You will notice that the studies do not cover the whole of the first 6 chapters of Hebrews, but leave 'gaps.' These gaps are being dealt with in the accompanying sermon series. After half term the sermon series will continue, and be accompanied by the second half of this Bible study series

Study 1: Hebrews 1:1-4

The Voice of Christ

Read Hebrews 1:1-4

Verse 4 talks about the name which Jesus has inherited. The verses which follow show us that this name Jesus received was 'Son', a peculiarly intimate name which no angel could lay claim to.

- ✠ As a warm up for this session, how many names for God can you think of? How many names for Jesus in particular can you think of?

In this session we will be thinking about the special role Jesus has within the Trinity, and how in his nature he is an 'exact representation' of God's glory.

I remember driving to a Christian event with some mature Christian friends from the local Brethren Church in 1986 just a few months after I had become a Christian. We got around to talking about what books we were reading at the moment, and I mentioned that I was reading John Wimber's *Power Healing*. One of my friends turned around to me and asked why I was reading that particular book, and when I explained that I wanted to learn how to pray more effectively for healing he said, "But God doesn't do that any more. That was something he reserved for Biblical times."

I remember at the time being shocked at the notion that God would change the way he does things at different times, almost as if he is a God who changes his mind. Surely Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8) and "Is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should change His mind." (Numbers 23:19)

I have learnt since that there are times when God changes his mind in the Bible. But what about the idea that God does things differently at

different times? In theology this idea is called 'dispensationalism' and suggests that God works in different periods of time (or 'dispensations') in different ways.

- ✘ In the first 3 verses of Hebrews there are 2 different places that suggest that God does things differently at different times. Can you spot them?
- ✘ What do you think of the idea that God might change his mind or do things differently at different times? How can we hold together verses like Hebrews 13:8 and Exodus 32:14 or Jonah 3:10? How can we trust a God who changes his mind?

Jesus is God's most complete Word, or revelation, to people on earth. As such, Hebrews 2:1 tells us that we need to listen carefully to what we have heard about Him so that we do not drift away from a true faith. Hebrews 1:1-3 explains why God's revelation through Jesus is better than the revelation of the prophets by listing 7 reasons Christ is superior.

- ✘ List the 7 reasons Christ is superior not only to the prophets, but also to the angels:
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.
 - 6.
 - 7.

If you are struggling to find all 7, they are listed at the end of the study!

- ✘ How should those seven characteristics strengthen the faith of

the spiritually wavering recipients of Hebrews?

- ✠ What does verse 3 imply about the relationship between Jesus, the Father and the Spirit? Does 'sitting at the right hand of Majesty' suggest that Jesus is somehow inferior to the Father? How do you see the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit relating together as three distinct persons and yet remaining one God? This is serious theology which people have struggled with for millennia, so don't worry if you struggle to find the right language!
- ✠ Some people visualise God the Father and God the Son as being quite different personalities. What does verse 3 tell us about the nature of Jesus in relation to God?
- ✠ Read Colossians 1:15 How can we truly know what God is like?

Close the session by spending some time together as a group worshipping the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!

Seven things that describe the Son in Hebrews 1:2-3

- He is the appointed heir of all things
- Through Him God made the universe
- He is the radiance of God's glory
- He is the exact representation of God's being
- He sustains all things by his powerful word
- He purged our sins
- He is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high

Study 2: Hebrews 1:5-14

The Superiority of Christ

In setting out to prove to his listeners (or readers) the superiority of Jesus, the author of Hebrews uses a challenging comparison. Instead of contrasting Jesus to sinful mankind, or using His victory over sin and death, the author compares Jesus to the angels. It is interesting that in today's church many people are accepting of the existence of the demonic and yet we speak very little about the angelic. As we look at these verses in Hebrews that so wonderfully illustrate how elevated and majestic Jesus is, let us begin by seeking to understand the angelic with whom he is compared first.

- ✠ Have any of you ever had or know anyone who has had an angelic experience? Why not share it with the group.
- ✠ How did it make you feel? Knowing that God rarely acts just to make us feel good, what do you believe the purpose of that experience was?

I have heard several stories of Christians in extremely difficult situations (where violence and destruction was a high possibility) who discovered after periods of unexpected and notable peace, that their attackers were intimidated and kept at bay by the large armed men. Armed men that the Christians never saw, but their attackers did.

Marie Monsen, a missionary to China from Scandinavia recounts a tale of her mission compound being surrounded by soldiers bent on looting and destruction. Those who took refuge in the decidedly insubstantial compound were surprised that they were left in peace. Later the men who had threatened to attack admitted to changing their minds when they saw the "tall soldiers with shining faces on the roof". Another story is told of a group intending to operate a 2 week mission out of a near derelict church in an area heavily affected by gangs. The one gang on whose patch the church was deemed to be, had already used violence and the threat of shooting etc. to prevent

anyone from using the church. So it was to the surprise of the group using it that they continued unmolested for the 2 weeks of the mission. When opportunity to strike up a conversation with a gang member occurred, the question was asked why they had left the church alone. The reply was simple. "What? With those big guys sat on the fence outside all day and night?"

- ✘ It's not surprising no one chose to tackle them. The common biblical response to angels is fear (Luke 1:11-12, 2:8-10, Acts 10:3-4). Why do you think this is?

However Angels are seriously underestimated in the importance of the roles they perform. They are: Holy messengers (Acts 10:22); protectors (Daniel 3:19-28); Warriors and encouragers (Daniel 10:10-14); Mighty (Rev 5:2); instructor of preachers (Acts 8:26); encourager of believers (Acts 10:3-6); Judger of blasphemers (Acts 12:23); helper of travellers (Acts 27:23-24) and they even dabble in prison breakouts (Acts 5:19). If you are anything like me, you will find it difficult to imagine anything more incredible, terrifying and holy than an angel.

- ✘ How do you think you would feel if you met an angel now?

Read Hebrews 1:4-14

That feeling is what the author of Hebrews wanted his readers to understand when he went on to say what verse 4 says. That Jesus "became as much superior to the angels as the name he inherited is superior to theirs".

- ✘ Spend some time as a group meditating and discussing on the following statements. Are there any of them that stand out to you or specific words that catch your eye? How did these statements make you feel?
 - Verse 6 references psalm 97 which instructs all the angels to worship Jesus. Revelation 5:11-12 says that all the angels are worshipping Jesus, singing "worthy is the lamb". Jesus is worshipped by the terrifying holy heavenly creatures.
 - Verse 7 says Angels are servants. Jesus is God's son.

- Verse 8 speaks of kingdom, eternal throne and sceptre. Jesus is King.
- Verse 9 tells us that Jesus is anointed!
- The angels are created but verse 10 tells us that Jesus is the creator of everything.
- In a world of increasing and continual change, verses 10 to 12 also tell us that Jesus is constant and imperishable.
- A person of high rank who put someone on his right hand gave him equal honour with himself and recognized him as possessing equal dignity and authority. If this is so, then verse 13 tells us quite categorically that Jesus is equally honoured with God the Father.

Read Ephesians 1:18 – 22.

Now read it again slowly, pondering on each of the significant phrases as you get to them. And this time when you get to the end of verse 22 read on to verse 23. All these incredible powers, authorities and names, and we are his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. How does this make you feel?

- ✠ What might you do differently now you have been reminded that someone so great and majestic, powerful and worthy of worship, fills us to the point where we ARE the fullness of Christ? Wow!

Study 3: Hebrews 2:5-18

The Authority of Christ

Many of you will know that in addition to being a pastor at Tabernacle, I am also a Padre in the British Army as a reserve officer. In my first posting, which was to a field hospital, I was one amongst many officers: all of the doctors and nurses were also 'professionally qualified officers' and many of them outranked me. However, when I transferred to a combat unit in the Royal Artillery I found a very different situation. The officers mess is tiny, with only 14 members, and I am one of the most senior people in the regiment. It has taken a bit of adjusting!

Last year I was asking one of the sergeants to arrange for some chairs to be put out for a church service I was leading. The sergeant was already quite busy, so I asked him as nicely as I could with a lot of 'please' and 'thank you.' The Regimental Sergeant Major (the RSM is the most senior non-commissioned officer in a regiment, and generally quite a scary character) saw me speaking to the sergeant and afterwards asked me to step into his office for a quiet word. "Padre," he said. "You do realise that you are a Major in the British Army, don't you? You don't ask people to do things for you - you tell them. Use your authority, sir!" I don't think the RSM quite understands the position of the Padre in a unit, but I get his point. I have authority that I need to use, not only as a soldier, but also as a Christian.

- ✘ Have you ever been in a position of authority where you have had people under you? Were you a good leader? Do you have any stories of when your leadership didn't turn out so well? Ghandi once said that you are only a leader if people follow you - how well did people follow you?

Read Hebrews 2:5-18, and then read Psalm 8. Use the words of Psalm 8 as a time of worship or as a framework for your opening

prayers and devotions.

The verses that the writer of Hebrews quotes from Psalm 8 talk about how God has 'put everything under the feet' of man. In Psalm 8 David marvels at the fact that the creator of heaven and earth has time to think of people, and is even more amazed at the place we have been given in creation. He says that we have been made 'a little lower' than the heavenly beings, and here on earth have been made rulers over creation.

Read Genesis 1:26-28, Psalm 115:16 and Revelation 22:5

- ✠ From the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation, and all the way through in between we read about the authority and position given to humans in God's creation. Do you feel that you have authority as a child of God in His kingdom? If you really had real authority, what would you do in the world?
- ✠ In what areas do you know you have authority, and in what areas do you feel you lack authority?
- ✠ Jesus spoke about having (and giving) power and authority. What is the difference between power and authority?
- ✠ How are we called to use this power and authority?
- ✠ In Hebrews 2:9 we read that Jesus was 'made a little lower than the angels.' This is clearly talking about his incarnation when Jesus was born ('made') a fully human being. What do you think about the creator and sustainer of all things being 'lower than the angels'? See also Philippians 2:6-11?

One of the key problems some people have with believing in the existence of God is the problem of suffering in the world. If there really is a God, they ask, then why doesn't he do something to alleviate suffering? The Bible does not shy away from dealing with the problems of evil and suffering. In this passage from Hebrews the writer identifies that whilst God has given us authority on earth, and

Jesus is the supreme power to whom all things are subject, we do not yet see everything working the way it should. There are areas of life that clearly are not subject to Jesus. How can this be?

- ✠ How do you explain the problems of evil and suffering in the world? If God is all powerful and all loving, how can he allow evil? Could you 'give an answer to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you'? (1 Peter 3:15)
- ✠ Rather than focusing on the things we do not yet see and understand, the writer to the Hebrews focusses on the things we do see and can trust in (verse 9). How can worshipping the risen and ascended Jesus help us deal with difficult times? Do you find worshipping Jesus difficult when things are tough? Does it help?
- ✠ Hebrews not only encourages to look up to see the glorified risen Lord, but also to look forward to the day when the devil's defeat is complete. There is a line in the film "The best exotic marigold hotel" which says, "Everything will be alright in the end: if everything isn't alright, then it's not the end yet." How does looking forward help you cope with dark or difficult times?

In chapter 2 the writer draws together a series of sweeping and glorious themes: the creation, God's mindfulness of man, suffering, redemption, authority and salvation. The central theme to all these is the incarnation of Jesus as a man.

- ✠ In your own words, summarise what the writer has to say about the birth of God as a human being in the baby Jesus, and why this is important in understanding suffering, sin, temptation and salvation. Why did God have to become flesh?

Study 4: Hebrews 3:7-19

The Rejection of Christ

As human beings we are fickle creatures aren't we? We live in a world where we no longer tend to keep things until they break, let alone look to repair them when they do. In the 21st century marriages don't even have to actually break, but just not hold the same promise as they once did for divorce to be the ready option. Once upon a time these two people looked across a room at each and smiled, blushed and looked away briefly, before plucking up the courage to speak to one another. There would have been that first hold of hands, the first kiss, the proposal, planning both the wedding and the life together after. There would have been the passion and excitement and the thrill of spending time together, sharing and enjoying. Then one day, it's cloudy, the sun hasn't shone the way it used to, the smiles have been replaced with frowns and instead of looking at what they had and trying to recapture it, they make the painful decision to walk away from each other because life no longer holds the same kind of promise. Tragic isn't it?

The Israelites had a similar relationship with God. They had encountered a God who was passionate about them, who pursued them and freed them, with many signs and wonders, plagues, pillars of fire and cloud, partings of the Red Sea, and provision of water and bread etc., and yet still they looked with human eyes at life and couldn't see the wonder of God's promise to them, the miracle of his love and provision, and they turned from him. They even talked about returning to slavery rather than a difficult life following their own loving God. All of that is what is encapsulated in the phrase "hard hearted".

- ✠ Spend a moment thinking and sharing times when you might have seen or felt God at work. Perhaps it was a healing, or answered prayer, a sense of God's presence or something else which can only be explained by the action of God. How often do you think of that time? How does recalling it and sharing make

you feel?

Read Hebrews 3:7-19

Verses 7-11 quote from psalm 95 where the psalmist uses the hard hearted rebellion against God during the Exodus as a warning to the Israelites of his day, and again the author of Hebrews takes it to warn the Christians to whom he writes.

- ✘ Why do you think it is, that even after all the things the Israelites had seen they turned away from God to the point of angering Him and losing their entry into the Promised Land?

The passage for this study is very clearly addressed to people who are wavering in their faith. There may well have been people turning back to their old ways and possibly giving up completely.

- ✘ What do you think is the significance of quoting the verses from Psalm 95 is in relation to people turning away from the Christian faith?
- ✘ Look at Hebrews 3:6 and again at 3: 14. What does the use of the word "IF" suggest to you?
- ✘ The passage strongly suggests that there is a question mark over the salvation of a person who turns away from the faith. How does this make you feel?

Verse 12 goes on to instruct us as Christian sisters and brothers to encourage one another, so that we might each help strengthen one another and prevent the awful outcome that the author suggests. It is important that we share our stories of God working in our lives in order to encourage those around us.

- ✘ How did you feel as you heard the stories people shared earlier? Why do you think that was?
- ✘ Verse 13 suggests that when you encourage a person (sharing a story or building them up) you help keep their heart soft and responsive to God. If this is the case, what does it make you

feel about the stories you share and the things you say to your sisters and brothers in the faith? What do you think the effects of discouraging words are on the believer?

- ✠ What do you think God feels about the discouraging and disparaging things we might say about one another?
- ✠ Why then do we do it? How might we stop ourselves?

Take a moment to pray for strength of character for all in your group, that we might all be encouraging and strengthening to others. Pray that our hearts will not harden and we will not rebel against God in any way. Then pray for those who you might know whose hearts have seemed to harden. Perhaps they have left the church.

Read the last few verses (16-18) and discuss in what ways we run the risk of being like the Israelites in our Christian lives today. Perhaps we feel quite strong in our faith, but do we always encourage and strengthen others as we should? Agree with one another in what ways you will encourage and strengthen each another. It might include a time of testimony each week at the beginning of cell group. It might be to agree as a group to challenge each other if we start to speak badly of anyone. Perhaps you could commit to pray for each other daily.

The Sabbath Rest of Christ

Hebrews 4:1-13

I once heard a theology lecturer give a really good piece of advice in a preaching class. She said, “Whenever you are reading scripture and see the word ‘therefore’ written, you should ask yourself, “What is the ‘therefore’ there for?” The word ‘therefore’ is a conjunction which connects two sentences or ideas together, and the writers of the New Testament were very fond of it! In the Book of Hebrews it is used 16 times to connect thoughts, ideas and arguments.

Hebrews 4 starts with the word ‘therefore’ (as does the previous chapter and chapters 6 and 12!) to connect what the writer wants to say with the thought that has just gone before. Chapter 3 ends by warning us about hardening our hearts through sin and rejection of Christ’s calling on our lives, and comparing our sin to that of the Israelites in the desert when they rebelled against God. It is a stark warning that Israel’s sin prevented them from entering into God’s promise, and the same can happen to us today. In chapter 4 the writer continues to explore these themes.

Read Hebrews 4:1-6

- ✠ What was the ‘promise of rest’ to the people of Israel when they came out of Egypt into the desert?
- ✠ Looking back at chapter 3 and from your knowledge of Exodus, why did the Israelites fail to enter the promise?
- ✠ The writer says that the promise of entering God’s rest still stands. What is that promise of rest to us today? What is ‘rest’ in this sense?
- ✠ How can we ‘be found to have fallen short’ (verse 1)?
- ✠ Do you think that once we are saved, we are always saved

regardless of how we live our lives subsequently, or do you believe that having committed out lives to Jesus it is possible to lose that salvation afterwards?

- ✠ The people of Israel had heard the promise of God but did not enter into it because of their lack of faith and their sin that stemmed from that. Is it possible for us to hear the Gospel, respond to the Gospel in faith but subsequently lose the promise? Are God's promises somehow dependant on our actions or lifestyle?

Read Hebrews 4:7-13

Also, read it in the following version from “The Message Version” by Eugene Peterson:

⁷God keeps renewing the promise and setting the date as today, just as he did in David's psalm, centuries later than the original invitation: Today, please listen, don't turn a deaf ear . . . ⁸And so this is still a live promise. It wasn't cancelled at the time of Joshua; otherwise, God wouldn't keep renewing the appointment for "today." ⁹The promise of "arrival" and "rest" is still there for God's people. ¹⁰God himself is at rest. And at the end of the journey we'll surely rest with God. ¹¹So let's keep at it and eventually arrive at the place of rest, not drop out through some sort of disobedience. ¹²God means what he says. What he says goes. His powerful Word is sharp as a surgeon's scalpel, cutting through everything, whether doubt or defence, laying us open to listen and obey. ¹³Nothing and no one is impervious to God's Word. We can't get away from it--no matter what. ¹⁴Now that we know what we have--Jesus, this great High Priest with ready access to God--let's not let it slip.

There are two keys to understanding the argument of chapters 3 and 4 which are connected by the words “Therefore” in verses 1 and 7. The first is the superiority of the Son – Jesus Christ – to Moses. This is introduced in 3:1-6. The second is the superiority of the rest which Jesus has achieved to the “rest” which Israel, under the leadership of Moses, did not attain (indeed, a rest to which Moses himself did not

attain). This superior rest is the focus of verses 7-19.

When the writer to the Hebrews cites from Psalm 95:7-8 in chapter 4 verse 7, he calls attention to the word “today.” He makes the point that while the “rest” that the first generation of Israelites failed to enter was dwelling in peace in the Promised Land, there was still a “rest” being offered in Psalm 95. It was still “today.” Thus, for the psalmist, the offer of rest remains, as does the danger of failing to enter into it. And when the author of Hebrews uses Psalm 95, he does so in a way that makes it clear that there is still an offer of rest, and that it can be embraced or lost.

- ✠ For the Israelites the ‘rest’ on offer was to enter into the promised land and cease their endless travels in the desert. What is ‘rest’ for Christians?
- ✠ Is it to be found in this life, or in the life to come?
- ✠ How would you summarise the conclusion the author comes to in verses 9-10?
- ✠ In verse 12 the writer introduces the idea of the Word of God in relation to his argument about achieving rest. What is the relevance of the word of God when it comes to thinking about rest?

Read Romans 7:7. Hebrews 4:12-13 are saying that God sees all things (including our sin) and nothing is hidden from his eyes. We know what sin is because of the Word of God (the Law or the Bible) which teaches us right from wrong. The Word of God, therefore, is like a sword, defining right from wrong, good from bad and holy from unholy. We know in our thoughts and our hearts right from wrong because of the Word of God.

- ✠ If how we live our lives is so important, and entering into God’s promise of rest is affected by our lifestyle. How important is reading and knowing the Word of God? What is the importance of studying the Bible?

- ✠ Do you feel you read and know your Bible well enough? What can you do about it?
- ✠ Do you feel accountable to anyone in relation to Bible study or holiness? If not, Is there someone you could make yourself accountable to?

Study 6: Hebrews 4:14-5:10

The Priesthood of Christ

Have you ever had someone you could completely trust, who was so inspirational that you felt you could follow them through fire and high water? I had a boss (Andy) once who was just the nicest man. He was just and fair as a manager, charismatic and inspirational as a leader, yet so highly approachable that everyone believed themselves to be his friends. Sadly, far too early for such a man, he died and his is the only funeral I have yet attended when there was no standing room left in the church and people were outside trying to hear. I honestly felt, if Andy had told me to jump out of the window, I'd have done so knowing that in some way he had ensured it was alright.

I also once went caving with some friends who I normally trusted. This one day it began to rain heavily “up top” and the cave began to flood. We were ill prepared (no wetsuits for one thing) and we all began to get very cold and hypothermic. I continued to confidently follow the group leader until he began to show signs of being uncertain of the way to go. In full flood, caves look quite different, and when hypothermic you begin to doubt your every thought. At that moment I began to genuinely believe that I was going to die in that cave. One kind of leader inspired confidence and the other had quite the opposite effect.

In the text for this study we look at Jesus as the great high priest through whom we can approach God's throne with confidence and whose example we are to follow, so before we look at the passage in detail, why not share if you have ever known inspirational and encouraging leaders or managers, and what their qualities were that so inspired you.

Read Hebrews 4:14 – 5:10

The High Priest had to be in the line of Aaron, offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as for the people, and was only allowed to go through the veil into the Holy of Holies once a year on the day of

Atonement. Jesus is clearly shown by the author later as being in the order of Melchizedek (a high priest whose line predates that of Aaron, but as if that isn't enough, Jesus is of course in the line of God. He was however fully human, yet sinless, requiring no sacrifice for his own deeds, and has gone through the veil into Heaven to remain in the presence of God.

- ✘ How important is it to you that Jesus was tempted in every way just as we are? Why is that?
- ✘ What does it mean to you that Jesus has sympathy with our weaknesses?
- ✘ What does it mean to you that we can approach the throne of Grace with confidence? The encouragement to do so in the words "Let us then approach" suggest that we should praying a lot more than we do, but if we step up our prayers what will "grace to help us in our time of need" mean to you?
- ✘ It surprised me to consider that even Jesus was called by God (Heb 5:5). How does this make you feel about the role of Jesus? What about whatever God is calling you to do? If you believe that God isn't calling you to anything, could you re-read Heb 4:16 as a starter?
- ✘ Reading Heb 5:7 how do we need to change our approach to prayer? What do you make of the association between submission and heard prayers?
- ✘ Is there an area in your life where you know you have yet to submit to God? Do you believe that God is "Hearing" your prayers despite this?
- ✘ What does the phrase "learned obedience from what he suffered" say about any suffering we might experience? Despite the truth in this statement, how should we approach the suffering of others?
- ✘ "Once made perfect..." Wasn't Jesus already perfect? What is

your understanding of this?

- ✘ John 3:16 says salvation is for whoever “believes” in Jesus. Heb 5:9 says “Obey”. One is definitely easier to accept than the other, but what difference might it make if we live to the standard set out in Hebrews?
- ✘ Originally, people only had access to God through the High Priest, but if Jesus is the high priest, what does this mean to our relationship with God? You’d be surprised at the number of times I’m asked to pray for people (not there and then but later when I’m praying) because in some way people still have a priestly model of access to God via the priest in mind. However we can approach the throne of Grace with confidence.

Jesus was tempted yet sinless, sympathetic to our weaknesses, called by God, totally submitted to God, obedient through suffering, and yet made perfect through his resurrection into heaven for eternity. And these are merely the attributes mentioned in Hebrews 4:14 – 5:10. It is hardly surprising that Jesus is regarded as the most charismatic and wonderful leader of all time. Many hundreds of thousands of people over the centuries have followed Jesus into and through the most dreadful of situations, sometimes even to the point of losing their lives for the sake of his gospel and the fact that despite the cost, Jesus is the only one it truly makes sense to follow.

Spend some time in prayer thanking Jesus for his example and asking for the strength, courage, obedience and submission to be the followers he has asked us to be.

Study 7: Hebrews 5:11-6:12

Maturity in Christ

I remember starting at secondary school and the maths lessons that we had in the first week. The school wanted to assess the ability of every new pupil, and so for four consecutive lessons we did a maths tests. Each test paper was a laminated sheet with about 75 -100 questions on it: the first sheet dealt with addition, the second sheet with subtraction, the third sheet with multiplication and the final sheet with division. On each sheet question number 1 was very, very easy with each subsequent question being a little more difficult. I remember laughing out loud as I was given the first test paper. The first question? $1+1$! Although we had 50 minutes to do the test, I completed it in about 15 minutes! And scored 100%.

I now understand that the class was very mixed ability and the school was trying to find out who knew what. Whilst I did well in these tests, there were others who had never been taught to do simple additions and subtractions, and they really struggled. For me, though, it was like going back to nursery school and covering ground I had first covered at my mother's knee. I was not impressed!

From chapter 5 verse 11 onwards the writer of Hebrews starts to let his frustration with the church show. He wanted to be teaching more complex ideas to the church and feels that by now they ought even to be teachers themselves. However, he is having to keep going over 'elementary' ideas with them and feels that the church ought to be back in nursery school. Instead of solid meat, the church is still living of babies milk - and as a result they are not thriving in the way they should.

Read Hebrews 5:11 to 6:12

- ✘ Are there areas of your Christian faith where you feel that your knowledge is more immature than other areas? Are there some areas where you are stronger in your knowledge and more mature?

In 6:1-2 the writer lists the elementary teaching which form a foundation to our life in Christ, and which we ought to move on from as we mature. These elementary teachings are:

- Repentance from acts which lead to death
- Faith in God
- Instructions about Baptism
- Instructions about laying on of hands
- Resurrection of the dead
- Eternal Judgement

- ✠ Do you feel mature in your understanding of these areas? Do some of these subjects seem quite complex to you/
- ✠ What do you think is meant by “acts which lead to death”? Some commentators think this is sin in our life. Others think it might be about relying on the Law and the act of following the Law, which do not lead to salvation without faith. They translate this verse as “repentance from dead works.” Which do you think and why?
- ✠ What do you think is meant by “Instructions about baptism”? The Greek word used here is plural rather than singular and it is not the normal word used in the New Testament to refer to baptism. The normal word translated baptism in the New Testament is baptisma. This word is baptisimos which is only used in two other places in the New Testament (Mark 7:4 and Hebrews 9:10). In both passages the word refers to Jewish ceremonial washings. Thus instruction about baptisms is a reference to teaching about Jewish ceremonial washings.
- ✠ What do you think is meant by “Instructions about laying on of hands”? In the New Testament laying on of hands is used to set someone aside for a special office or job (cf. Acts 6:6); for the filling with the Holy Spirit (cf Acts 8:17) and for healing (cf Acts 28:8. What do you think is being referred to here in Hebrews and why?

- ✠ In Hebrews 6:6 the writer talks about those who 'fall away.' What do you think he means by this?
- ✠ The writer seems to suggest in verses 4-6 that if someone gives their life to Jesus (is 'enlightened'), and then falls away through sin, that they cannot be brought back to repentance again. In other words, if a Christian turns away from Jesus, they cannot have a second chance. What do you think of this? What else might the writer mean?
- ✠ Can you think of cases in scripture of people being given a second chance after turning their back on God? How do we hold these examples together in our thinking with Hebrews 6:4-6?

Traditionally there are two schools of thought when it comes to Christians and sin and salvation. The first (Arminianism) says that people can exercise free will and having become a Christian they can still choose to walk away from their salvation and lose it. The second view (Calvinism) says that believers cannot lose their salvation because of God's predestination. Therefore if an apparent believer turns back to sin then we know they were never truly a Christian in the first place.

- ✠ Are you a Calvinist or an Arminianist in your understanding of sin and salvation? Can someone lose their salvation? If someone does appear to lose their salvation, were they ever saved in the first place?
- ✠ Imagine a situation: a person attends a Billy Graham rally and responds at the altar call. They go forward, say the 'sinners prayer' and ask Jesus into their life. As far as they are concerned, they really believe it and have every intention of following Jesus for the rest of their life. Later they are baptised, join a church and begin serving. However, at a later date they fall into sin, stop going to church, and stop serving God. They still believe in God, but choose their sinful lifestyle over following Jesus. One night, they are involved in an accident and die. Where are they going? Was the 'deal sealed' that night at the

Billy Graham rally, or has their subsequent sin disqualified them from salvation?

- ✠ Do you know people who have chosen a sinful lifestyle over serving Jesus? Without necessarily naming names, close your session by praying for those people. Also pray for our congregation and those who have recently given their lives to Christ (especially our young people) that they will remain faithful to the end.

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