
Reflections on the Book

Various³⁸

Russ Kennedy

What I have learned to love from Hebrews...

I want to share some personal reflections and responses to selected texts. I have thought about these a lot over the last year. I have not written them as a manuscript. And so, from my heart in this moment out of 41 years of teaching the book...

The Majestic Supremacy of Jesus Christ

Hebrews 1:1-3

¹ Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. ² And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe. ³ The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven.

Worship Jesus in the unfathomable mystery of being His Father's glory.

The Sufficient Finality of Jesus' Sacrifice

Hebrews 9:6-15

⁶ These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, ⁷ but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. ⁸ By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing ⁹ (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, ¹⁰ but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will

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the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

¹⁵ Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

Revel in the finished work of Jesus that not only saves our souls but cleanses our consciences.

The Magnificent Greatness of the New Covenant

Hebrews 10:11-18

¹¹ Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. ¹² But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand. ¹³ There he waits until his enemies are humbled and made a footstool under his feet. ¹⁴ For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy.

¹⁵ And the Holy Spirit also testifies that this is so. For he says,

¹⁶ "This is the new covenant I will make with my people on that day, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds."

¹⁷ Then he says,

"I will never again remember their sins and lawless deeds."

¹⁸ And when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices.

Stand secure in the promises of the New Covenant.

The Eternal Sureness of God's Promises

Hebrews 6:13-20

¹³ For example, there was God's promise to Abraham. Since there was no one greater to swear by, God took an oath in his own name, saying: ¹⁴ "I will certainly bless you, and I will multiply your descendants beyond number."

¹⁵ Then Abraham waited patiently, and he received what God had promised.

¹⁶ Now when people take an oath, they call on someone greater than themselves to hold them to it. And without any question that oath is binding. ¹⁷ God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind. ¹⁸ So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. ¹⁹ This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary. ²⁰ Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Wait patiently for the fulfillment of God's sure promises.

The Central Importance of Enduing Faith

Hebrews 10:32–39

³² Think back on those early days when you first learned about Christ. Remember how you remained faithful even though it meant terrible suffering. ³³ Sometimes you were exposed to public ridicule and were beaten, and sometimes you helped others who were suffering the same things. ³⁴ You suffered along with those who were thrown into jail, and when all you owned was taken from you, you accepted it with joy. You knew there were better things waiting for you that will last forever.

³⁵ So do not throw away this confident trust in the Lord. Remember the great reward it brings you! ³⁶ Patient endurance is what you need now, so that you will continue to do God's will. Then you will receive all that he has promised.

³⁷ "For in just a little while, the Coming One will come and not delay. ³⁸ And my righteous ones will live by faith. But I will take no pleasure in anyone who turns away."

³⁹ But we are not like those who turn away from God to their own destruction. We are the faithful ones, whose souls will be saved.

Hebrews 11:13–16

¹³ All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth. ¹⁴ Obviously people who say such things are looking forward to a country they can call their own. ¹⁵ If they had longed for the country they came from, they could have gone back. ¹⁶ But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Look forward by a faith that endures until the heavenly land is in our sight.

The Grave Danger for False Professions

Hebrews 2:1

¹ So we must listen very carefully to the truth we have heard, or we may drift away from it.

Hebrews 3:12–19

¹² Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. ¹³ You must warn each other every day, while it is still "today," so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. ¹⁴ For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ. ¹⁵ Remember what it says:

"Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled."

¹⁶ And who was it who rebelled against God, even though they heard his voice? Wasn't it the people Moses led out of Egypt? ¹⁷ And who made God angry for forty years? Wasn't it the people who sinned, whose corpses lay in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom was God speaking when he took an oath that they would never enter his rest? Wasn't it the people who disobeyed him? ¹⁹ So we see that because of their unbelief they were not able to enter his rest.

Hebrews 5:11–6:12

¹¹ There is much more we would like to say about this, but it is difficult to explain, especially since you are spiritually dull and don't seem to listen. ¹² You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food. ¹³ For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn't know how to do what is right. ¹⁴ Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong.

¹ So let us stop going over the basic teachings about Christ again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding. Surely we don't need to start again with the fundamental importance of repenting from evil deeds and placing our faith in God. ² You don't need further instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And so, God willing, we will move forward to further understanding.

⁴ For it is impossible to bring back to repentance those who were once enlightened—those who have experienced the good things of heaven and shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the age to come—⁶ and who then turn away from God. It is impossible to bring such people back to repentance; by rejecting the Son of God, they themselves are nailing him to the cross once again and holding him up to public shame.

⁷ When the ground soaks up the falling rain and bears a good crop for the farmer, it has God's blessing. ⁸ But if a field bears thorns and thistles, it is useless. The farmer will soon condemn that field and burn it.

⁹ Dear friends, even though we are talking this way, we really don't believe it applies to you. We are confident that you are meant for better things, things that come with salvation. ¹⁰ For God is not unjust. He will not forget how hard you have worked for him and how you have shown your love to him by caring for other believers, as you still do. ¹¹ Our great desire is that you will keep on loving others as long as life lasts, in order to make certain that what you hope for will come true. ¹² Then you will not become spiritually dull and indifferent. Instead, you will follow the example of those who are going to inherit God's promises because of their faith and endurance.

Make certain that your faith is genuine as it believes God in His promises and warnings.

The Great Need for Biblical Community**Hebrews 10:19–25**

¹⁹ And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. ²⁰ By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. ²¹ And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, ²² let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

²³ Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. ²⁴ Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. ²⁵ And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

Hebrews 12:12–17

¹² So take a new grip with your tired hands and strengthen your weak knees. ¹³ Mark out a straight path for your feet so that those who are weak and lame will not fall but become strong.

¹⁴ Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord. ¹⁵ Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many. ¹⁶ Make sure that no one is immoral or godless like Esau, who traded his birthright as the firstborn son for a single meal. ¹⁷ You know that afterward, when he wanted his father's blessing, he was rejected. It was too late for repentance, even though he begged with bitter tears.

Love the God's community of people you are gathering and members with.

Introduce the series starting next week.

Closing

- Worship Jesus in the unfathomable mystery of being His Father's glory.
- Revel in the finished work of Jesus that not only saves our souls but cleanses our consciences.
- Stand secure in the promises of the New Covenant.
- Wait patiently for the fulfillment of God's sure promises.
- Look forward by a faith that endures until the heavenly land is in our sight.
- Make certain that your faith is genuine as it believes God in His promises and warnings.
- Love the God's community of people you are gathering and members with.

Hebrews 13:20–21

²⁰ Now may the God of peace—
 who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus,
 the great Shepherd of the sheep,
 and ratified an eternal covenant with his blood—

²¹ may he equip you with all you need
 for doing his will.

May he produce in you,

through the power of Jesus Christ,
every good thing that is pleasing to him.
All glory to him forever and ever! Amen.