

HOLINESS REVEALED

SERMON NOTES

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These sermon notes are to be used in conjunction with *Holiness Revealed: A Devotional Study in Hebrews* by Amy Reardon in partnership with The Salvation Army (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2015).

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ABOUT THESE NOTES



These sermon notes provide a six-week series, based on *Holiness Revealed: A Devotional Study in Hebrews* by Amy Reardon. In *Holiness Revealed*, the author combines keen insight and conversational, easy-to-understand writing to help readers learn Hebrews' message about holiness. As you lead your people through this study in Hebrews, you will learn why a holy life is so important, not only to our holy God, but also to our daily victory over sin.

WEEK 1

THE INCOMPARABLE CHRIST

HEBREWS 1:1-14



INTRODUCTION

Do you have 20/20 vision? If you do, you can see clearly at twenty feet what you should normally see at that distance. If your vision is 20/100, you have to be as close as twenty feet to see what someone with normal vision can see at a hundred feet. The Hebrews, to whom the epistle of Hebrews was written, seemed to have a vision problem. They had begun to focus so much attention on Judaism that they were beginning to lose sight of who Jesus is and what he does. They needed a vision adjustment. For one thing, they needed to see that Jesus Christ is incomparable.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. He Alone Is Perfect

The Hebrews' ancestors were people of faith, but because they were human, they were flawed. They were imperfect, but Israel's Messiah was perfect. Not even the most revered prophet or priest could compare with him.

A. God's Perfect Spokesperson (Heb. 1:1-2)

A self-confident preacher told his congregation he didn't have to prepare his sermons. He claimed, "I just open my mouth, and the Lord fills it."

One of his church members remarked to another: "And when he preaches, we wonder if that's the best the Lord can do."

Unlike that self-confident preacher, the Old Testament prophets spoke and wrote what God had given them, but Jesus not only spoke the truth, he was the truth (John 14:6).

B. God's Perfect Representation (Heb. 1:2–3)

Jesus embodied God's message (John 1:1, 14, 18). He was God's end-times messenger who spoke with authority (Matt. 7:29). Jesus told Philip, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

The writer of Hebrews identified Jesus as God's appointed heir of all things, the agent of creation (Heb. 1:2), and "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (v. 3). No one can compare with Jesus.

C. God's Perfect Savior (Heb. 1:3)

Jesus did what no one else could do. He died to cleanse us of sins, and then sat down at God's right hand, signifying his saving work was complete and fully acceptable to the Father (v. 3).

Instead of looking for salvation through church, individuals, charitable giving, good citizenship, good works, or something else, we must look in faith to Jesus alone for salvation (Acts 4:12).

II. He Alone Is Preeminent

The writer of Hebrews pointed out that Jesus Christ is "much superior to the angels" (1:4). He followed this declaration by identifying him as the Son of God and the sovereign of the universe.

A. As the Son of God (Heb. 1:4–6)

God never called an angel his son, but he called Jesus his Son and summoned all the angels to worship him (vv. 5–6).

In modern times, many people have been drawn into the worship of angels, but all such worship is ill placed. Only Jesus deserves our worship, and the angels' worship as well.

B. As Sovereign of the Universe (Heb. 1:7–14)

We may appreciate the role of angels in serving God (vv. 7, 14), but only Jesus Christ is worthy our worship. He occupies the throne at God's right hand. His kingdom is characterized by righteousness, and God has exalted him (vv. 7–9). The Lord created all things. Unlike the creation, he is unchanging and eternal (vv. 10–12). Someday, he will subdue his enemies (v. 13).

CONCLUSION

Christ is incomparable, and as such he deserves our lifelong love, worship, and loyalty. We must not allow anything or anyone to divert our commitment from him.

WEEK 2

AVAILABLE REST

HEBREWS 3:16–19; 4:9–11, 14–16



INTRODUCTION

How much rest does the average person need? It's hard to say, because individual needs vary. Infants seem to need about sixteen hours of sleep per day, but most adults do well with seven or eight hours sleep. Some adults require ten hours sleep, whereas others can get by on only five hours.

In spite of how much daily rest we require, we should be delighted to know that God offers us perfect rest.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Eternal Rest

A. An Earthly Rest Awaited Israel (Heb. 3:16–19)

The Israelites could have entered the Promised Land three months after leaving Egypt. God had promised them a land flowing with milk and honey, and their spies had returned from the Promised Land with clear evidence of its productivity (Num. 13:23–26). However, ten of the twelve spies discouraged the people with their report of giant adversaries in the land. Only two spies, Joshua and Caleb, urged the people to trust God and enter the land (vv. 30; 14:6–9). However, the Israelites refused to believe God and possess the land. Consequently, they had to wander in the wilderness for forty years until the unbelieving generation all died.

Unbelief kept the people from entering an earthly rest.

B. A Heavenly Rest Awaits Us (Heb. 4:9–13)

God promises heavenly rest (eternal rest) to all who believe in Jesus as Savior (vv. 9–10). However, those who reject Jesus and the promise of heavenly rest follow the example of the unbelieving Israelites in the wilderness and fail to receive the rest God promises (v. 11).

No one can fool God. His Word lays bare the thoughts and intents of the heart. He knows who believes and who doesn't (vv. 12–13).

You and I have a choice. We can believe in Jesus, whose redeeming work on the cross was sufficient to provide heavenly rest, or we can disbelieve and miss that rest. Hebrews 3:7–8 counsels, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

II. Daily Rest

A. He Understands Our Needs (Heb. 4:14–15)

Life can be frantic. We rush. We worry. We despair. But, according to Hebrews 4:14–15, Jesus is our High Priest in heaven. He urges us to find daily rest in him. He understands our needs and sympathizes with us, having been "tempted in every way, just as we are" (v. 15). Nevertheless, he did not sin.

Remember, Jesus told us to come to him and take his yoke upon us to find rest, because his yoke is easy and his burden is light (Matt. 11:18–30).

B. He Responds to Our Prayers (Heb. 4:16)

We have a choice. We can pray or worry. Someone has asked, "Why pray, when you can worry?" And it seems some Christians would rather worry than pray. But Hebrews 4:16 invites us to pray, confidently carrying our concerns to Jesus. If we pray confidently, we will receive mercy and grace in the nick of time.

CONCLUSION

Rest, heavenly and daily, results from trusting in Jesus.

Hymn writer and poet Fanny Crosby wrote the poem "All the Way My Savior Leads Me." In it she writes, "Perfect rest to me is promised in my Father's house above." We might write a postscript to her words, and say, "Perfect rest to me is promised in my heart down here below."

WEEK 3

OUR PERFECT HIGH PRIEST

HEBREWS 7:23–28



INTRODUCTION

The writer of Hebrews had been showing his readers that what the gospel offered was far better than what Judaism offered. However, his readers were having a hard time living by faith. The visible trappings of Judaism were luring them away from the gospel. What they could see: Jewish priests, the temple, the rituals, and the sacrifices seemed to exert a stronger appeal than what they could not see. They could not see Jesus, for example.

If it seems hard to live today by faith, Hebrews 7:23–28 can shore up our faith and help us live for Jesus. We may not see him in the flesh, but what he brings to our lives is far superior to what the priests of Judaism brought to the Jews.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Our High Priest, Jesus, Lives Forever

A. His Priesthood Is Permanent (Heb. 7:23–24)

Christianity is different from all the religions of the world, because Jesus arose from the grave, whereas the bodies of founders of the world's religions are in graves. Even the most faithful priest in Old Testament times died, and those who were still ministering when Hebrews was written were also going to die. The ministry of every priest was therefore temporary. However, Jesus, our High Priest, lives forever. His priesthood is therefore permanent.

B. His Salvation Is Complete (Heb. 7:25)

Because Jesus lives forever as our High Priest, he saves us completely. In heaven, he intercedes for us. No trial or burden is too great for him to handle. He doesn't simply save us from our sins and then leave us. He helps us all along our pilgrimage, and will welcome us in heaven.

II. Our High Priest, Jesus, Is Perfect

None of us are perfect, and we can never find a perfect friend if we searched the entire human race, but our Friend in heaven who intercedes for us is perfect.

A. He Possesses a Perfect Character (Heb. 7:26)

The writer to the Hebrews pointed out that Jesus meets our need. He is "holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens" (v. 26). The apostle Peter described Jesus as "a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Pet. 1:19) and that Jesus "committed no sin" (2:22).

It is no wonder the Father declared, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17).

Often, jewelers display sparkling diamonds on black velvet. The contrast between the brilliance of the diamonds and the blackness of the velvet is striking. In contrast to the darkness of sin that pervades humanity, Jesus stands alone as pure and free of sin.

B. He Presented a Perfect Sacrifice (Heb. 7:27–28)

Israel's high priests were imperfect. Like all human beings, they were sinners, and therefore they had to offer sacrifices for their own sins and also for the sins of the people. But Jesus, our High Priest, offered a one-time-for-all-time sacrifice for our sins (v. 27).

On the cross, when Jesus atoned for our sins, he cried out, "It is finished" (John 19:30). He completed the work of our redemption. Nothing needs to be added to Jesus' saving work. Indeed, nothing can be added to it.

Under the law, imperfect priests were appointed; but after the law, God swore by an oath that Jesus was a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4; Heb. 7:28). Our eternal, perfect High Priest not only offered a perfect sacrifice, he was the perfect sacrifice!

CONCLUSION

We cannot see Jesus, but he sees us and lives forever on our behalf. Someday we will see him face-to-face, but until then let's not let anyone or any system of religion detract us from him and his ministry.

WEEK 4

MESSAGES FROM THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

HEBREWS 9:3



INTRODUCTION

The ark of the covenant played an extremely important role in the life of Israel. Located in the Holy of Holies, often called the Most Holy Place, in the tabernacle, it represented God's presence. When the Israelites marched into battle, the priests carried the ark in order to assure victory over the enemy.

In several ways, the ark of the covenant conveys significant messages about Christ and his ministry. We will cover three of those messages.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. The Message about Christ's Nature

The ark of the covenant was constructed of wood overlaid with pure gold.

A. Wood Symbolized Jesus' Humanity

Jesus was human like us, except he was sinless (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 7:26; 1 Pet. 1:18–19).

B. Pure Gold Symbolized Jesus' Deity

Jesus was God in the flesh (John 1:1, 14; Heb. 1:2, 8).

We must not minimize either Jesus' true humanity or his true deity. On the cross, he perfectly represented humankind and God and reconciled each to the other.

We ought to appreciate Jesus' true humanity and realize he understands our temptations, trials, sorrows, and needs.

II. The Message about God's Presence in Christ

A. The Ark Symbolized God's Presence

God met his people at the ark. Jesus is the focal point of God's presence. He is Immanuel, "God with us" (Matt. 1:23), and Paul wrote that "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:19). God meets sinners when they come to Jesus for salvation (John 14:6).

B. The Ark Was Portable

Four rings were located on the ark so the Levites could put staves through them and transport the ark when the tabernacle was moved from location to location. God's presence is with us wherever we go (Matt. 28:18–20; Heb. 13:5).

III. The Message about Christ's Sacrifice

A. Blood Was Sprinkled on the Ark

When the ark stood in the Holy of Holies, once a year on the Day of Atonement, Israel's high priest carried the blood of sacrificial animals through the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. First, he sprinkled blood on the seat or covering of the ark to atone for his own sins, and then he sprinkled blood on the lid (the mercy seat) to atone for the sins of the people (Lev. 16:14–15; Heb. 7:27).

Jesus shed his blood once and for all for our sins (Heb. 9:11–12).

First John 2:2 refers to Jesus as "the atoning sacrifice for our sins." The Greek word translated "atoning sacrifice" means "mercy seat." Just as the blood sprinkled on the mercy seat came between the commandments inside the ark and the gaze of a holy God, so Jesus' blood came between the Commandments we had broken and God.

B. Angels Looked Down onto the Mercy Seat

Angels are not the recipients of redemption; sinners are. However angels are inquisitive about our redemption (1 Pet. 1:12).

CONCLUSION

The ark of the covenant was off limits to the people of Israel, but Jesus invites everyone to come to him (Matt. 11:28–30). If you haven't come to him for salvation, why not come to him today in faith? Jesus promised he will never drive away whoever comes to him (John 6:37).

WEEK 5

INCENTIVES AND EXHORTATIONS

HEBREWS 10:19–25



INTRODUCTION

An incentive is something that causes someone or some group to perform an action. Car dealerships may offer incentives to persuade us to buy a car. A rebate is one example of an incentive. Zero percent interest is another.

Christians enjoy incentives. The writer mentions two of them in Hebrews 10:19–21 and exhorts us to do certain things because of our incentives.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. The Incentives

A. Access into the Most Holy Place (Heb. 10:19–20)

What a privilege we have to be able to enter God’s presence because Jesus shed his blood to make it possible! Through him, the way to God is open. It is “a new and living way” (v. 20). In Old Testament times, only Israel’s high priest could enter the Most Holy Place and only once a year. But we can enter God’s presence at any time and wherever we are.

Wouldn’t you feel privileged if you could have an audience with the president or prime minister or queen any time you chose? How much greater is our privilege to access God’s presence any time we choose to do so?

B. A Great Priest over the House of God (Heb. 10:21)

Priests took turns ministering in the temple, but Jesus, our High Priest, ministers over the church, the house of God (v. 21). He is available at God's right hand all the time for all members of the church. Unlike Israel's priests, he lives forever. What an incentive to avail ourselves of his ministry!

II. The Exhortations

A. Draw Near (Heb. 10:22)

At Mount Sinai the people of Israel were instructed to stand far off, but because of Mount Calvary and Jesus' subsequent resurrection and ascension, we are exhorted to "draw near to God" (v. 22).

We ought to draw near without hypocrisy, with full confidence, and having a clean conscience and outward cleanness.

Some interpret "our bodies washed" (v. 22) as a reference to baptism, but Amy Reardon in her book, *Holiness Revealed*, states, "As Hebrews has focused on change within the human heart and mind because of the blood of Christ, this [a life changed by the Holy Spirit] seems much more in line with the thrust of the book than the unprecedented mention of a sacrament" (pp. 166–167).

B. Hold Fast (Heb. 10:23)

Instead of drifting or abandoning our hope, we ought to keep our hope steadfast, knowing God is faithful. He will keep every promise.

The promises we find in Scripture are there to strengthen our faith and hope. We ought to memorize as many promises as we can. Then, when our faith and hope begin to sag, remembering and relying on God's promises will prop up our faith and hope.

C. Motivate One Another (Heb. 10:24)

Christians need one another. We ought to think about ways to motivate one another to be more loving and to do good deeds.

Perhaps a phone call, e-mail, card, or visit to a fellow believer may encourage him or her to do God's will today.

D. Keep Meeting (Heb. 10:25)

It has been said, "If absence makes the heart grow fonder, some people must really love church." Hebrews 10:25 exhorts us to meet together regularly. By doing so we encourage one another, and certainly we need encouragement as the day approaches.

Jesus will return—perhaps much sooner than we think. We do not know how much time remains to serve him, to grow spiritually, to walk in holiness, and to evangelize. We ought to make "the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:16).

CONCLUSION

Privilege begets responsibility. With the privilege of being a teacher comes the responsibility to educate students. With the privilege of coaching a baseball team comes the responsibility to help the players perform at their best and learn how to lose with honor as well as how to win. With the privilege of being a parent comes the responsibility to nurture, protect, and guide one's children. With the privilege of being Christians comes the responsibility to exercise faith in God and help our fellow believers honor him.

WEEK 6

FRUITS OF HOLINESS

HEBREWS 13:1–7, 18



INTRODUCTION

If you own an apple tree, you expect to find apples on it someday. If you own a cherry tree, you expect to enjoy the fruit of delicious cherries someday. If you take care of a fruit tree, you will not find bitter fruit on it. Similarly, if you lead a holy life, you and those who observe your life will see the fruit of holiness that the writer of Hebrews describes in Hebrews 13.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Helping Hands

A holy life is not simply a life of pious talk. True holiness shows in our walk. The Holy Spirit makes our hearts holy and extends that holiness to the sanctifying work of our hands.

A. Expressing Love (Heb. 13:1)

As Christians, we stretch out our hands in love to our fellow believers. If we see a need, we reach out with help. The apostle John wrote, “If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:17–18).

B. Extending Hospitality (Heb. 13:2)

Hospitality is almost missing from our culture. Many of us lead busy lives and therefore seldom entertain guests in our homes. Hebrews 13:2 tells us not to forget to entertain strangers. Opening our hearts and homes to others pleases God and blesses others.

Holiday Inns did not exist in the first century, and generally inns offered far less than quality accommodation. On pages 217–218 of *Holiness Revealed*, author Amy Reardon comments, “If a person was traveling, it could be dangerous to stay at an inn. It was important, therefore, for believers to provide food and shelter for other believers who were traveling or otherwise in need, not only for the benefit of fellowship, but to keep them safe.”

We should consider our homes part of our stewardship, and dedicate them to the Lord. We can show hospitality by accommodating traveling missionaries, hosting fellowship occasions, or inviting unsaved friends into our homes.

C. Empathizing with Prisoners (Heb. 13:3)

Probably the prisoners referred to in verse 3 were believers imprisoned for their faith. We should not forget those who are suffering a similar fate today. Nor should we fail to empathize with persecuted believers. Remembering those believers may involve giving money and material resources to help them. It certainly involves praying for them.

II. A Contented Heart

A. Satisfied with Basic Needs (Heb. 13:5)

How much money does it take to satisfy us? Just a little more? Undoubtedly Christians in Western nations have far more than their counterparts in many other countries. But it is far more important to have the Lord’s presence than all the gadgets and creature comforts we might think we need.

B. Satisfied with the Lord’s Presence (Heb. 13:5–6)

A young pastor, still spouting his knowledge of the Greek New Testament, quoted Hebrews 13:5 to an old saintly bed-ridden woman. He told her that in the Greek the verse contains a triple negative. He explained that God said, “I will never, no never leave you; never will I forsake you.”

The dear old saint looked the young pastor and then replied slowly with conviction, “Well, maybe the Lord had to say it three times for you unbelieving preachers, but once is good enough for me.”

We ought to be satisfied with the Lord’s constant presence and trust in him as our unfailing helper.

III. A Good Memory

A. Emulate Past Spiritual leaders (Heb. 13:7)

God gives spiritual leaders to the church for our good. Some pass away, and others move on to another field of service. But all of the past leaders who led holy lives are worthy our emulation. We should follow their example.

B. Pray for Present Spiritual Leaders (Heb. 13:18)

The writer of Hebrews requested prayer for himself and perhaps for unnamed associates as well. He wanted the Hebrews to pray that his conscience would be clear and he would live honorably. It is unfortunate that some pastors and others in ministry have fallen to

temptation. They failed the Lord and the Lord's people, but perhaps few, if any, believers prayed regularly for them. Pastors are human and subject to temptation. Prayer can help them resist temptation and lead a holy life.

CONCLUSION

The medical community tells us we should include fruit in our daily diet. Even more important, the fruits of holiness should be part of our daily life not only to benefit us, but also to benefit others. Are the fruits of holiness described in Hebrews 13 a part of your life?