

## *The quest for a better mousetrap.*

*We're always looking for something better, aren't we...*

- *The traps my dad had, were very old green painted steel ones. And they were the best, until they weren't.*
- *For a while, all we could get were those flimsy white pine ones that basically had these little steel staples to hold them together... They were never any good.*

*Most of the time, we don't even care about the mousetraps we do have, because it's been months or maybe years since the last mouse plague. And your traps (the ones that you very carefully selected because they were the best ones), they're probably stuck behind your fridge somewhere, out of sight, out of mind, and you don't even think about them...*

*My current mousetraps, I reckon are the best traps ever. I don't reckon they can get any better. They are the "RatSak" "FastKill". And they work a treat. Put a bit of peanut paste into them, and you'll catch that cunning creature in no time...*

*I'm a convert. I don't think I could get any better...*

*And yet I know, next time we have a mouse plague, one of you lot, are going to tell me about a new mousetrap – a **better** mousetrap.... And I'm going to go out and buy myself one, because we're always looking for something better...*

Obviously today, isn't about mousetraps... But just like mousetraps, sadly, for some, their "faith" can become something that goes through cycles of importance to them –

their faith may mean everything to them (today), but then in a few months' time, it becomes like the mousetrap stuck behind the fridge – it's forgotten – their faith fades into the background... But later on, maybe another need might arise, and all of a sudden, faith seems important again...

Or, the human quest to always look for something better, may lead to discontentment in one's spiritual experience. And never has this been more evident than what it is today. We have become a consumer culture, and many of us carry our consumerism into the church. Many are forever looking for a better spiritual experience to consume:

- A better church;
- A better band;
- More comfortable seats;
- A more dynamic speaker;
- People I can mix with, who are more like ourselves;
- A place where I can be served, and I don't have to do that much.

Or maybe it's a discontentment with the Christian life itself. A realisation that "Things are a bit tougher than I expected them to be.", may cause some to fall away and neglect their faith. And just like a mousetrap that isn't in use, a neglected "faith" can become so neglected, it becomes a thing of the past, and maybe even lost...

And if you've been a Christian for a while, you've seen:

- people come;
- them get excited;
- genuine faith flourish in them;

- them be passionate about their faith; and inviting others; and being excited to be a follower of Jesus,,,

But you've also seen:

- some fall away;
- some, who were passionate, lose their fire;
- some walk away from Jesus altogether...

And it broke your heart, didn't it...

Today, we begin our new series on Hebrews. And I don't really know how to categorise Hebrews. It's sort of a letter, but only in the way it ends. It's actually more of a written sermon, then what it is a letter. We don't know who it's written to. We don't know who wrote it.

The reason it's called "Hebrews" is because it quotes a lot of the Old Testament, and that would only make sense if it were written to people who are very familiar with the Old Testament (such as the Hebrews). "Hebrews" is just another name for the "Jews". (It is their Scriptures, that are being quoted).

But having said that, most Bible Scholars today, believe that it was written to a church somewhere near Rome (because at the end of the letter, it says: those who are in Italy send their greetings. In other words, they know them – as if they are neighbours).

And so, it is highly likely, that Hebrews was written to a church that had sprung up (like so many other churches), from within a local synagogue (because that's where the likes of Paul and Silas used to preach. When they came to town, their first port of call, would be the local synagogue. And there, they would show from the Jewish Scriptures, that Jesus is the Messiah).

Now, at the local synagogue, you would find both Jews and the God-Fearing Gentiles – that is the non-Jews who worshipped the God of the Jews. And this letter comes across as if it was written to both: To the Jews; and also to the Gentiles who knew the Scriptures, because they've been worshipping in a local synagogue with the Jews.

Now, why am I telling you all this? It's because it helps us to understand the context of the letter. Hebrews is a very pastoral letter,,,,, and yet it's heavy in Theology. He is addressing a very pastoral concern. The concern is that with the increase of persecution, some were:

- hiding their faith;
- sliding from their faith;
- beginning to question, “Is it really worth it?”
- wondering, “Is this Christianity thing, worth the extra cost?”

Before they became Christians (you see), it wasn't so tough. As Jews, they were much more accepted in their culture, whereas Christians were becoming outlawed...

And it seems, that some had fallen from their faith.

And so, the writer of Hebrews, was showing a very pastoral concern for those who fall away. And he endeavoured to strengthen the faith of these Christians, by helping them to understand:

- the significance of Christ;
- the depth of Who He is;
- how great/better He is than anything else...
  
- there is no greater calling, than to be a follower of Jesus...

If you are looking for something better, you are not going to find it. And yes, it is worth the cost.

You see, “feelings” and “experiences” may draw a person closer to God,, but it is **knowing** God, and knowing Who He is, and knowing the vast richness of His Son – that’s what holds us close/strong...

And to explain this, he begins his letter-sermon with the revelation of God. God speaks... In what other religion, does God speak? Why is it worth following Jesus? Because through Jesus, God speaks.

It amazes me, the places where people will search today, in their quest for spiritual enlightenment, and yet they will not look to Jesus... But Jesus is the one through Whom God speaks.

At one time, God spoke through the prophets. He didn't speak to everybody. By His Holy Spirit, He spoke through certain individuals, known as the prophets. But when Jesus came, He didn't have to use prophets – He spoke through His Own Son.

And the image we're given here, is Jesus Christ (the Son of God), is God.

You see, Jesus Christ: He wasn't only there at creation – He **did** the creating. It was **through** Jesus Christ, that God created the world... And this is how Jesus Christ is described:

- He is the radiance of the glory of God
- He is the exact imprint of his nature  
In other words, when you meet the Son, you've met with God.
- He is the one who upholds the universe by the word of his power

Some people like to think that the universe is like a great big clock, that somehow came into being, and that it is self-sustaining, gradually winding down... Let's think about that for a moment:

Do you know what makes this Earth orbit the Sun? A physicist would tell us, that it's a combination of velocity and gravity... That's how a satellite orbits the Earth. The closer it is to the earth, the faster it has to be travelling, otherwise it would crash into the earth... But somehow, the earth is tethered to the Sun by gravity...

And science can describe gravity, but it still has no idea why gravity as a force exists.

It's like there is something unknown, that upholds the universe... It's Jesus. Jesus **upholds the universe by the word of his power** ...

How powerful is that? This is Jesus Whom we worship. And this Jesus, is the one who has saved us.

- It is Jesus who at the cross, made purification for our sins. No other god/religion can purify anyone from sin. In fact, the rejection of the one true God, and rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ, **is** the very definition of sin...
- He is the one who sits down at the right hand of God
- He is the one who is far superior to the angels...

You see, Jesus is not like a mousetrap. You're not going to find a better one... And a key theme of this letter, is just how much better, Jesus is...

When I was a kid, we used to sing a song:

*God is better than football;  
God is better than beer;  
God is better than cricket,  
'Cos God's here all the year...*

A very shallow song, but it's expressing a truth of Hebrews: God, revealed in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is better than anything else. The Greek words for "better"; "superior"

“more excellent” are used no less than 15 times throughout this very short letter.

Does that give you a hint as to what Hebrews is about?

Nothing can compare to Jesus. It is right, to leave everything to follow Jesus. And once we begin following Jesus, never back-off; Always remember how marvellous He is.

- No other god (false god), can compare to Jesus;
- No other spiritual experience compares to Jesus;
- No opportunity in life comes close to knowing Jesus...

And if I fall away from following Jesus (in the search for something else), that demonstrates that I don't really know Him; Or I don't value Him...

Most of us have a deep desire for God to speak to us. And sometimes we crave, “God, give me direction”... Essentially, we're wanting God to make our decisions for us... But the thing is, God has already spoken, and He has spoken very clearly. He has spoken through His Son...

At the end of January, we finished our series on the Gospel of Luke. It took us 2 years, to get through the teaching of Jesus contained within that one Gospel. And every word of it, was God speaking through His Son.

There:

- were powerful words;
- were challenging words;
- confronting and convicting words...



God speaking through His Son... And how much of it do we remember? Maybe we need to read it again, because God speaks to us through his Son.

And through Jesus Christ, God reveals His very nature to us.

- The radiance of the glory of God;
- The exact imprint of His nature...

And through Jesus, we discover:

- the Love of God;
- the Grace of God;
- the Mercy of God;
- the Justice of God;

We discover:

- that He is Saviour
- that He is Redeemer;
- That He is Lord.

Last weekend we celebrated Easter – The death of Jesus on Good Friday; His resurrection on Easter Sunday. At the Cross, Jesus revealed God as He truly is. He revealed the love of God, and the sacrificial nature of God. And at His empty tomb, we experience the power of God.

This is a power far superior to that of any Angel.

When it comes to the Spirit World, Jesus Christ is **much** superior to the Angels... Satan and his demons are but fallen angels, and Jesus is far superior to them. He is all powerful. He is ruler; He is conqueror....

When it comes to a spiritual battle, there is no doubt, who holds the victory... His Name is above every other name...

To Him be the kingdom;  
the power; and  
the glory,  
for ever...

So, this has been an introduction to Hebrews.

Hebrews begins, by telling us that God speaks. And in this letter, we're going to be reminded (often), of where God spoke in the Old Testament, and how that's still relevant to us today. We're going to be reminded of the faith of the heroes of the Old Testament; And we're going to encounter Jesus speaking to us today.

When we get to **Hebrews 4:12** we're going to hear: <sup>12</sup> For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. <sup>13</sup> And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

God speaks. And I pray, that as we study this book of Hebrews, the Lord will speak to you and I (through His word/Son). I pray that the Word of God, will be like a surgeon's scalpel, cutting deep, cutting away the sinful flesh

(that God wants to free us of), making way for pure, spiritual growth in Christ.

That's my prayer. And if you want to make it your prayer, say "Amen".

Amen.