

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Third Sunday after Easter, April 22, 2018

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 381,528:11-12,156,528:1-6,535:1-2

Lessons: Psalm 69:1-19, Hebrews 11:39-12:3, John 6:61-69.

Sermon Text: Hebrews 1:1-4.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Have you chosen the wrong path?

This is a question which the letter to the Hebrews, more properly called ‘the letter to the Hebrew Christians’ talks about. You have made choices and sacrifices. You have chosen to avoid many things of this world. You have chosen to follow what you believed was the Word of God taught and practiced in its truth and purity.

But haven’t you sometimes had doubts about whether or not you have chosen correctly? You look at what’s happening around you. You think about family, about acquaintances, about those around you in school and at work and in the world and see what they are doing, and things seem to be going well with them. Many who have no regard or no respect for God’s Word seem to be prospering in the world.

We see other churches and the things they do and sometimes think that the grass looks greener elsewhere.

We hear people disagreeing with and attacking our faith with seemingly logical arguments. We even endure others making fun of our religion and we are mocked for what we believe. We are upset and hurt when we hear what others think about and even tell us about our convictions, about our faith, about our church.

This sermon isn’t so much about a defense of our church but a defense of our faith and whom we, by the working of the Holy Spirit, have chosen to follow. This is a sermon about

WHOM WE FOLLOW

- 1. Many had their doubts about following Jesus,**
- 2. But Jesus is superior to the religion the Hebrews remembered.**

As you read the whole letter to the Hebrew Christians, and I hope you will take the 25 or 30 minutes necessary to read the whole book, you realize that the author, who is unknown to us, is speaking to Jews, to the Hebrews who have chosen to follow Jesus Christ, believing him to be the Messiah, the great high priest who would atone for all their sins. But things have happened to make them doubt their choice. This book reinforces the idea that they have made the right decision in following Jesus. May we, too, find comfort that we have made the right choice.

This book is a record of fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies and laws. It contains lots of Jewish history and discussion of the Old Testament and it shows how Jesus Christ fulfilled it all in order to earn salvation for mankind. This book also gives great insight into the Jewish religion and particularly the Jewish Christians.

The writer begins with a discussion that reminds us of the verbal inspiration of Scriptures. *“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.”* That’s a mouthful! The first readers of this letter knew the Old Testament. They knew Moses, who had recorded the first five books of the Bible. They knew Abraham, their ancestral father and his descendants as

recorded in the Scriptures. They knew the prophets and the Psalms. They knew what God had said. And now even in this letter God was speaking to them, to us, and to and for all mankind. ***“In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.”*** This book is all about the Son of God, who came down to earth and fulfilled, completed all that God said the Redeemer, the Savior would do.

Right away in the first verses of this book we read that ***“The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.”***

Then, in the words after our sermon text, God shows in verse after verse how Jesus is superior to the angels, superior to Moses, and superior to the priests of the Old Testament. The main purpose of this letter was to establish the superiority of Jesus. Jesus is better than angels, the prophets of the Old Testament, Moses, the law, the old covenant, the priesthood, the tabernacle and the temple, and the Jewish sacrificial system. Jesus' death on the cross fulfilled the Old Testament.

The letter aims to guide God's people into God's eternal rest - his promised land of heaven which is a far better promised land than the land of Canaan turned out to be after God's people settled there in the time of Joshua.

This book is intended to strengthen our faith in Jesus and what he did. This very letter tells us that ***“faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”*** Hebrews 11:1 (NIV) Faith is the stance God's people take as they persevere in confidence toward the goal of heaven. The letter concludes with admonitions and encouragement for all Christians to strive to live a God-pleasing life. It is also an appeal to sanctification, pleading that all followers of Jesus be holy and follow everything Christ has commanded us.

The author of Hebrews is writing to Jewish Christians. These followers of Jesus appear to be tempted to go back to Judaism or at least some hybrid version of Christianity mixed with Judaism. Because most people assumed that the audience of the book was Jewish, the book came to be called the letter to the Hebrews.

The letter seems to talk to a group of Christians facing fierce persecution. They likely experienced persecution from the Roman government as well as from other Jews. During the first century A.D., Judaism was a protected religion under Roman law but Christianity was not. The pressure of persecution must have made it tempting for Christians to return to their Jewish roots in order to avoid persecution and possible death. Then, too, these Jewish Christians suffered persecution such as you have experienced, from family, from acquaintances, from people at school and work and in the world, just because of your confession of Jesus Christ.

The writer asks the readers to remember what had happened in their lives, and pleads: ‘don't throw your confidence away.’ ***“Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.”*** Hebrews 10:32-35 (NIV)

Because of Jesus' superiority, what Christians have is superior to the old revelation. Jesus and the new covenant are superior to the old covenant, the old promises, the old sacrifices, the old “promised land,” the old sanctuary, and the old priesthood.

Jesus, the very Son of God, came to earth, lived among us, preached, performed miracles, and finally was crucified. In this way he ***“provided purification for sins.”*** This idea is fully developed in this letter, showing that it is not the Old Testament sacrifices, not obedience to the Old Testament laws but faith in the fact the Jesus, God's Son, purified us from all sins, which saves us eternally. The apostle John, too, assures us: ***“the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”*** 1 John 1:7 (NIV)

Not only did he provide purification for us from all our sins, but after he was done with this, he then sat down at the right hand of God the Father in heaven.

In every way he is superior to angels, to Old Testament laws and priests. Those ideas are developed more fully later in the book.

Jesus Christ provided eternal rest. Just as the Jews, the ancestors of the first readers and hearers of this book looked forward to resting in the Promised Land, Canaan, after wandering for 40 years in the wilderness, so Jesus Christ will provide rest in the promised land of heaven to all who believe this. ***“Now we who have believed enter that rest.”*** Hebrews 4:3 (NIV)

Jews had looked to their priests in Jerusalem as representing them before God and making sacrifices which were acceptable to God. The temple was far from its glory years, having been ransacked centuries earlier by the Babylonians. The Jewish religion had been hindered by the Roman occupation. The Romans even insisted on appointing the High Priest, which God had intended to be a life-long hereditary calling. But in Jesus Christ God has provided the ultimate high priest. Jesus is their rightful, perfect high priest, and our priest, too. Neither they nor we need to depend on an Old Testament priesthood which had been thoroughly corrupted. After all, the high priest, Caiaphas, had been a leader in the crucifixion of the Savior. So we read: ***“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are -- yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*** Hebrews 4:14-16 (NIV) This was far different than having to go through the priests and approach God through a high priest who could only directly approach God in the very holiest place in the temple only once each year. In Jesus we have a high priest – and a supreme God – whom we can approach directly any time we want. After all, Jesus even taught us to pray, giving us the pattern of the words we call the Lord’s Prayer. In a later chapter we have this assurance under oath from God, and as a result, ***“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain.”*** Hebrews 6:19 (NIV)

In this book we find warnings against being swept up in and carried away by false doctrines. ***“Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them.”*** Hebrews 13:9 (NIV) Instead, ***“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name.”*** Hebrews 13:15 (NIV)

Think of all the unscriptural teachings and Godless practices that surround us, many even coming from churches that claim the name Christian. When people speak of a new morality it is really just the old immorality. When people encourage you to be your own person and decide everything for yourself, that is just putting yourself above God. When people tell you not to be guided or led by old, antiquated teachings, that is often just an excuse to abandon what God tells you in his clear Word. When people offer you ideas contrary to Scripture, they are just putting human wisdom and ideas above what the almighty, omniscient God tells you in his inspired Word.

And through the entire letter, Jesus Christ is above all! It is his undeserved love and mercy, his grace, which shines in this letter, even to the point that this letter is ended with the comforting words: ***“Grace be with you all.”*** Hebrews 13:25 (NIV) And so, today, tomorrow, and every day, may God’s grace in Jesus Christ thrive in your lives, with the Word of God as your guide. Amen.